Volunteer Tourism Development in Thailand:
An Implication for Development

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Abstract

Volunteer tourism is addressed as a new way of tourism to support sustainable development, especially in local destination, so called ‘alternative tourism’. Instead of using the term of ‘tourist’, ‘traveler’ would be another term for those who concern on social responsibility and began to search for new patterns of travelling with meaning. This type of people travels to work for non-paid working with various purposes such as doing research, assisting for development projects, teaching, or exchanging their experience with people in host community. Thailand is one of the famous destinations for volunteer tourism operated by various organizations. Volunteer tourism plays even more important role to support disaster management in order to recover and rebuild affected areas. This form of tourism was formally emerged when there was tsunami disaster hit an Andaman coastal zone, southern of Thailand in 2004. This paper provides theoretical perspectives on volunteer tourism development in Thailand through a case study of selected volunteer tourism organization. Implications of volunteer tourism will be discussed for future development.

Key words : alternative tourism, volunteering in Thailand, volunteer tourism

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1. Background

For decades, there is a great debate on whether tourism significantly contributes to the socio-economic and environment or it is harmful to the host destination. Various scholars (Aronsson, 2000; Jamieson, 2001; Guysoy, 2004; & Pongponrat, 2006) mentioned that tourism related activities degrade quality of natural resources leading to degradation of environment while also threaten and destroy local traditions, means of livelihood, and self-reliance since locals depends upon tourism-based activities which is a sensitive sector. According to obvious negative impacts of tourism, UNESCAP (2001) mentions that sustainable tourism is one approach to development of the tourism industry designed to balance the positive and negative impacts at present and in the future. Sustainable tourism development aims to manage resources in such a way to fulfill socio-economic needs while maintaining cultural integrity, ecosystem and biological diversity. To follow the concept of sustainable tourism, there is an emergence of alternative tourism called ‘volunteer tourism’ which is addressed as a new way of tourism development to reduce its negative impacts and to serve for sustainability.

An early definition, Mowforth and Munt (1998) considered volunteer tourism as a combination of ‘alternative tourism’ and ‘volunteerism’. This form of alternative tourism is aimed at so-called new tourists, who normally would like to be labeled as travelers instead of tourists, the term associated with traditional mass tourism. McGehee (2002) stated that the popularity of volunteer tourism as a form of alternative tourism has grown significantly over the past decade. Ideally, volunteer tourism is expected to be a tool to support local sustainable development project for the host community through tourism sector. The popularity of volunteer tourism as a form of alternative tourism has
grown significantly which influenced by the concept of ‘saving the world’ after a declaration of sustainable development as a mainstream of global community development. Tourists who concern on social responsibility began to search for new and exciting forms of travelling with the need of social standing more than just joining the traditional mass-tourism product. According to Tomazos and Butler (2009), there are 146 volunteer tourism organizations worldwide that send thousands of volunteer tourists around the world each year. There are volunteer opportunities on every continent of the world with the top five countries being China, India, USA, Indonesia and Brazil.

Due to increasing of natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Indian Ocean tsunami, Earthquakes in Pakistan and China, cyclone in Myanmar, East Japanese earthquakes and tsunami, and other catastrophic events, this generates volume of people to get involved in volunteer work for relief. It is also happened in tourism sector which this phenomena triggered tourist’s getting involved in relief efforts though volunteer tourism. Unfortunately, there is still a limit of research and study carried out to develop in-depth understanding, progressive and solid framework of volunteer tourism that dealing with disaster recovery and management.

