

Management Strategies and Sustainability of National Museums in Bangkok

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Abstract

Today, tourism is one of the most important industries for Thailand. Among the attractions, national museums are considered the center that present the nation's history, art and culture inherited from the past and preserved until now. These make management and sustainability as public organizations very important to consider. This research was therefore conducted to find out what and how strategies are developed and practiced among the national museums in Bangkok as well as significant areas that lead to sustainability. Only qualitative methods were adopted in the conduct of this research. In-depth interview, focus group and observation were selected to be the most effective options for research data collection. The results of this research indicate the key findings that the national museums are under similar management strategies for development as learning sources and tourism attractions. Such strategies are implemented by the Office of National Museums, put and updated in National Museum Development Plan. Furthermore, on tourism and hospitality services, technologies for visitors are being focused, while Public Relations, Information Technology, Personnel, and Image of the national museums should be emphasized for sustainability.

Keywords: management strategies, tourism and hospitality services, sustainability, National Museums

Introduction

The Kingdom of Thailand is a country with a long enchanting history as well as art and culture inherited from the ancient times and preserved until now. Tourism is one of the country's largest and fastest growing industries and also a major source of income, foreign exchange earnings and employment. In this regard, tourism can be categorized into numerous types based on the tourists and their objectives or motivating factors for travelling. "Cultural Tourism" is one and is now a popular global tourism market. It is the form of tourism that is concerned with a country or region's culture which includes the lifestyle of the people and their history, art, architecture, religions, and other elements that helped shape their way of life.

Today, national museums are generally seen as the center of historical and cultural aspects making management and sustainability as public organizations very important to consider. Thus, this research was conducted to figure out the present strategies developed and practiced in regard to management and also suggestions for sustainability, with research objectives divided into three areas as described below.

Management Strategies: To figure out present strategies as well as viewpoints of the management of national museums and propose for this research accordingly in terms of management and operation (e.g. public relations and marketing).

Tourism and Hospitality Services: To study the current tourism and hospitality services and apply relevant theories as recommendations for service management and development.

Sustainability: To point out in detail significant ways for sustainability of national museums through interview with stakeholders and proposed plans.

In addition, the study targets of this research which are national museums in Bangkok refer to those announced in the Royal Thai Government Gazette (Ratchakitchanubeksa) under Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums, B.E. 2504 (1961) and under the supreme operation and management of Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture (Table 1. The Study Targets - National Museums in Bangkok).

Table 1.

The Study Targets - National Museums in Bangkok

National Museum	Displays
Bangkok National Museum	Collection of art, cultural and archaeological objects.
Changton National Museum	Collection of the royal auspicious significant elephants of Thailand.

The National Gallery	Traditional and contemporary paintings, sculptures and graphic arts, and works by H.M. King Bhumibol.
Royal Barges National Museum	Collection of the royal barges.
Silpa Bhirasri Memorial National Museum	The studio of Professor Silpa Bhirasri including an exhibition on contemporary art.

Source: Office of National Museums, Fine Arts Department

Review of Literature

There are previous studies in an international context considered as research evidence and also theoretical and methodological knowledge in regard to museum management. Kawashima (1997) discusses in *Museum Management in a Time of Change: impacts of cultural policy on museums in Britain 1979-1997* that management is a necessity in order to change proactively in adapting to dramatic environmental changes. The research found that one of the major changes in relation to museum operation is 'market changes'. There is growth in number of museums. Many of them are run by enthusiastic individuals and voluntary associations to preserve the craft of the past, and local and industrial history. Independent museums gain a vital source of income through admission charges and other visitor spending, and become market-oriented: responsive to visitors' needs and imaginative in presentation of displays and information. Such facts influenced museum culture making subsidized museums aware of the need to behave in a similar way. A related trend is the use of various techniques to entertain visitors as demands for good amenities and customer care of high standard have been enhanced by an upsurge of consumerism in commercial and public services. These demands are still growing as people's expectations keep rising. Overall, a 'business-like' approach to management through corporate planning, while bearing in mind the importance of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, could be appropriate for most national museums today.

Hasan (2006) similarly points in *Management practices in two of the oldest museums in Malaysia* that national museums play the role of preservation and dissemination of knowledge and building awareness among the public on the importance of conserving and preserving the historical, cultural and natural heritage of the country. However, now the

modern museums not only preserve heritages but they also inform and entertain. In order to achieve this goal, they develop communication techniques which are increasingly sophisticated and lead to exhibitions that are more attractive, spectacular and up-to-date in the way of transmitting information and motivating the visitors. These are interesting points that can be discussed in the case of national museums in Bangkok as the paper looks into the mood and structure of governance of the Sarawak Museum and the Selangor Museum, which are national museums in Malaysia.

