Aligning the context of Rural Tourism Policies in Sabah

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Abstract: Rural tourism is known as an effective catalyst for rural socio-economic regeneration. This form of tourism creates employment opportunities, better income distribution, preservation of village environment and local culture. The success and the sustainability of rural tourism depend on the role of government and its agencies in shaping and governing these policies. Rural tourism in Sabah is one of the three priorities highlighted under the Sabah’s State Development Agenda. In line with Sabah Tourism Master Plan 2011-2025, the government of Sabah has drawn out a strategic development plan for tourism to catapult this industry to the next level by adding value and ensuring long-term sustainable growth. This plan is a protégé of the Tourism Master plan 1981 and Sabah Tourism Development Guidelines 1995. At present, rural tourism policies in Sabah for authorities and business operators remain ambivalent. Initial community group discussion indicates a lack of interaction between policy makers and its stakeholders highlighting gaps in the rural tourism governance resulting in conflicting policy implementation. This research aims to explore the issues, possible redundancies and loopholes of existing policies at local, state and federal level pertaining rural tourism policies. This process would first involve the identification of relevant policy documents governing rural tourism in Sabah. The analysis will include compiling, comparing and bridging the policy gaps. The complex nature governing Sabah’s Rural Tourism policy issues involve various actors at local, state and federal levels. Hence, the Actor Network Theory (ANT) is employed in developing propositions that will bridge the gap amongst the existing policies governing rural tourism.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Sabah, policy, Actor Network Theory
Introduction

Rural tourism has been long recognized as an effective catalyst of rural socio-economic regeneration (Panyik, Costa, & Rátz, 2011). Since the early 20th century, rural tourism activities have provided a platform for the development of countries worldwide. As a result of declining economic activity, restructuring of agricultural sector, dwindling rural industrialisation and out-migration of higher educated youth (Briedenhann, 2004) many scholars have highlighted the importance of rural tourism as a catalyst for economic generation and human development (Briedenhann, 2004; Fleischer & Pizamt, 1997; Su, 2011). Others have highlighted that the development of tourism in these rural areas can be a result of the lack of viable alternatives or the self-fulfillment of political rhetoric (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000). This is especially been a key role in the development of rural areas which were economically and socially depressed (Su, 2011).

Rural tourism can take many forms of definition, a vacation or a holiday in which a vacationer occupies a large portion of his time engaged in recreational activities on a farm, ranch or country home and its surroundings (Fleischer & Pizamt, 1997). Su (2011) mentions that Brawmwell and Lane 2004 quotes rural tourism as a collaboration activities and interests in farms, nature, adventure, sports, health, education, arts, and heritage taking place in countryside as a multi-faceted activity rather than farm-based tourism. It is also seen as a form of sustainable development that brings upon productivity in rural. The objective of this form of tourism is to bring out employment, create better income distribution, preservation of village environment and local culture and at the same time raising host community's participation and presenting methods to confirm beliefs and traditional values within new circumstances (Mahmoudi, Haghsetan, & Meleki, 2011) and also acts as a provider for auxiliary
funding to continue their daily activities of the peasants (Fleischer & Pizamt, 1997; Park & Yoon, 2009). Nonetheless, the success and the sustainability of it depends on the role of the government and its agencies in formulating policies, shape practices and deliver services (Baum & Szivas, 2008).

In the context of this study, the district of Semporna, within the state of Sabah, Malaysia will be used as a study side. This research aims to explore the issues, possible redundancies and loopholes of existing policies at local, state and federal level pertaining rural tourism policies. The analysis will include compiling, comparing and bridging the policy gaps. The complex nature governing Sabah's Rural Tourism policy issues involve various actors at local, state and federal levels. Hence, the Actor Network Theory (ANT) is employed in developing propositions that will bridge the gap amongst the existing policies governing rural tourism.

**Tourism in Malaysia**

Tourism in Malaysia has been part of the political plan since 1987. This is especially seen when the Federal Government took the agenda of developing tourism as part of the major economic sector. Malaysia is targeting to achieve a high-income-nation status by 2020 and has laid out plans to achieve this target through the tourism industry. The government has targeted 36 million tourist arrivals and RM168 billion in tourist receipts. With this alone, it is clear that the government has put tourism on the pedestal and is seen as one of the most important income contributor for the nation (M.-L. Siow, Abidin, Nair, & Ramachandran, 2011).

