



Factors for Success in National Culture Festival Administration by Local Government Units

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to study factors of success in national culture festival administration conducted by local government units. The selected study area was the Loy Krathong and Candles Festival at Sukhothai Historical Park, Sukhothai Province, Thailand. Eight samples, all of which were representatives from local government units, were selected by using purposive sampling method. Data collection included interviewing and observation within the festival space. The results showed that the factors of success in national culture festival administration conducted by local government units comprised of five key factors: 1) Clarification of goals and objectives of the event. 2) Clarification of roles and duties classified by expertise. 3) Encouragement in collaboration among local government units 4) Promotion of the festival's identity. 5) Security measure for the festival. The study would provide useful information for the future event organizers both from government and private sectors.

Keywords: National cultural festival, Festival administration, Local government units

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Introduction

Festivals and local special events have become one of the fastest growing types of tourism attractions (Lin, 2011; Manthiou et al., 2014). They represent modern tourism (Lin, 2011). Festivals also attract tourists, who have special interest in culture, to participate in community events; they can help encourage knowledge sharing among tourists and local residents (Raj et al., 2013). Festivals can also increase the residents' feeling of pride in local heritage (Lee, Back, 2008; Raj et al., 2013).

Festivals provide opportunity for local community to put their identity and uniqueness on display (Derret, 2004). Event location would become famous tourist attraction where people would want to visit and explore. From the view of administration, organizing a festival or an event is considered an effective tool to restore the city as it can build up good image for the location. Organizing a festival, therefore, is one of the key factors to promote local tourism (Lin, 2011; Lee, Back, 2008). In terms of economy, festivals are apparently a vital tool to boost up local economy and tourism; they certainly bring immense income and benefits to the community (Lee, Back, 2008; Getz, 2008, 2010; Rosenbaum, Wong, 2010; Pan, Huan, 2013). Considering, via different dimensions, the significance of festivals to a particular community, city, and country, festivals are considered the tourism's destination brand (Manthiou et al., 2014).

Many previous studies on the subject of impacts of festivals to tourism showed that most researchers focused on studying the impacts of festivals to local economy and finance management, points of view of organizers towards festival administration, and evaluation of impacts caused by

festival organization (Getz, 2008). However, the study on the topic of national culture festival organized by local units is scarce. Since 1977, Loy Krathong and Candles Festival at Sukhothai Historical Park has been promoted to become a national festive event. At the beginning, the festival was initiated in collaboration of Sukhothai Province, the 6th Regional Office of Fine Arts Department (Sukhothai), and Tourism Authority of Thailand (Sukhothai Office). The project aimed at restoring Loy Krathong Festival in the original style as it was recorded in the history, promoting and preserving Loy Krathong Festival as the national heritage, and promoting tourism in Sukhothai, where Loy Krathong Festival had been originated. The organizations agreed to name the festival "*Ngan Pao Tien Len Fai*" (Candle-light, Fire-play Festival), as recorded in the historical stone inscription (Stone Inscription, Sukhothai Provincial Governor's Office, 2014). It has been 38 years (since 1977-2014) that Loy Krathong and Candle Festival in Sukhothai has been annually organized at Sukhothai Historical Park (Public relation news, Sukhothai Provincial Governor's Office, 2014)

Objective of the study

To study factors for success in national culture festival administration conducted by local government units, case study of Loy Krathong and Candles Festival at Sukhothai Historical Park, Sukhothai Province, Thailand.

Research Methodology

This study was a part of a research on the development of product brand's model from the tourists' points of view for festival and event tourism.

Qualitative approach was the major research method. Data was collected through questionnaires. Sampling of the study was Thai tourists who had past experiences in attending Loy Krathong and Candles Festival at Sukhothai Historical Park, Sukhothai Province; the value of product brand was mainly evaluated by these tourists. Quantitative approach was used as a secondary research method to get the response from different angles. It would help ensure the complete results of the study (Creswell, Clark, 2011).

In order to gain response of the sampling, research tools were designed by using semi-structured interview which encouraged key informants, i.e. representatives of the organizing team, to share their personal experiences; this method was applied in order to gain inclusive insights of the organizers in terms of festival administration. Purposive technique was applied when selecting 8 key informants based on an official announcement or the Notification on Appointment of Working Committee for the Loy Krathong and Candle Festival 2014. Not only interview, observation in the working area was also applied. Each interview took 30 minutes.