Thailand is one of the famous destinations for volunteer tourism operated by various international organizations such as International Volunteer Program Association, Travel to Teach, Earth Watch, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), or Bridge Volunteer. Volunteer tourism became to be interesting area to study from last decades. This due to its significant growth which contributes to sustainable development worldwide. Volunteer tourism in Thailand was initiatively addressed since the Tsunami disaster in year 2004, there were many volunteers went to the disaster effected area in the southern of country provided relief works to the Tsunami victims and their communities. Those
volunteers mainly were backpackers and ordinary tourists who used to visit the tsunami affected areas or stayed in Bangkok but willing to help. They gathered as a group and traveled down south to the tsunami affected areas. During a time of disaster recovery, many interest groups and organizations were formulated as volunteer working group, which later, became volunteer placement organizations.

This paper aims to provide theoretical perspectives on volunteer tourism development in Thailand. It was conducted through current situations reviewing and group discussion among key informants for a case study analysis of volunteer tourism organization. This paper is based on a qualitative research method resulting in an implication of future development for volunteer tourism.

2. Literature Review

Literature review for this study was initiated by a question of what all about volunteer tourism is. Therefore, the paper presents reviewed literature based on formulated questions used in searching for related concepts and theories of volunteer tourism.

2.1 What is the linkage between volunteer tourism and alternative Tourism?

Tourism is a very large sector and is growing rapidly. Assessing the impact of tourism on livelihood is not a simple matter because tourism is a multi-faceted phenomenon. In general, the impacts of tourism can be categorized into positive and negative effects. Promoting tourism is a major mechanism of economic growth. Nevertheless, since there are many negative impacts of, the relative values of benefits versus harms must be carefully assessed. High
income from a tourist invasion of a rural village may decrease the value of traditional way of life or destroy natural scenery value by the local community. To solve problems, UNESCAP (2001) addressed that sustainable tourism is one approach of development to reduce negative impact of tourism. Recently, sustainable tourism was transformed its terminology into an alternative tourism which recognized as a distinct form of tourism. Weaver and Opperman (2000) addressed that mass tourism has contrasting ideal types with alternative tourism because mass tourism attractions are artificial and foster externally controlled and high-leakage operations. Meanwhile alternative tourism attractions area mostly authentic and offering locally controlled and high-linkage opportunities. Consequently, alternative tourism can be defined as a form of tourism that consider on social, environmental, and community values which allows both hosts and guests appreciate contributions of its while also having interaction and shared experiences among them. Volunteer tourism can be, therefore, seen as suitable with a key concept of alternative tourism. This due to its presenting an opportunity for maintaining an alternative traveling purpose that significantly contributes to host community development than other vacations.

Volunteer tourism is a combination of ‘tourism’ and ‘volunteerism’. This aims to present so-called new tourists, who normally would like to be labeled as ‘travelers’ instead of tourists, the term associated with traditional mass tourism. In general, this type of traveler aims to work as a volunteer in one destination, meanwhile, learn other cultural, interact with social and community and raise awareness. Wearing (2004) had mentioned the meaning of volunteer tourism as learning in the form of academic knowledge, the development of personal knowledge, self-confidence, independence, cultural awareness and social abilities appears to be central to many volunteer tourism
experiences and expectations. Volunteer tourism offers unique opportunities for intense cross-cultural interactions that may lead to an increased awareness of global issues and inequalities.

2.2 What are types and target of volunteer tourism?

The volunteer tourists travel to work for various purposes such as research, assist, teach or exchange their experience with people and community without receive income from company or organization. Wearing (2002) identified volunteer tourists as those tourists who volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society and environment. Brown and Morrison (2003) found two types of volunteer tourists which are a) volunteer-minded tourists who are willing to spend most or all of their vacation volunteering and b) vacation-minded volunteer tourists who dedicate partial of their vacation time to voluntary work.

Volunteer tourism makes contributions on development for both personal, interpersonal and society as a whole. Chen and Chen (2011) noted that the contributions of volunteer tourism for individual include personal growth, personal awareness, self-confidence, self-contentment, self-development, and satisfaction. Volunteer tourism provide education and learning process for individual, skills development, and work experience. For contributions on interpersonal and a society as a whole include cross cultural interaction, interpersonal awareness, opportunity for person-to-person encounters, as well as sharing and appreciating culture (Chen, 2009). Moreover, the international setting of most volunteer tourism can bring additional benefits including international knowledge, increased cultural awareness and mutual
understanding, intercultural competence, language skills, and also enhancement of social relationship between volunteer tourists and host communities.