More on the services, Walzl (2006) mentions in *Museums for visitors: Audience development - A crucial role for successful museum management strategies* that nowadays with museums broadening their audiences and trying to make collections more accessible to the public and more sophisticated technically as well as methodically, interpretation tools become an important part in the process of engaging the visitors. These tools such as audio guides, computer interactives, multi-layered text labels as well as specially trained mediators which help to make the museum experience more worthwhile by linking the visitor experience with the collection displayed and initiating a communication between the visitors and the objects. Furthermore, engaging visitors in an interactive experience is much more likely to result in a positive museum experience and visitors come back for more.

Methodology

According to the research objectives set, qualitative methods were adopted as they appear more subjective and are text-based as well as able to provide more in-depth information, whereas quantitative methods are number-based and so less in-depth in terms of information.

In-depth Interview

In-depth interview was selected as the main method for data collection with target informants being the Museum Promotion and Development Division, Office of National Museums and Academic Department, Bangkok National Museum. This method allows the interviewer to encourage informants to talk, ask supplementary questions and ask informants to explain their answers (Veal, 2006). In-depth interview was therefore helpful to acquire answers for this research in detail. The first interview was conducted on 29 June 2015.

A number of 13 checklist questions were designed to apply with each in-depth interview. This set of checklist questions consisted of total three different areas to explore, namely: Management Strategies (Question 1-5), Tourism and Hospitality Services (Question 6-10) and Sustainability (Question 11-13). All these were open-ended questions allowing the informants to answer in detail, clarify responses, and give more thoughts and opinions rather than a simple one-word answer. These include fact-based and up-to-date information and also insights from their direct or prior experiences in regard to national museums.

Focus Group

The focus group techniques were only applied to acquire answers to the question on sustainability “*What should be done for the sustainability of the national museums in Bangkok?*”, which required a variety of thoughts and opinions rather than single ideas of an individual. Furthermore, a group of three administration officers was approached due to their decades of work experiences in regard to the development of national museums in Thailand which could contribute for this research in regard to sustainability.

The researcher was the moderator of the focus group session conducted on 16 July 2015 with administration officers of Academic Department, Bangkok National Museum. The discussion lasted for about 30 minutes in the form of conversation and exchange of opinions.

Observation

This research used observation to support the data obtained from interviews. This includes personal observation through following news and updates relevant to the research topic, questions and objectives, and directly visiting all the five national museums in Bangkok. Furthermore, “participant observation” which involves interaction of the researcher with the people being researched was also applied by sharing the researcher’s own points of view during the focus group session.

Analysis and Findings

According to Hatch (2002), data analysis is a systematic search for meaning, a way

to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Furthermore, “analysis” is organizing and interrogating data to develop explanations, make interpretations, and generate theories. These correspond with Berg (2007) that qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, and description of things.

Having obtained interview and observation data along with documents, this research continued with analysis tools being documentary, content and thematic analysis. The results are explained below.

Management Strategies

Each of the five national museums in Bangkok is under the Office of National Museums, Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture. The Fine Arts Department is the key organization responsible for the preservation, revitalization, restoration, promotion and communication of various areas of arts and culture. However, the subordinate organization directly in charge of management and operation of all the national museums is the Office of National Museums (Figure 1)