In the earlier years Malaysia's economy was traditionally dominated by the primary commodities and soon evolved into the manufacturing sector in the 1970's (Hanim,
Malaysia has always placed rural development as their forefront of its development plan. In the 7th Malaysian plan, the government highlighted the importance of community participation in tourism. Also highlighted in the 9th Malaysian plan were to create opportunities for farmers to expand and diversify agricultural products such as agro tourism (Kunasekaran, Ramachandran, & Shuib, 2011). Other governmental initiatives include promoting rural development through the New Development Policy (NEP) between 1971 till 1990. Its main concern was to address the regional economic inequalities and poverty faced by the Malays in Peninsular Malaysia. Like other sectors, this policy intensified the rural tourism sector through intense development of the rural areas in Malaysia (Awang & Aziz, 2011). The main objective of these agendas were to gain economic growth and employment in the rural areas through this industry (Hjulmand, Nielsen, Vesterløkke, Busk, & Erichsen, 2003).

**Policy Challenges**

Sabah is one of 14 Malaysian states located at the Northeast tip of Borneo Island boarded by the South China Sea, Sulu Sea and Celebes Sea (Kim, 2011). It is the second largest state in Malaysia with a total land area of 73,600 squared kilometer (Goh & Lee, 2010). The main four cities of Sabah are within these shorelines of Sabah, they include Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan, Tawau and Kudat, where its coastlines including islands and lagoons is 4328 km (Jakobsen, Hartstein, Frachisse, & Golingi, 2007). Situated within the Coral Triangle rich with marine biodiversity (Poh & Fanning, 2012; L Teh, Cabanban, & Sumaila, 2005) and its rugged landscape is made up of extensive rainforest towering mountain peaks (Dony, Ahmad, & Khen Tiong, 2004). The national language is still...
Bahasa Malaysia, but the state of Sabah compromises of 31 different indigenous groups including Kadazans, Muruts, Kedayans and Sulu (Dony et al., 2004).

Sabah is a premier nature, adventure and cultural destination and is famous for its ecotourism. Tourism in Sabah is one of the three priorities highlighted under the “Halatuju Pembangunan dan Kemajuan Sabah” (Sabah’s State Development Agenda) (Lydia Teh & Cabanban, 2007). Sabah’s plans for its tourism industry is clearly stated in their annual budget proceedings highlighting the importance of various management programs, environmental and wildlife protection and management (Aman, 2009). In years, Sabah has evolved into an attractive tourist destination for investors and accommodation sectors (Kim, 2011). Sabah State Government projects about 2.75 million tourist or more to arrive in year 2012 (“Sabah expects 2.75 million tourist arrivals,” 2012). Today, tourism is becoming more significant as the industry is growing at 420 percent year on year and shows strong potentials in years to come (Jakobsen et al., 2007). The state of Sabah has two major attractions, Mount Kinabalu, the highest peak in Southeast Asia and Pulau Sipadan, noted as one of the top SCUBA diving spots in the world (Lydia Teh & Cabanban, 2007). The state of Sabah recognises that its tourism sector depends heavily on the natural biodiversity of the state and that it plays a crucial role in its human and economical development. To ensure the sustainability of this industry and the biodiversity, the government of Sabah has been working together with non-profit organisations such as WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), UNDP (United Nations Development Plan) and Danish Co-operation. (Kim, 2011).

In line with the federal and state’s agenda, it is evident that the direction of tourism in Malaysia and the state of Sabah points in the direction of further expansion. However, in order to maintain the unique biodiversity and original setting that the industry depends
on, policies pertaining in mitigating anthropogenic effects must be firmly in place. However, preliminary observations and interviews with key stakeholders, and literature on Sabah’s current situation indicated that there were environmental issues that were rampant and needed to be addressed immediately. This main issue would include problems pertaining to its environmental impact, both directly and indirectly on the tourism industry.

The state of Sabah is one of the poorest state in Malaysia, having a poverty rate of more than four-times the Malaysian national average (Poh & Fanning, 2012). The Sabahan’s GDP growth rate is still growing, but is experiencing a growth rate that is declining year on year. GDP growth rate for Sabah for year 2010 is 2.4%, a decline of 4.9% since 2008 ("Department of Statistics Malaysia," 2012). The state’s top 3 economical drivers in 2008 are agriculture (26%) followed by mining and quarrying (14%) and construction (1.3%) ("10th Malaysian Plan," 2010). However, it was found that Sabah’s economy is well poised to meet the future demands of the three thrush economic areas highlighted in its strategic plan, HATALAJU (H. L. Siow et al., 2006).