Data collection period was during the Loy Krathong and Candles Festival 2014 (2-6 November 2014) at Sukhothai Historical Park. During these 5 days, all activities and festival atmosphere were closely observed in order that the researcher would understand thoroughly the process of activity creations.

Methodological triangulation was the main method for data validation (Chantawanit, 2007). Three sources of data, i.e. informants' interviews, related documents about Loy Krathong and Candles Festivals in Sukhothai, and data gained from the

study field observation, were all double checked and validated. Typological Analysis (without theoretical framework) was adopted for data analysis (Chantawanit, 2007). The data collected from three sources was analyzed and categorized into different factors for success in national culture festival administration conducted by local government units.

Results

1. Goals and Objective of the Festival

The result showed that the working committee has still persisted on the original objectives when the first Festival was organized in 1977. Mr. Nikhon Musikkama, the Director of Sukhothai Historical Park at that time, initiated the plan of the project to the Sukhothai Governor's Office to organize a national festival of Loy Krathong to promote the province tourism. The festival was named "Nga Pao Tien Len Fai" (Candle-light, Fire-play Festival), which was the original term found in the record of historical stone inscription. According to the Notification on Appointment of Working Committee for the Loy Krathong and Candle Festival 2014, the objectives of the Festival were delineated as follows:

"Sukhothai Province annually organizes Loy Krathong and Candles Festival with the aims to preserve and promote culture and local tradition. The Festival is also organized in accordance with the 5 strategic plans of the Province— tourism promotion, in particular..."

According to Mr. Wasan Chamnanhui, the representative from the organizing team as follows:

"The goals of the Festival were "to preserve the Loy Krathong tradition and to promote Sukhothai tourism. It is a well known fact that our province



originated the festival, according to the historical record in the stone inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great.” (Chamnanchui, interview, 2015)

2. Roles and Duties of Unit Representatives

Sukhothai Governor’s Office was the main host to organize Loy Krathong and Candles Festival in Sukhothai since 1977. The Governor of Sukhothai Province resumed the position of the Executive Director of the Festival; the Director had power to appoint heads of local government offices to be in charge of creating activities. The appointed working committee would have to agree on the theme plan and direction of the festival before assigning each supporting section, for example administration section, public relations section, security section, to work on the jobs or activities related to their area of responsibility.

To appoint each government unit to be in charge of each organizing section, the committee would consider the unit whose regular job was in accordance with the assigned responsibility, for example, Public Relations Division at the Governor’s Office would take charge of the Public Relations and Master of Ceremony section in festival organizing team. Sukhothai College of Dramatic Arts, another clear example, would take responsibility in creating audio and visual performances such as Khon dance drama.

Mr. Wasan Chamnanchui described his main responsibility in the Festival saying that,

“My main job was to coordinate with the heads of each organizing section. I may consider adding or changing people in charge in accordance with their working experiences in the past. Normally, the team which worked for a particular section in the previous years would be very much likely to work in

the same section almost every year.” (Chamnanchui, interview, 2015)

3. Collaboration among Local Government Units

After the Notification on Appointment of Working Committee for the Festival was officially announced, the organizing committee would invite all committee members to the first meeting. In the meeting, each working section would report to and share with the committee the results of their works from last year including all challenges and obstacles. Suggestions from tourists, local residents and private tourist companies were also mentioned in the meeting in the hope that the committee would develop and improve the plan for next year.

For Loy Krathong and Candle Festival 2014, the Sukhothai Governor’s Office approved 20 million baht subsidies to organize the Festival. The preparation period took 7-8 months before the Festival. The monthly meeting was held to closely monitor the progress of each section until the last month before the actual Festival. There were 60 government units working for the organizing team this year; the working teams were divided into 32 different sections. Two vice governors were, therefore, assigned to monitor the progress of every section, helping the work run more flowingly and effectively, particularly in commanding and monitoring the work of each section.

“ We started working after getting officially appointed from the Governor. At least 7-8 months before the Festival, the Governor would call for regular meetings. As this was one of the most famous national festivals, we must seriously focus on the work and tried our best not to ruin our long

established reputation.” (Chamnanchui, interview, 2015)

“Before working on the new project, each section must report about problems and obstacles from last year. The committee would brainstorm to find the possible solutions in order to prevent the future occurrences of the problems. As we spent quite a long period of time preparing for the Festival, we don’t usually encounter any serious problems. Perhaps, it’s also because we are so familiar working with the same organizing teams which have extensive working experiences.” (Likkasit, interview, 2015)