Previous research confirmed that major target of volunteer tourism is young generation who mostly study in college or university level and willing to experience new things in different culture with their energetic condition while also be part of the sustainable concept. Wearing et al. (2004) mentioned that the meaning of volunteer tourism is a learning process in a form of academic knowledge, the development of personal knowledge, self-confidence, independence, cultural awareness and social abilities appears to be a central expectations and experiences of volunteer tourists. Mentioning social capital, as knowledge and network, also plays vital role in generate volunteer program in different practices and places. This occurs when university students travel outside campus to learn for different culture while working as volunteer for host community development projects.

2.3 Why people involve in volunteer tourism?

Harng Luh Sin (2009) stated that motivating factors for volunteer tourists were “to travel” rather than “to contribute” or volunteer. Volunteering in the local community was also a reason but one of many means of travelling to different destinations to “learn about local cultures” or to “go beyond superficial tour packages where you don’t see how people really live”. Many studies show that volunteer tourism have used these approaches to examine why people volunteer abroad, and to a lesser extent why they chose the country, organization, or project. Similar to findings from broader volunteering, volunteer tourists hold both altruistic (e.g., desire to help, give back, make a difference) and self-interested motivations for volunteering abroad (e.g.,
authentic travel, gain experience, engage in travel and adventure, learn, pleasure-seeking, personal growth, cultural exchange, and professional development. Considering decision-making to involve in volunteer tourism programs, volunteer tourists select an organization to involve in volunteer activities for its reputation, varieties of program and schedule, marketing, safety and security, specific projects, organization type such as NGO, type of people involving, and recommendations from family or friends (Coghlan, 2007; Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

2.4 Is volunteer tourism beneficial?

There is increasing of discussion on whether volunteer tourism contributes to host community or it generates negative impact. Volunteer tourism offers local people chances to meet interesting people, make friendships, learn about the world, and expose themselves to new perspectives. Experiencing different cultural practices enriches experiences, broadens perspective, and increases insight as well as appreciation for different approaches to living which a sense of achievement, sense of belonging as citizen of global community. McGehee and Santos (2004) addressed that the interaction between the volunteer tourists and the host communities is a vital component of volunteer tourism for both parties. However, Sin (2009) highlighted that there are two sides of volunteer tourism. There is a positive relationships creating between volunteer tourists and the locals. On the other hand, these relationships are not equal since the volunteer is initially placed in a powerful position. There is a belief that educational volunteer projects are more beneficial than others since they help the people help themselves instead of only helping them for a short time. These provide long-term effects to host communities that in time will allow the population break out of their poverty (Sin, 2009; and McGehee & Santos,
According to Wearing (2004), volunteer tourism is as much a pursuit to explore the self as it is a pursuit to help others, and is thus rewarding to both parts. Bringing mutual benefits and positive interaction between host communities and volunteer tourists is a main focus of volunteer tourism program. As a volunteer tourism organization, it may need time to develop its identity along with the tools and strategies that will serve both volunteers and locals effectively.

3. Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research to explore volunteer tourism development in Thailand. Primary data was collected though field observation and focus group discussion with volunteer tourism organization. A case study was designed to describe social phenomena including current situation of volunteer tourism in Thailand and volunteer tourism planning and management. In this paper, it presents a case study of Andaman Discoveries, an active volunteer tourism organization in southern of Thailand. It represents a development program in rural community by an initiative idea from volunteering program into volunteer tourism program.