In line with Sabah Tourism Master Plan 2011-2025, the government of Sabah has drawn out a strategic development plan for tourism to catapult this industry to the next level by adding value and ensuring long-term sustainable growth ("Sabah Tourism Master Plan 2011–2025 by IDS," 2010). However, as at the time of print, the Sabah Tourism Master Plan 2011-2025 has yet to be passed by the parliament. This plan is a protégé of the Tourism Master Plan 1981 and Sabah Tourism Development Guidelines 1990-1995 (Management Plan for the Semporna Island Project, 2001).
Nonetheless, despite the plans being in place, scholars have highlighted that there are major environmental distress that could lead to the fall back of sustaining this industry in the long run (Ali, 2010; Praveena, Siraj, & Aris, 2012). However it must be addressed that the complexity of addressing the tourism industry is understanding that tourism is a fragmentation of diverse players of different organisations, ownership including local, national transnational agencies and governments (Baum & Szivas, 2008). More often, addressing and synergising these groups’ opinion would be a challenge. Highlighting the importance of interest groups, Baum & Szivas (2008) further states that this group would make up of those representing tourism businesses, local and national government agencies, labour market agencies, community groups, trade unions and others.

**Study Site- Semporna Sabah**

The study site, district of Semporna (Semporna, hereafter), is situated within the Tawau division, situated on the South Eastern coast of Sabah. Semporna is 1,145 square kilometer (Royo-Vela, 2009) is one of the main attractions for tourist both local and international ("Foreigners choose Sipadan as favourite diving spot," 2012). The total population of people of Semporna is 113,164. It mainly consist of 67% Bajau, 8.5% other Bumiputra groups and 1.8% Malay. Other ethnic groups such as Kadazan Dusun, Murut, Chinese and Indians make up the rest of the population ("Department of Statistics Malaysia," 2012). The main source of income for the Semporna people include seaweed farming, local businesses of small shops and services mostly manned by women, and cultivating tapioca, bananas and other fruit. The seaweed is a crucial part of the socio-economic development for the people in Sabah as private and local companies
are venturing into seaweed and cultivation at a larger scale in Semporna (Ahemad Sade & Ariff, 2006).

The livelihoods of fishing and seaweed farming of the people of Semporna are threatened by the change in their environment. The main culprit to this would be the drastic depletion of fish stock due to the overfishing and devastation of coral reefs due to fish bombing and poisoning (Corpuz, 2008).

On the other hand, tourism in Semporna started to flourish in the 1980's (Ali, 2010). Tourist would take Semporna coastal town as a gateway to its beautiful islands such as Sipadan, Mabul, Bohey Dulang and Sibuan (Hutton, 2001).

Semporna's tourism crown jewel lies especially on Pulau Sipadan. This island is approximately 30km south of Semporna and is a host to a cornucopia of marine life teeming with turtles, moray eels tropical fish and a diversity of hard and soft coral (Ledesma, Lewis, & Savage, 2003). Often compared to the Great Barrier Reefs in Australia, it was estimated that from January to October 2011 alone, Pulau Sipadan was visited by 30,959 foreign tourists and 4,523 local visitors ("Foreigners choose Sipadan as favourite diving spot," 2012). Tour operators have tapped on this market of international tourist, which correspond to the need of these commodities by targeting the European, Japanese and Taiwanese market (Hitchcock, King, & Parnwell, 2008). Catering for the niche sector of tourism, rural tourism has put Semporna on the map through its location within the Coral Triangle – the world’s marine biodiversity (Praveena et al., 2012; "WWF Malaysia - Survey to assess biodiversity richness in Semporna," 2010). It is also believed tourism in Sipadan and the islands surrounding generates more tourist generated income than those from Mount Kinabalu (Lo).
It was found that these coastal settlers contributes significantly to the degradation of ecosystem (Corpuz, 2008; Malaysia). The increase in human activities and other anthropogenic effects have caused the bio-diversity of Semporna and its surroundings to be at stake. The main causes of reef habitat loss in Semporna is the use of improper fishing methods such as dynamite and cyanide fishing and illegal trawling as well as coastal development leading to coral mortality from high turbidity (Jakobsen et al., 2007). This is seen as one of the major problems occurring within the area of Semporna (Antiu, 2012).

The Malaysian government as well as non-governmental agencies and academicians has long recognised this problem and its effect on the ecosystem within the district of Semporna. In 1998 the Malaysian Ministry of Environment and Tourism introduced restrictions to the number of visitors that can visit Pulau Sipadan. This efforts were introduced through policies to reduce the impact of divers on this island and also to minimise the use of fresh groundwater (Weaver, 2001).

