

When the King's Philosophy Meets Local Wisdoms: Raising the Potential for Community Product Standards and Cultural Tourism in the Central Northeastern region of Thailand

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ABSTRACT

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This research investigates the methods that can be utilised to improve community products and cultural tourism in Thailand's central northeast in order to address economic and social disparities. The study takes after the philosophy of King Rama IX and creative local wisdoms and uses a three-pronged approach. Firstly, working to improve and establish quality standards for community products and leveraging local knowledge can lead to the enhancement of community products. Secondly, the framework for cultural tourism can be conceptualised through the capitalisation of the uniqueness of the region. Thirdly, fostering community innovations, sustainable learning arises as the pragmatic resolution for long-run empowerment of cultural and economic development. The study utilises a combination of research methods such as interviews, observations, and surveys to pinpoint important areas for growth. These areas include establishing a brand, utilising content marketing, improving product design, and developing regional tourism calendars. The results indicate that these strategies, which are rooted in the local wisdoms and the King's philosophy, have the potential to reduce economic and social inequalities while promoting community-based prosperity.

Keywords: Community Products, Cultural Tourism, Local Wisdoms, King's Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Thailand's centre northeastern area possesses a vast and rich collection of cultural and societal heritage, including diverse traditions, localised wisdoms, tourist attractions of historical importance, and the ample natural resources to enable potential capitalisation of such through harnessing these advantages for the development of sustainable tourism. This precedence has resulted in the development of unique community-based products and touristic activities that are based upon cultures and traditions, gaining the recognition and distinction markings. This is largely supported by the headwinds from the expanding Thai tourism industry, necessitating the promotion of cultural village activities to stimulate grassroots economy and income generation for nation-wide communities.

The research attempts to highlight and resolve the challenges resulting from fluctuations in purchasing power and consumption, as well as reduced tourism from the spread of COVID-19 through designing a community development strategy with strong emphasis on building stronger grassroots economy and enhance societal opportunities for the community population to result in income disparity reduction. The research focuses on utilising the available social capital in the central northeastern area to promote and develop products that align with current market demands. The approach involves empowering local businesses at numerous levels to take on the roles of marketers and promoters of their communities, thereby increasing the value of trade and investments between prefectures in the region, intranational, and transnational markets. In addition, the philosophy of King Rama IX to raise awareness of

preserving local traditions and wisdom within such communities while empowering local entrepreneurs to participate in regional business networks, organisations, and associations is brought into light in designing the aforementioned strategy to further in the establishment of cultural tourism destination conceptualisation in the central northeastern region, and enhances sustainable learning and skills unique to such communities to impart an economically robust and sustainable foundation, ultimately benefiting the regional economic expansion. This study also suggests ways forward in policy implementation directions for relevant community development parties for product standard elevation and cultural/local tourism for communities, as well as their roles and contributions; let alone, ways forward for future research attempts along this field.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAMEWORK CONCEPTUALISATION

A. Inequality

Inequality, encompassing economic and societal disparities, persists across various aspects and regions in Thailand. Such phenomena affect the marginalised groups disproportionately by putting them at the disadvantage in respect of those in the higher societal ladders. Economic inequality, in terms of income, wealth, and opportunities, is influenced by economic policies with either intentional or unintentional negative consequences. This research employs economic inequality as a framework to devise a strategy, along with strategic silos, for reducing such disparities. This is by ways of enhancing community products based on local wisdoms and the King's philosophy, involving the modernisation of production to robustly meet market demands, and elevate the current production capabilities. By promoting learning and skills tailored to community uniqueness, the aim is to elevate quality of life and to lead to the betterment of localised livelihoods, thereby mitigating economic and social undesirables.

B. King Rama IX's Philosophy on Community Development, Economic Impact on Communities, and the Local Wisdom Concept School of Thought

The wisdom and philosophy of Thailand's King Rama IX highlights the need for community-related issues through collectivism and multidisciplinary methods, considering the differences in geographical, economic, and societal contexts of the different regions in Thailand through the prioritisation of localised knowledge and wisdoms; let alone enabling communities to take ownership of such projects. Additionally, it involves fostering alternative pathways to lead to communal growth based on the concepts of self-sufficiency economy. As a complementary, The Local Wisdom Concept emphasizes indigenous knowledge passed down through generations, including world-views, practical skills, and interactions with environment, society, and the divine. The method integrates development with community lifestyles and values by harnessing indigenous wisdom to increase product uniqueness and regional identity, hence supporting sustainable growth and cultural preservation.

By putting people and communities at the centre of development, this creates chances for their active involvement in advancing the creation of OTOP (One Tambon One Product) goods and other opportunities that arise from community development as a whole. This research employs the above concepts to investigate community products that embody local values, heritage, and historical events in order to add value to these goods and create unique selling attributes that will support the region's geographical branding and revenue generating.

C. The Concept of Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is the practice of travelling to different cultures, customs, and lifestyles. Cultural tourism is greatly enhanced by the diversity of social conventions, traditions, art, architecture, historical places, artefacts, tales, historical values, ways of life, language, attire, consumerism, beliefs, religions, rituals, and customs. This study analyses the collective culture, historical beliefs, and practices of the central northeastern provinces using the framework of cultural tourism. Seasonal tourist routes can possibly be formed by researching local traditions, customs, and natural resources, catering to private tourism enterprises, as well as opening up new types of tourism to benefit foreign and domestic holiday-makers and generate cash for such communities.