Content analysis was applied to analyze qualitative collected data. This is to analyze people’s opinion and feedbacks on volunteer tourism development which is useful to understand the mechanism and pattern of volunteer tourism, problems and constraints facing, and its implication for future development.
4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Current situation of volunteer tourism in Thailand

Volunteer tourism in Thailand was formally initiated after Tsunami disaster hit north Andaman coastal zone in 2011. However, the concept of volunteering in Thailand has been recognized long ago before Tsunami happened. In year 1957, there were representatives from Young Buddhist Association of Thailand under Royal Patronage attended the 2nd Asia Volunteer Leadership Camp organized by Indian Organizing Committee for International Voluntary Work Group and UNESCO. Later, this group of representatives also attended the 3rd Asia Volunteer Leadership Camp. From this international camp, the representatives obtained views, information, strategies to formulate volunteer program in Thailand as it could help for developing the country. Therefore, there was an idea to set up volunteer camp for young people in public universities. Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, as major public universities in Thailand, were the first-two universities that implemented volunteer camps by involving university students in the camp. Later, this type of student camp became student volunteer club implementing through different universities nation-wide. Mainly, the idea of university volunteer club is to involve university students in public works or community development to follow the idea of citizen social responsibility for country development. Previously, besides university volunteer club, there were other volunteer organizations organized volunteer camp such as Y.M.C.A. and American Friends Service Committee. Later in 1980, there was a formulation of Thai Volunteer Service Foundation (TVS) to act as a main body of volunteering program planning, management, and operating though the country. TVS was formally registered as volunteer service center in 2000.
TVS has organized different projects for young people including Full-Time Volunteer, Human Rights Volunteer, Young People Development for Social Change, and Teacher Volunteer. Besides domestic volunteering, TVS also has the collaboration among Mekong countries for the Young Generation in Mekong Region project which aims to build up network among youth in Mekong Region for sustainable development. Main objective of TVS is to create forum of leaning and developing attitudes and skills for committed volunteers who want to contribute to unfortunate people. Meanwhile TVS also try to enhance capacity of young people to develop their skills and analytical thinking by conducting training and exposure trips. TVS acts as a liaison to promote collaboration among NGO and governmental agencies in seeking for participatory social development.

Although there was a long legend of volunteering in Thailand, but the concept of volunteer tourism is very young in this country. Mostly, volunteer tourism programs in Thailand are owned and operated by international organizations. Major volunteer tourism organizations such as MONO Travel, Openmind Projects, Volunteering Solutions, iCare Thailand Foundation, GapYearThailand, ISV, Gibbon Rehabilitation Project, Teach English Abroad, Cross-Cultural Solutions, Go Abroad.com, Projects abroad, and Volunteer Forever. These volunteer organizations do volunteer placement worldwide and have sub-office branches in different countries including Thailand. However, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), as a main actor of tourism promotion and marketing, also tried to deal with a trend of volunteer tourism. In 2013, TAT launched a project called “The Little Big” which was a volunteer tourism program designing competition to inspire worldwide travelers to take a volunteer vacation in Thailand. Unfortunately, this project was a so called ‘marketing campaign’ for tourism business which not generated any significant
impact on volunteer tourism development in long term.

To deal with Tsunami disaster in Thailand, volunteer tourism became more interesting for people who want to help tsunami victims. There was a main volunteer center called ‘Tsunami Volunteer Center’ (TVC) located in Khao Lak, Phang Nga Province, one of the main tsunami effected areas. It was founded in 2005 in directly response to Indian Ocean Tsunami. This was Thai-led NGO funded by private donation which not affiliated with any religions. Main objective of TVC is to assist in the restoration of tsunami-affected communities through empowerment approach. There are various development projects focused on community-based tourism, children outreach and education, and small business development for locals. Besides tsunami relief projects, TVC tries to encourage volunteer spirit amongst volunteers to rebuild tsunami effected communities by providing opportunities to interact with local villagers through learning of Thai cooking, dancing, batik painting, and also Thai language class.