Another major effort would include initiating the Semporna Priority Conservation Area. This project, active since 1980’s has the objective of addressing several coral reef surveys and also in assisting in the establishment in the Tun Sakaran Marine Park (TSMP) (Praveena et al., 2012). The Department of Marine Park Malaysia and Fisheries Sabah collaborate with Sabah Parks to monitor TSMP (Praveena et al., 2012). TSMP is approximately 45 minutes away from the coastal town of Semporna. The park was gazetted in July 2004, and is the largest Marine Park covering an area of 340 square km of sea and coral reefs and 10 square kilometer of land or 35,000 hectors in total ("Sabah Parks - Tun Sakaran Marine Park," 2010). The gazetted area includes the island of Bodgaya, Boheydulang, Tetagan, Selakan, Sebangkat, Maiga, Sibuan and Mantabuan.
In the context of the conservation of Semporna’s biological diversity including coral reefs in and the islands surrounding TSMP, several enactments and legislations are in place. This would include Parks Enactment 1984, Forest Enactment 1968, Fauna Conservation Ordinance 1963 (Praveena et al., 2012). These enactments, looks at the regulations of anyone entering this protected areas and the consequence of individual violating these regulations.

In TSMP, communities of approximately 2000 live together with 544 coral reef fish, 255 hard corals and 70 soft corals. The Semporna Island Darwin Project (SIDP) took place to initiate the local communities on the importance of conservation of these coral reefs. The Marine Conservation Society, together with Sabah Parks were involved in a project to educate the local community on how to use local resources in a sustainable manner. One of the initiatives of this project was to introduce seaweed cultivation and clam ranching as an alternative source of income (”The Semporna island Darwin project,” 2011), and a healthier method to gain an income without harming the bio-diversity.

On the contrary, despite all these policies, conservation enactments and legislations and efforts to conserve the environment are in place, recent studies have shown that it is still evident that the concerns regarding the protection and conservation of these areas remain a topic amongst scholars (Corpuz, 2008; Jakobsen et al., 2007; Praveena et al., 2012; L Teh et al., 2005; Lydia Teh & Cabanban, 2007).

However, in the environmental context, the issue does not only apply to the degradation of coral reefs but also coastal management issue. The coast line around Sabah faces numerous conflicting interest from public, private and industry groups (Jakobsen et al., 2007). Due to the population concentration and urbanisation alongside coastal areas,
there is evidence that improper treated sewage and solid waste is discharged directly into the sea. An observation of the place indicated that certain hoteliers dispose raw sewage into the sea. Also, deforestation for agriculture and aquaculture contribute significantly to soil erosion leading to increase in sediment of coastal areas (Jakobsen et al., 2007). The local newspaper mentions that the state’s minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Masidi Manjun states that the town of Semporna was a “Rubbish Town”. He adds that this issue was highlighted by tourist and that the rubbish could have originated from those living nearby islands, hence drifting the rubbish to the coastal town of Semporna (Vanar, 2010).

**Policies in Responsible Rural Tourism**

Table 1 postulates the hierarchy based on The Malaysia’s Government Official Portal (myGovernment, 2012). However, it was found that only 2 of the 7 departments identified have state level ministries in their portal. On the other hand, it was identified that the state government of Sabah also has similar but not identical ministry layout. Table 2 identifies the ministries that would have portfolios with regards to responsible rural tourism in Sabah.
Table 1: Hierarchy for Federal Government relevant to Rural Tourism Policies

Note: * Sabah Department visible on the myGovernment website

Source: (myGovernment, 2012)
Table 2: Hierarchy for Sabah State Government relevant to Rural Tourism Policies

Note: ** Data unavailable due to broken web-link

Source: ("Sabah Government," 2012)
Due to the fact that there are several potential agencies involved in rural tourism, policies in Sabah for authorities and business operators remain ambivalent. Initial community group discussion indicates a lack of interaction between policy makers and its stakeholders highlighting gaps in the rural tourism governance resulting in conflicting policy implementation. Hence, emphasising the need for proper policies to be in place in order to mitigate as well as rehabilitate the situation at hand.

As this paper is work in progress, the analysis of compiling, comparing and bridging the policy gaps will be at the infancy level. This is because government documentations are mostly available only in hardcopy and hence difficult and time consuming to obtain. Nonetheless at the preliminary stance, it was identified that policies protecting Sabah’s ecosystem and environment are aplenty. At this juncture of study, the report will include a comparison specifically between the National Policy on the Environment under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment Malaysia and Sabah Environmental Education Policy under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah. The comparison between the two will zoom into the environmental education perspective in attempt to compare and bridge possible gaps within these policies.