4. Promotion of the Festival’s Identity

The working committee selected the story of the origin of Sukhothai *Pao Tien Len Fai* (Candle-light, Fire-play Festival) as the main theme of the festival. All activities in the festival such as Loy Krathong, candle lighting, different types of local fireworks, recreation of ancient market, music and dance performances were all designed to recreate the festive atmosphere in the past during the Sukhothai period. All activities were based on the references and records found in the ancient Sukhothai stone inscription. One activity also mentioned in the stone inscription was “*Phra Ratcha Pitee Chong Prieng*” (Lantern Floating Festival). The recreation of Sukhothai festive tradition was intricately designed by the 6th Regional Office of Fine Arts Department, Sukhothai Historical Park, and local scholars. A scholar from Sukhothai College of Dramatic Arts, Mr. Somsak Likkasit, shared very useful information and insights on the creation of theme and framework for the festival.

“ The identity of the Festival is put into three keywords: solemn, sacred, and serene. All activities were designed to reflect local intellects.

Modern displays will not be found in the festival. There was a case that a motor show was proposed to have a display in the festival but the proposal was turned down as this type of display did not fit with the main theme of the festival. Our tourists enjoyed traditional displays and activities such as beauty queen contest, Khon dance drama, Sukhothai gala dinner and Loy Krathong. These activities are what we need to maintain in our festival.” (Likkasit, interview, 2015)

5. Security Measure for the Festival

The organizing team was very concerned about safety and security of the tourists; the security measure for the festival was carefully planned and strictly followed, for example, alcoholic drinks area control and fireworks prohibition within and around the festival area. Security guards frequently walked around in the area for safety check. Cost of foods and drinks in the festival was also strictly controlled.

Moreover, all food stalls must be decorated only by natural materials and food containers must be naturally biodegradable. Food stall owners, in addition, must dress up in traditional costumes. Those who violated the regulations would be blacklisted and abruptly deprived of the right to sell products in the festival area. Krathongs and souvenirs were also under the cost control. Should there be any complaints from the tourists, they can go to the administration center located in the festival area. Under the security unit, there were many different sub-categories or sub-working units, for example, security control, traffic control, cleaning unit, first aid unit, and food stalls zoning unit. These operations confirmed the significance of safety control and prevention of tourists being taken advantage of by any unreasonable acts.

“ For the Festival’s safety measure, we prohibit lantern floating, firecrackers and fireworks. Alcoholic drinks and any forms of addictive drugs are also strictly prohibited. Any modern forms of music are not allowed, as well as noise making. We try to prevent any possibilities that will cause any forms of accidents and brawls. It is very important that all food stalls must be clean and the price must be reasonable. All stalls are require to be decorated only by natural materials, whereas the food stall owner must agree to dress up in Thai traditional costumes. For any food stalls which cannot fulfill these requirements and follow the instructions, their contracts will be cancelled. Sukhothai Municipality Office is in charge of these matters” (Tientham, interview, 2015)

Discussion

1. Goals and Objective of the Festival

The clarification of goals and objectives was one of the key factors contributing to the success of Loy Kratong and Candle Festival in Sukhothai. For the goal was set from the beginning since 1977 that this event was expected to become a “national” festival, the organizing team has been working hard to complete the main objectives of the Festival. Each year, the working team has been improving their organizing administration and creating activities which responded to the Festival’s identity, including the PR plan and risk control measure.

According to the 5-year strategic plan for development of Sukhothai province, the vision was clearly set to develop Sukhothai to become “the world heritage city with outstandingly impressive tourism”. This goal was set expecting that it would drive Sukhothai’s economy forward. The province actually

gave thought to planning sustainable tourism development in which represented local history as well as preserved local tradition [Sukhothai Strategic Plan for Development (2015- 2018), 2014]. In conclusion, festivals could help move local economy forward and were used as a tool to build up good image for the province. (Lin, 2011; Getz, 2008)

2. Roles and Duties of Local Units

Sukhothai Governor’s Office was the head of the organizing team; it was in charge of administration, policy planning and setting direction for the Festival. The organizing team comprised of 32 sections, appointed from 67 local units. The administration was carefully conducted under official regulations starting from issuing the Notification on Appointment of Working Committee, identifying working sections and their responsibilities, and generating jobs according to the expertise of the working team; all of these procedures were to assure the coordination flexibility and efficiency of each working unit.