Another main volunteer organization which directly dealing with tsunami relief project is Andaman Discoveries. This organization was selected as a target unit for the study which will be described and discussed in following section of this paper.

4.2 A Case Study of Andaman Discoveries

Overview of Andaman Discoveries

This study selected a case of Andaman Discoveries to investigate volunteer tourism program implementing in Thailand. It is a non-profit organization based in southern of Thailand that provides assistance to tsunami-affected villages in the north Andaman coastal zone from 2004 until present. Andaman Discoveries is a continuing work of North Andaman Tsunami Relief (NATR)
which is an independent volunteer organization founded by Bodhi Garrett who was a victim from Tsunami in year 2004 that hit on the Andaman Coastal zone. NATR successfully implemented various development projects in 12 communities to recover from the tsunami disaster. Later on, community-based tourism programs were formulated by NATR as alternative income source for villagers which finally turn in to Andaman Discoveries tour operator based in Kuraburi, Phang Nga province but also operating in surrounding areas of Andaman coastal zone, southern of Thailand. Andaman Discoveries organizes volunteering both for short term and long term program, village experience, tours, and community-based tourism including eco-tours, cultural tours, and educational tours. The organization works in partnership with local communities as responsible tourism operators that aims to increase sense of belonging of local community with income generating while also raise awareness for tourists on local culture so called ‘tourism social enterprises’. Training and supports were provided to the villagers while Andaman Discoveries helps to promote and facilitate cultural exchanges between villagers and tourists volunteers.

All Andaman Discoveries activities and itineraries are designed in collaboration with the villagers themselves, based around the principles of community-based tourism. Andaman Discoveries also has specially-designed comprehensive support material including a Visitor’s Guidebook, and Thai Phrasebook to allow people to make the most of their time in village and to facilitate cross-cultural exchanges. The organization put excess revenue back into village projects that directly support livelihoods and the well-being of individuals. For example, Andaman Discoveries supports youth scholarships, ecotourism projects, and village guide trainings. Andaman Discoveries works in partnership with these communities to provide responsible and authentic
community based tours, which genuinely benefit the local people by offering eco-tours, cultural tours, educational programs, interactive handicraft workshops, and volunteer placements, even for those with limited time or tight budgets.

In year 2009, there were 429 volunteer tourists involved in the programs who mostly came from Europe and North America. One of the success programs of the Andaman Discoveries known as “The Andaman Community Tourism Network (N-ACT)” which covered the area of North Andaman districts of Kurabuti, Suksamran, and Kapoe where ecologically and culturally are unique. This network tries to increase the contribution of tourism to sustainable livelihoods and sound ecosystem management. This idea is implemented through providing best experience for tourists to learn about local customs through cultural learning programs though homestay programs, villager tour for spending time with the communities of Muslim, Buddhist, and Moken Sea Gypsy. Moreover, there are culinary classes and local handicraft workshops run by villagers for tourists.

Andaman Discoveries is an award-winning social enterprise that supports community-led development by acting as a bridge to respectful visitors and volunteers through sponsorship of education, conservation and cultural empowerment. It has been working with tsunami-affected communities to provide authentic community-based tours, study and service trips, and volunteering opportunities since 2005. In addition, Andaman Discoveries also awarded for example Wild Asia’s Responsible Tourism Award Winner 2010, BBC World Challenge 2009, Tourism Authority of Thailand 2009 Green Award Winner, Travel + Leisure Global Vision Award 2008, SEED Award for Entrepreneurship in Sustainable Development 2008, Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards 2007, Wild Asia’s Responsible Tourism Award
2007 – 2009, Ban Talae Nok Awards, Muang Kluang Awards, Tung Nang Dam Awards and many other.