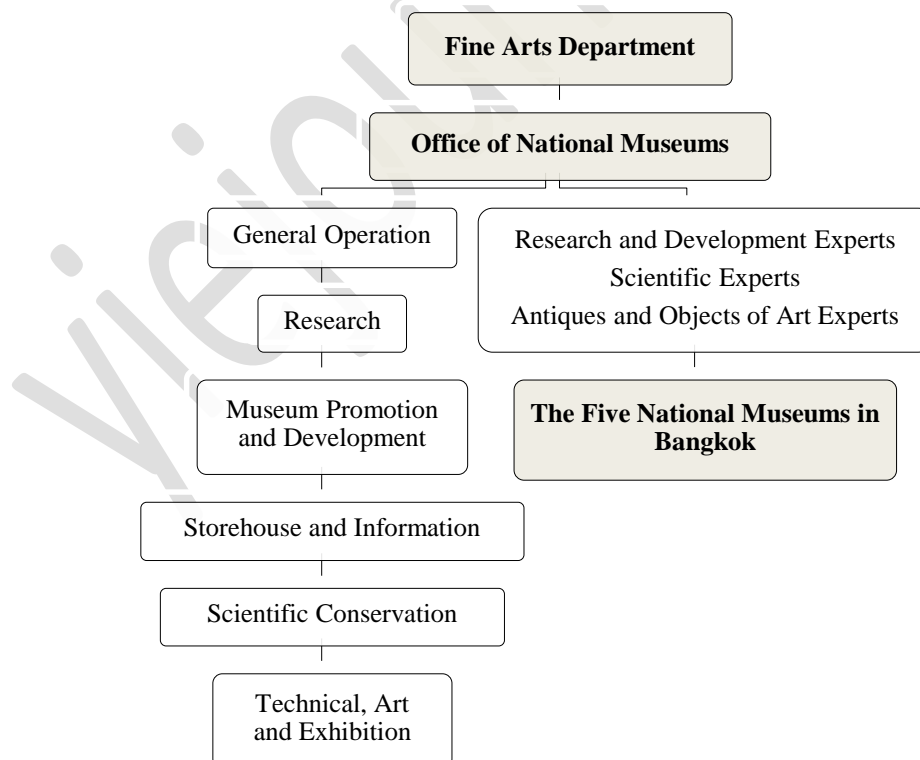


Figure 1. Organization Chart

Source: National Museum Development Plan

Inside of each national museum in Bangkok are also different departments in regard to operation and management being administration division, security division, exhibition gallery keys division, and academic division. The management strategies are development plans implemented by the Office of National Museums with an emphasis on socio-cultural, academic and economic aspects of the national museums to serve as both learning sources and tourism attractions (Figure 2. National Museum Development Concept).



Figure 2. *National Museum Development Concept*
Source: National Museum Development Plan

In view of the above, the following mission in terms of management are considered:

1. To develop and increase the potential of national museums to become learning sources and tourism attractions that is alive, up to par and up-to-date.
2. To build the management system of national museums that is up-to-date and effective.
3. To preserve antiques and objects of art which are cultural heritages of the nation.
4. To study, analyze and conduct research to retrieve historical and archaeological knowledge as well as art history knowledge and provide them to both Thai people and foreigners.

Tourism and Hospitality Services

On tourism and hospitality services, it is found that in general that both tourism and hospitality are similarly provided. These include providing information through print media in both Thai and English language and providing additional guide services through booking

apart from having regular staff assisting at the museums. However, based on the interviews, one concern in common is that the use of information technology in services is insufficient. To be specific, the informants all agreed that it would benefit both the museums and visitors if there are official online websites for each national museum. As a part of tourism and hospitality services, this can be considered as necessary due to the consumer demands or trends on searching for information or even live updates of the products and services. Although the national museums are in fact non-profit tourism organizations and are not operated as a business unlike those that emphasize on the profit and growth of business, still they are tourism attractions that need to ponder about what will be useful for their service development and improvement. Furthermore, the use of information technology, social media especially Facebook could also add value to the means of services particularly in terms of accessibility and convenience. It can also be an effective channel for public relations and marketing of the national museums as well. With regard to other service technologies, being developed are QR Code (Quick Response Code) for the visitors to get all information (e.g. explanation about artifacts) on their mobile devices while visiting, AR (Augmented Reality) using Aurasma Program, a leading augmented reality platform available as an application for high-powered devices (e.g. iPhones and iPads) free of charge. The visitors will be able to install and get the live physical view of objects. Other than these, Virtual Museum, VDO and Audio Guide are also being developed and expected to be provided as part of museum services.

Sustainability

The focus group technique was utilized to gain various perspectives on sustainability of national museums. Thematic analysis was used to identify and record patterns or themes of the data obtained. Table 2 below depicts the findings of such focus group session using this type of data analysis, which are the “majority” of opinions or “mutual” opinions of areas that should be focused by the management for sustainability of the national museums in Bangkok.

Table 2.

Focus Group Results

Public Relations	“Public Relations” is important to promote the work of the museums and also educate visitors which after all will help with the preservation of cultural heritages of Thailand.
Information Technology	“Information Technology” should be developed and used more in the operation and management of the museums.
Personnel	“Personnel” should be focused in terms of recruiting permanent staff that hold specific qualifications or skills to serve in specific areas and training them effectively leading to professional development of the museums.
Image	“Image” is important to be adjusted and maintained through time following the international standard as well as the ever-changing demands or trends of visitors.