**Comparing the gaps of the two policies**

National Policy on the Environment under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment Malaysia mooted the National Policy on the Environment in 2002. This policy strives towards continuous economic, social and cultural progress and enhancement of the quality of life of Malaysians through environmentally sound and
sustainable development *(National Policy on the Environment, 2002)*. The objectives of this policy includes the following:

- A clean, safe, healthy and productive environment for present and future generations
- Conservation of the country's unique and diverse cultural and natural heritage with effective participation by all sectors of society
- Sustainable lifestyle and patterns of consumption and production.

Seven different strategies were drawn out to achieve these objectives, where the first objective, Education and Awareness will be highlighted in this study. The aim of this strategy is

“To achieve a deeper and better understanding of the concepts of environmentally sound and sustainable development and a caring attitude towards nature, environment education and awareness will be promoted across the board incorporating information dissemination and training, in line with the recommendations of Agenda 21.” *(National Policy on the Environment, 2002)*

The state level policy, which is the Sabah Environmental Education Policy under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah has made extensive efforts to trickle down the objective of the Federal Government in terms of environmental education efforts. In this context, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah has coined this policy with the specific objective to instil environmental stewardship and sustain lifestyle among the people in Sabah. This policy aims to involve stakeholders such as the government, NGO’s, and education institutions as agents to
disseminate the importance of environmental education in Sabah (Sabah Environment Education Policy, 2009).

**The Gap - Education Opportunities**

Both the policies mentioned above, extensively highlights the importance of environmental education through various agents. However, these policies have yet to address individuals who do not have excess to basic education. The importance of environmental education in schools and other institutions of learning are seen as an important element to promulgate regulations of an integrated environmental education system. In Taiwan, one of the main factors for successfully accomplishing environmental education is through cultivating professional academicians who teach environmental education through a long period of time (Wen-Tien, 2012). Environmental education is seen as an important element in school in order to help students develop the abilities and capabilities needed for civic participation, service and action (Srbinovskia, Erdoganb, & Ismailia, 2010).

In the context of Semporna, Sabah, since 2008, the district of Semporna had a population of 138,000 people; a 4.42% increase since 2001. This increment is considered the 7th highest increment in population out of 24 districts available in Sabah.

When Sabah gained independence in 1963, the government had issues with the status of the Sea Bajau. A large population of migrants originating from southern Philippines and Indonesia, and this has increased rapidly in the mid 1970's to 1980's due to political unrest, particularly in southern Philippines. Therefore, both local and migrants settle along the coastal areas of Sabah and depend on fishing as their main source of income (Jakobsen et al., 2007; Poh & Fanning, 2012; L. S. L. Teh, Teh, & Sumaila, 2011).
Issues such as their nationality, primitive lifestyle, poverty, maritime crime and other socially related issues (Ali, 2010).

Today, similarly like other parts of Sabah, Semporna faces a problem with illegal human migration and complex socio-economic factors (Malaysia). In Semporna alone, there are 714 accounted illegal immigrants ("It's not a trap," 2011). In most cases, these illegal immigrants are of Philippines descendent and are called Sea Bajau or Bajau Laut or Palau. These people reside in Semporna due to the political unrest in the Philippines, and due to this unsolved matter relating to their citizenship and status, they have been categorized as ‘stateless people’ rather than illegal immigrants or political refugees (Ali, 2010). However, the question still remains on the issue of their actual status in Sabah where historical factors and contribution to the economic development could be a key factor as to whether or not their status should remain as illegal immigrants (Ali, 2010). Due to this, there are many unaccounted people that are residing in the district of Semporna.

In light to that, the issue of education remains cumbersome. On a general note, the people of Semporna have access to primary and secondary education. In Semporna alone, there are 38 primary schools and 9 secondary schools (Portal Emis, 2008). As for higher education, Semporna has only 1 community college that offers one type of certificate course, which is Tourism and Travel/Tour Operators (Laman Web Rasmi Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia: Statistik, 2010). There are no universities or colleges present in the district of Semporna. While this may seem like a reasonable opportunity for the communities to obtain basic levels of education, schools in Malaysia would only accept children with valid documentation. Therefore, it is considered a far
cry for the stateless people to get basic education, hence limiting the opportunities for all to get basic environmental education.