**Staffing and financial supporting**

Andaman Discoveries supports community-led development by acting as a bridge to visitors and volunteers through sponsorship of education, conservation, and cultural empowerment. Therefore, the Andaman Discoveries is a small office with overlapping job duties that are share between staff. There are 5 full-times staff working with numbers of volunteers and network organizations. The strengths of Andaman Discoveries mainly lie in the high personal motivation and determination of their staff to really make things move in this coastal region. Andaman Discoveries shows that the implementation of sustainable, socially and ecologically responsible development concepts can be a successful option to implement in tourism sectors through alternative tourism especially a volunteer tourism programs.

Main grants and financial assistance for Andaman Discoveries came from Ecosystem Grants Program (EGP), IUCN, and the Netherland since 2004. There are various partnerships to support programs from both national and international organizations such as Tourism Authority of Thailand, Thailand Eco Portal, and Thai Craft, Openmind Projects, Educational Travel Center, Responsibletravel.com, Wild Asia, and also Handsup holiday. Andaman Discoveries works in partnership with these communities to provide responsible and authentic community based tours, which genuinely benefit the local people to offer eco-tours, cultural tours, educational programs, interactive handicraft workshops, and volunteer placements. As a social enterprise, Andaman Discoveries strives to maintain financial transparency and believe it is socially responsible to make a spending publicly available to
guests, volunteers, and other businesses. Andaman Discoveries support the communities and work by putting excess revenue back into village and organizational projects that directly support livelihoods and the well-being of individuals. For example, Andaman Discoveries supports youth scholarships, ecotourism projects, and village guide trainings.

**Volunteer tourism programs**

Andaman Discoveries, by collaborating with local people, offers various in-village projects categorizing into three types of projects consisting of sustainable livelihoods, conservation, and community development. For students and academics, tailor-made educational trips will be arranged. If visitors want to stay longer for learning about locals, there are possibilities for field research on coastal ecology or on socio-ecological issues. It can be seen that the activity of Andaman Discoveries is encouraging the development of volunteer tourism while it promotes self-reliance for local community. Andaman Discoveries remains the driving force and try to make the progress and weaknesses in village development visible through constant monitoring and evaluation. It aims to empower the villagers to eventually become fully self-sufficient and to be independent but still follow sustainable business plans.

**Perceptions on Volunteer Tourism Development in Thailand**

Perceptions of key informants are essential in providing fresh and valuable contributions for the study. Focus group discussion was conducted with staff and volunteers who are working at Andaman Discoveries. Presently, volunteer tourism development in Kuraburi, Phang Nga, an undeveloped area of north Andaman coastal zone, offers visitors and volunteers a unique opportunity to immerse in the cultural diversity and spectacular natural beauty of this region.
This area of southern of Thailand is a home to Muslim, Buddhist and Moken villages living side by side in harmony. Here local people still make a living by their traditional livelihood thus making this area a fascinating place to explore. Andaman Discoveries tries to provide opportunities for visitors and volunteers to learn about the traditional culture and language of the local people by taking part in homestays, village and eco-tourism activities. Meanwhile, volunteers help serve the underprivileged communities in the area by capacity building through teaching English or environmental conservation projects. Programs of Andaman Discoveries help to support the long-term economic rehabilitation of the region in the wake of the 2004 tsunami, and protecting the culture and environment of the region from encroachment of mass tourism.

Based on focus group discussion, participants expressed concern over the situation of the volunteer tourism in Thailand based on their experiences as the quote below.

‘By involving volunteers, we developed a broader, more diverse group of stakeholders and for the organization… It helps us to involve people to support our work, bringing fresh ideas and inform the strategic direction and effect change.’ (Focus group discussion, 2014)

However, volunteers themselves, often understand their roles as ‘tourist’ who doing some volunteer work as additional schedule. This may not match with the volunteer roles that required for volunteer programs even in tourism sector. Therefore, volunteer tourist needs an orientation of expected roles and responsibilities before their placement. Volunteer tourism can contributes to cohesive society by building trust and reciprocity among people. It can be both
challenging and rewarding for both side of provider and receiver. Volunteer tourists required to use their skills in a new context of activities which they can transfer useful knowledge while gaining a greater understanding of the issues affecting other people, as the following quote demonstrates below.