Decentralization was the key strategy in administration. Local units which had different areas of expertise were assigned to be in charge of different jobs. This was considered the strength of the organizing team. Each local unit was given opportunity to exercise their creativity through festive activities creation. In addition, in the same working section, some local unit may take primary responsibility while the others took supporting roles. It is worth noting that even though there were many different working teams, communication between teams was not at all a problem, due to the fact that these working teams have been working together for quite a long time and co-working in other projects as well.

3. Encouragement in Collaboration among Local Units

Sukhothai Loy Krathong and Candle Festival was mainly administered based on decentralization strategy in which Sukhothai Governor's Office resumed the position of the executive director who generated jobs and different responsibilities to local units appointed as working teams. Local government units (i.e. governance section, public relations section, and educational institutions) and some private sectors were invited to join the working team and worked together; this was the great opportunity to build up close connection and networks among different local units. This could be beneficial to other collaborative projects in the future.

Having opportunity to join the working team in organizing a national festival made these local units feel more committed to working for the community and be proud to be part of the success of the event. (Raj et al., 2013) This was one of the important strategies to develop economy and cultural tourism within local community. Not only local community directly benefited from organizing a festival, private sectors, including all services and tourism (i.e. tourist business, accommodation and hotel business, and food business), also gained profits from this. (McDonnell et al., 1999 cited in Raj et al., 2013)

4. Identity of Sukhothai Loy Krathong Festival

What made distinctive character of Sukhothai Loy Krathong and Candle Festival was the awareness of the values of historical resources and local tradition. The festival goals and objectives were primarily set in response to the main theme to preserve and promote local culture, and encourage

cultural exchange between local residents and tourists. Today, the festival organizer still held on to the original theme which aimed in building up sustainable cultural tourism based on strong background knowledge in history and culture. Cultural festival could help create good image of the city as well as encourage local residents to have pride in their own cultural heritage. There were also many benefits for tourists. Apart from the fact that they could learn more about local history, tourists' first-hand experience while being exposed to different culture was something that most tourists cherished. Organizing a festival, therefore, was an effective marketing strategy frequently exploited by most organizers as it could help attract bigger number of tourists, restore the city, and promote local culture. (Getz, 2008)

Sukhothai cultural identities which were adopted in the process of festival creation were, for example, Sukhothai's "*Lai Sue*" (ancient letters), traditional costumes, and traditional music and dance. The identity of the Sukhothai Festival which made it distinctive from Loy Krathong festival in other places in the country can be put into three keywords: **solemn**, **sacred**, and **serene**. Buhalis (2000); Cai (2002); Morgan, Pritchard (2005) all agreed that identity clarification was a very significant strategy for promoting tourism. Attractive activities in the festival were the main tourists' incentives. (Getz, 2008) Clear identity was also an effective tool to build up good image for tourist attractions. (Ritchie, 1984)

5. Security Measure for the Festival

Comprehensible safety control measure, for example, alcoholic drinks area control, fireworks prohibition within and around the festival area, foods



and goods cost control, and parking management, helped guarantee tourists' safety and security. The organizing team must be concerned and highly alert about security matters (Raj et al., 2013). For an enormous-scaled national festival like this one, the organizers must also strictly follow the historical site preservation regulations.

Under the administration of security section, different sub-categories or sub-working units were assigned to take charge of different matters. Sukhothai Governor assigned the vice governors to closely monitor and follow the works of each unit. All of these actions and effective administration left good impression and positive thoughts toward the Festival among tourists and summoned even bigger number of tourists to come to the Festival in the following year.

Conclusions

The factors of success in national culture festival administration conducted by local government units comprised of five key factors. First and foremost, the clarification of goals and objectives of the event was essential as it determined the direction of the event organization and also helped elevate the scale of the event from an ordinary local festive occasion to a national festive phenomenon. Second, the clarification of roles and duties classified by expertise of the working teams was another factor. Local units, private sectors, and local residents were all given opportunities to contribute and work for the project. This encouraged people to have pride in their local resources and to be aware that with their contributions, the festival became a very successful event which could attract a great number of visitors from all over the country. Third, encouragement in collaboration among local government units was a

strategy to build up long term connection and public engagement within the province. Fourth, The Festival's identity promotion was a very important strategy in which it helped publicize the uniqueness of Loy Krathong Festival in Sukhothai which was distinctive from those organized in any other parts of the country. The Festival's identity was also used as the key theme which set clear direction and framework for all activities creations. Last but not least, security measure for the Festival reflected that the organizing team was highly alert in risk prevention; this also showed that the team could perform professionally in organizing the large-scale national event.

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