**Bridging the gap for improved results**

In the policy formulation process, theories related to the conglomeration of various actors should be applied. The importance of having a holistic view of stakeholders is crucial. This would mean that policy makers would need to adopt an approach that involves the main stakeholders during policy development. To further define this statement, policy makers must use a community-based development approach in order to accurately address concerns on social change, environmental degradation and economic dependence (Liu, 2006). To address social changes, policies from the government level could work together with the UN Convention to allow stateless people to enter the country under certain regulations (Ali, 2010) and gain certain basic human rights such as education. From the economic perspective however, both public and private initiatives can use policies as a base to play a significant role in enabling tourism sector through recruitment and managing human resource development (Baum & Szivas, 2008). Looking from an environmental context, many organisations (both government and NGO’s) have attempted to instil policies within the users through various forms of education campaigns (*Chapter 1, Sabah Wildlife Department*, 2003; "The Semporna island Darwin project," 2011) and enactments. It is therefore crucial to involve individuals with and without formal education in order for the education awareness to be effective. Nonetheless, it is still unclear as to why these policies are not reaching its objective; therefore a more rigorous study on these policies needs to be readdressed.
Promising Approach – Actor Network Theory (ANT)

The Actor-network Theory or ANT is a patterned network of heterogeneous relations, or an effect produced by such a network. This relational and process-oriented sociology assumes agents, organisations and devices as ‘interactive effects’. ANT is therefore effect of interaction between materials and strategies of organisation (Law, 1992). The fundamental importance of ANT is that it is not materialist oriented. Therefore, it does not intend to divide humans and non-humans but with the intention to understand that there is a simultaneous presence of different ‘agencies’. These agencies can be humans, machines or even symbols, whereby treated in heterogeneous actor-network (Plesner, 2009)

The Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is worth considering as a framework for the study of tourism. This theory will guide scholars in tourism on how and what to study in tourism (Vanderduim, 2007). This is because ANT establishes important insights for tourism research (in this case, research in rural tourism policies) as it provides a possibility to bypass dualism and also to take into consideration the significance of materials in the concepts and practices of tourism. ANT, therefore provides the ability to deal with relational materiality of the social world where it provides an avenue for researches to identify how tourism happens through hybrid network practices of different actors while providing the opportunity to grasp multiple relational orderings (Jóhannesson, 2005). In short, tourism is held together by active sets of relations in which the human and the non-human continuously exchange properties, bringing some form of structural order to the whole picture at large (Vanderduim, 2007). What actor-network theorists now seek to investigate are the means by which associations come into existence and
how the roles and functions of subjects and objects, actors and intermediaries, humans and non-humans are attributed and stabilised (Murdoch, 1997).

In the context of rural tourism in Malaysia, the characteristics of its actors can be conglomerated to tourist operators, local officials, federal and state officials, tourist and civil society. Rural tourism is therefore a complex system of action with specific operating logics, composed of a multitude of actors. It involves multiple objects and non-human elements into the composition, alongside with actors (Murdoch, 1997). In order for policies to work, the relationship between these elements must be bridged, creating a synergistic environment crucial for the effectiveness of policies.

In order to achieve this, the researcher would need to adopt an inductive, comprehensive approach, where the experiences of actors and the sense that they give to their actions and how they view the reality of the system they operate (Jolivet & Heiskanen, 2010). This procedure will be guided through the constructivist worldview.

In short, the policies governing the conservation of the rural tourism setting, in this case particularly environmental education in Semporna still lacking in achieving its objectives. Rural tourism policies in Sabah for authorities and business operators remain ambivalent. Initial community group discussion indicates a lack of interaction between policy makers and its stakeholders highlighting gaps in the rural tourism governance resulting in conflicting policy implementation and the lack of these policies being intertwined on both state and federal levels. It is therefore important to take this opportunity as a platform to further sharpen these policies in order for them to serve its purpose.
Conclusion

In a nutshell, the problems that occurred within the context of this study is due to the existing rural tourism policies that are not aligned between the state or federal level due to the multiple policies available. Observations of these policies also suggest that there is a lack of interaction between policy makers and its agencies and actors, and the lack of these policies being intertwined with each other. According to Awang & Aziz (2011), the potentials of tourism policies in Malaysia have not reached its optimum because of poor policy implementations and the lack of alignment between federal and state governments.

This study will address these gaps and provide valuable information on policy formulation framework. It is also timely to address the issue in order for Malaysia to achieve its target as the Malaysian government aims to achieve a bullish target of 36 million tourist arrivals and RM168 billion in tourist receipts by 2020.

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