‘In Thailand, volunteer tourism is a new issue that has not been planned…which does not seem very different to other forms of tourism… The situation in the field of volunteer tourism, volunteers should come in the form of helping society.’ (Focus group discussion, 2014)

Presently, volunteer tourism in Thailand does not receive effectively supporting from government agencies. Organizations those support the volunteer tourism program are mostly international organizations which supporting on financial support and personnel training. This is leading to a situation that volunteer tourism program in Thailand is limited to foreign group, meanwhile, less interesting from Thais.

Considering involvement university student, as a main target, in volunteer tourism program, there is less of them participate in volunteer tourism program. Mostly, if they want to do volunteer work, they will attend volunteer camp or volunteer club which is implemented through student volunteer camp in their college or university as supported by quotes below.

‘Volunteer tourism in Thailand has not received the attention that it should. There is less organization to offer volunteer tourism activities. Our participants are mostly foreigners who came to involve in activities through the campaign and support from many
sectors, such as international organizations, tour operators, etc.’ (Focus group discussion, 2014)

‘Student in Thailand or youth participants does not pay attention about volunteer tourism. They may think it is not important or may not get a good publicity about the program in Thailand.’ (Focus group discussion, 2014)

‘Most of us begin our volunteer journey early in life around 23 years old with participating in all kinds of volunteering that we can. This age-group are involved in some kind of volunteering and engaged in formal volunteering. This means that young people age between 16 to 19 years old are more likely to volunteer than any other age groups. They think about benefits for themselves and others by making better society.’ (Focus group discussion, 2014)

Many volunteer tourists changed their way of thinking and their lifestyle in order to adjust to the local community’s way of living. Sometimes, these adjustments made them learn that they could adapt to live when tough situations came along. They learn how to overcome constraints.

‘When I was on the volunteer trips, I had a really strong sense that I was exactly where I was supposed to be…You feel so worthwhile and you have all those good feelings that you’re doing what you’re supposed to do…I want to do something really good with my life, and I didn’t know what that was for a long time.’ (Focus group discussion, 2014)
'I think that the experience gained from participating in the activities, volunteer tourism, an activity that can’t be found in a package tour or any other tourism, creating memories.' (Focus group discussion, 2014)

Former volunteers in focus group discussion shared story of learning process to deal with the problems. Some example was they need to adjust themselves to sleep on hard-concrete floor of a local house during their volunteer placement.

'Different experiences to help understand people more than the journey to find new exciting activity... Not only help to understand people, but to understand ourselves as well.' (Focus group discussion, 2014)

Findings of the study provide an overall picture of the motives of people involving in the development of volunteer tourism. Moreover, it helps reflect on the development of volunteer tourism by Andaman Discoveries as a showing case.

'It made sense to involve youths in a responsible tourism model and to create a network among them. In appreciation of their remarkable commitment and good knowledge of their area, Andaman Discoveries invited the groups a couple of years ago to exchange experiences. Representatives from twelve villages came to meet and they are still keeping in touch with each other.' (Focus group discussion, 2014)
However, participants mentioned that the organization is also facing constraints of ongoing financial support and insufficient staff to manage and operate volunteer tourism programs. Andaman Discoveries is trying to create a network of volunteering and providing different activities. It tries to build a relationship with different destinations such as Community-based Tourism South Andaman Sea, an agency to support volunteer tourism activities. Moreover, Andaman Discoveries tries to coordinate with local government to receive support on community development projects. So far, there is limited supporting from domestic actors but Andaman Discoveries never stop trying to find solutions.