Conclusion

According to the analysis and findings, it can be concluded that all the five national museums in Bangkok: Bangkok National Museum, Changton National Museum, The National Gallery, Royal Barges National Museum, and Silpa Bhirasri Memorial National Museum, are under similar management strategies implemented by the Office of National Museums and published in National Museum Development Plan. The purposes of these strategies are to be served as systematic framework for the national museums in regard to action planning, performances and also budgets for adjustment and development to overall meet the demands of the society and accomplish the objectives of the national museums themselves which are to be both effective historical and socio-cultural learning sources as well as tourism attractions. This means to focus on both academic value and economic value of the national museums along with the conservation of Thai cultural heritages which is the most essential part.

As national museums are tourism attractions, they are considered providers of tourism and hospitality services to all those visiting the museums. This research found that it is necessary to utilize useful technologies to support the exhibition of artifacts or antiques in

the museums. Not only for a more modern appearance in the sight of visitors but also for the convenience of visitors obtaining information. It is also necessary to use more online communication tools more such as social media which are useful in terms of public relations and marketing as well.

The research found that there are four areas on sustainability that should be emphasized, namely public relations, information technology, personnel and image. All these lead to the sustainability of the national museums in Bangkok today which is concerned with how to be established and maintained successfully as tourism organizations. The four aspects are also involved with tourism and hospitality services provided by the national museums as the development of these will not only lead to long-lasting sustainability but also to outstanding services. In conclusion, the key findings of this research---the focus points for successful management of the national museums in Bangkok can be seen below.

Table 3.

Key Findings

Management Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Office of National Museums, Fine Arts Department, formulates and implements management strategies, which can be found in National Museum Development Plan. - The management strategies put an emphasis on the purpose of national museums to be effective historical and socio-cultural learning sources and tourism attractions.
Tourism and Hospitality Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a necessity in terms of service effectiveness to increase the use of various technologies in exhibitions of artifacts/antiques and the use of online communication tools for the purpose of public relations and marketing.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are four main areas significant for sustainability being public relations, information technology, personnel, and image of the national museums as tourism attractions.

Discussion and Recommendations

Having compared the findings with the previous studies mentioned in Literature

Review, it is found that the findings in the context of Thailand are similar to those of foreign countries. This could be because national museums are the places concerned with the history, culture and people of one nation and so they have similar ideas in regard to management and services. However, it is still difficult to compare due to the fact that Thailand is a developing country and is simply different from other countries in terms of economic and social background.

The national museums are non-profit tourism attractions yet they are corporate organizations with targets that have to consider the market demands and trends so to set up effective plans and strategies for successful management and provide quality and satisfactory services. Furthermore, it is important to understand the meaning or concept of strategic management of the national museums which refers to identification and description of the strategies carried out to achieve better performance and set future direction as tourism organizations.

The researcher views that the management strategies of the national museums can be both internally and externally focused. In this regard, internal strategy looks within the museums to increase its quality standards, productivity, efficiency and operational effectiveness, whereas external strategy looks at strategic goals of the museums' image and performance in the marketplace. These all link to the "tourist perceptions", expectation, demands, trends, preferences, thoughts and feelings towards the national museums that the management will have to consider about.

The national museums can also constantly conduct SWOT Analysis to figure out their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, which are internal and external factors they can examine for the organization. These will assist them in formulating and implementing appropriate management strategies which incorporate various functional areas to achieve the objectives of the national museums. Furthermore, as service organizations, they can perform service marketing which requires 'external marketing' (e.g. prepare and promote the services or activities), 'internal marketing' (e.g. train and motivate staff to serve the visitors/tourists well), and 'interactive marketing', practicing both the "technical quality" (the quality of the products/services) and "functional quality" (how they are provided). Examples are such as that while the precious artifacts are displayed. the staffs will also have to attend to any requests of the tourists and assist them in providing

information and answering their questions willingly with a service mind. These will retain the tourists and they may share their good experiences with other visitors as well.

Along with the above, it is worth to look at the national museums in Bangkok as a part of cultural tourism which helps preserve and enhance national and local pride and spirit and that the museums are essential in building a country's image and also play an important role in developing a positive image of a country internationally. In this regard, the researcher views that culture-based tourism in Thailand and Bangkok could be developed more with a focus on promoting national museums as the main attractions for all tourists to visit. Nevertheless, there would still be a need for sustainable thinking, meaning that the tourists should gain more in-depth knowledge of the Thai culture upon their visits which will stimulate understanding and a wish to cooperate in terms of cultural preservation. These are significant to make cultural tourism possible. Furthermore, it can also be a movement for all stakeholders being the government, the enterprises (e.g. tour operators, travel agencies), the local community, and the tourists, to cooperate to develop cultural tourism in the national museums.

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