4.3 Discussion

Volunteer tourism play more vital role in natural disaster recovery especially in Thailand after Tsunami hit north Andaman coastal zone in southern part of the country. This paper delineated situation of volunteer tourism in Thailand with a focus on a case study of Andaman Discoveries, the volunteer tourism organization. To consider volunteer tourism in Thailand, there is still a limit number of young Thais who involve in volunteer tourism program if compare with young foreigners who travel to Thailand to do volunteer work with an additional of leisure trips. This phenomena is explained through the idea that volunteer tourism is recently emerging in Thailand which people still have no clear understanding of the concept. If young Thais want to do volunteer work, they will involve university volunteer club or camps which normally happens in Thai society. This behavior was supported by the idea that young Thais may define volunteering separate from tourism and leisure trip. Meanwhile, even TAT tried to promote volunteer tourism in Thailand, but the result appeared as a marketing campaign for tourism promoting especially targeting on foreign
tourists not domestic tourist. This project even far behind the concept of volunteer tourism as its original focused on social responsibility.

Considering on the case study of Andaman Discoveries, it was initiated from a tsunami volunteer supporting body and developed into volunteer tourism agency which is actively for disaster relief works as well as community development for sustainability. Considering on a showing casing of Andaman Discoveries, even it is an active volunteer tourism organization which receiving many awards of responsible tourism but the organization is still facing some constraint of receiving support from governments and related agencies in term funding. Also there is a limited number of staff to responsible various task of management and operation, this may create overlap and workload of staff while also leading limited volunteer activities to offer and limited areas for volunteer placement extension. Although Andaman Discoveries works as a volunteering in form of a non-profit organization to pursue the social responsibility, it must be well-planned with an effective management in order to be a sustainable social enterprise as it is in-charge with.

Volunteer tourism in Thailand is completely a new concept which required research and studies to development strengthen strategies in long-term. Meanwhile, there must be a solid body knowledge and a clear guideline for related organizations and agencies to obtain clear understand of volunteer tourism concept to plan and design for effective volunteer programs integrated into tourism sector.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

As volunteer tourism is a perfect collision of the altruism concept and a personal passion to see the world in different way in post-modern world, there
is increasing number of people to get involved in this alternative form of tourism. Volunteer travelers look for special experience such as be able to contribute to host destination; finding ways to give back to society; learning something news; and also experience something different. There are various studies trying to explain definitions of volunteer tourism and identify why people get involved in volunteer tourism. Recently, there is a debate on whether volunteer tourism generates positive or negative impact on host community which somehow becomes mainstream to make argument of this type of tourism. However, volunteer tourism is continue growing and is extended into different practices include disaster recovery and management works. Findings of this study show that volunteer tourism in Thailand is not well-recognized even there is a long historical legend of volunteering, but not into tourism sector. There is limited number of local volunteer tourism organizations to offer and operate volunteer tourist activities even Thailand is one of a main volunteer tourist destinations worldwide. Mostly, volunteer tourism organizations in Thailand are international organizations.

Based on findings of the study, there are suggestions to strengthen volunteer tourism development in Thailand which can adapt into other countries that share similar situation. The coordination of local and other tourism organizations can help to support and strengthen volunteer tourism development in Thailand in many way as follows.

- Technical support for local groups such as training, study tours, and information exchange to provide more perspectives, knowledge, and understanding of the volunteer tourism planning and management.

- Raising awareness and morale such as running a campaign to promote participation in volunteer tourism development as a tool for
community development, provide rewards and certificates for the success of local group activities, visits to successful community projects, and provide incentive system to involve local people.

- Developing networking to establish good interaction among the stakeholders such as setting up seminars for stakeholders to meet and discuss issues of concern. This would provide a channel to get people together for idea-sharing for volunteer tourism planning and management.

Creating a collaboration of volunteer program is a key idea for action plan development to pull resources and financial supporting. It is required a comprehensive planning to match between requirement and qualification of prospect volunteers and the needs of host community which will provide benefits for locals, volunteers themselves, and placement organizations. This is far beyond just a volunteer tourism for business but also for supporting sustainability.

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