D. Conceptual Framework

This study project is an extensive exploratory one that focuses primarily on collecting qualitative research data to guide the development of creative community goods and cultural tourism, with a focus on the central northeastern

region. The main goal is to use indigenous creative expertise to strengthen intellectual property rights, thereby mitigating economic and social inequality.

Taking into consideration the historical and cultural artefacts and fabrics of such communities can be beneficial in creating a ripple in local economic development while mitigating the risks of further economic and social hindrances through the utilisation of the principles in community-based and grassroots economic development of Thailand's King Rama IX. The research aims to create strategies for cultural promotion and create tourism programmes by analysing the motivations and historical foundations of community products. Aiming to preserve cultural heritage, promote economic growth, and enhance community well-being, the project targets locals and entrepreneurs as important stakeholders who own and impart local creative wisdoms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodologies utilised in this research attempts involves creating an innovation to improve the standard of community products and the establishment of cultural tourism to ease regional economic and societal hindrances as follows:

Step 1: Identify issues as well as analyse artefacts and available documents to develop a cultural and traditions conservation strategic framework with the strong promotion of localised wisdom and knowledge, livelihood, inheritance learning, and localised profession elevation through the investigation of historical and cultural artefacts, customs, performances, and other resources to develop respective tourism programmes.

Step 2: Research and develop to create innovations that elevate community product standards and cultural tourism, aiming to reduce economic and social disparities and promote intellectual property based on the King's philosophy in the central northeastern region, following the framework established in Step 1.

Step 3: Collect data and conduct experiments to comprehend the stake of creating innovations that elevate community product standards and cultural tourism, with the aim of reducing economic and social inequality and promoting intellectual property based on the King's philosophy in the central northeastern region through the method of synthesising the undertaken research work overview.

Step 4: Investigate the available information with aims to dissect, explain, and elaborate the components of available artefacts, their definitions, and their relatedness with the societal and cultural concepts to reach an integrated perspective.

Step 5: Summarise findings and recommendations to report various factual events of the research having been studied thoroughly, including their causes and effects, as well as in which ways the application of the research findings offsets the current state-of-the-art in community product development and cultural tourism programmes.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES AND IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Community Product Development Standards

To enhance community goods, product production standards must be consistent with community beliefs and livelihood. Each format involves distinctive requirements and concerns to ensure such products closely adhere to modern market expectations and are well-received by the community, given their resonance with the community's unique identity and propositions.

Community product producers in the prefectures of Roy-Ette, Kon-Kène, Maha-Sarakam, and Khala-Sinne show resilience and adaptability to technological and societal shifts in production and trade, despite obstacles which can range from a lack of proactive risk management, a lack of funding, and difficulty accessing low-interest finance sources. Despite these impediments, opportunities are sought through grants from private and public entities, and government legislation.

B. Community Product Marketing, Entrepreneurial Efforts, and the Relationship with Cultural Tourism

There are two realised challenges associated with community products: Firstly, the difficulty in establishing unique selling proposition and clear-cut identity for powerful branding content creation is apparent. As a result, this proves challenging in terms of promoting products and highlighting them in a crowded local product marketplace. What's more, regarding knowledge transfer, especially in traditional crafts, another challenge lies within the low uptake, interest, and involvement from younger generations to be successful from both the demand and supply sides of the story.

Branding, storytelling, and product designs are pertinent in strengthening the market position and the standing of community products. The existing symbols, logos, and other attributes of the product play their roles in creating the image of the town and such communities, enabling the reflection of their unique identity and marketing to differentiate from other communities of similar products. Community products can potentially succeed given their high profit and income-generating potential in addition to a powerful content marketing, branding and internalised storytelling, and stronger representation of such communities.

Entrepreneurs are fluent with the development needs and comprehension of technological needs to enhance product dynamics. Regardless, the question of the sustainability of knowledge transfer remains a hinterland due to the financial support hindrances and methods not in deployment to disseminate technology after the finalisation of such hand-helping project. The picture of cultural tourism in the region is ideal, with the community product identity tied to the tourism destinations. The concepts towards the introduction of annual calendars of tourism used in the cultural sites or symbols of exploits must also be taken into considerations by relevant parties.

C. Ways forward for the Sustainability in Heritage Preservation and Cultural Tourism Development

Empowering community members to become innovators and develop unique product concepts contribute with marked essence to sustainable heritage conservation and tourism development. Continuous improvement in product designing, differentiation, and strategic promotion drives local income elevation and sustainable economic development, bringing economic and social development; let alone, creating local communities with greater influence in the market of tourism and local products. This contributes to the growth of the local economy via creating soft power as leveraged promotional tools.

The necessary cooperation between the public sector, the private sector and the education sector is to be enabled to pave way for the assessment and promotion of the benefits of social and cultural tourism. Government agencies can coordinate among producers, mark community costume days, sponsor events, and distribute grants accordingly based on the needs of different communities, while actively participate in societal promotion opportunities. Educational institutions offer knowledge exchange activities to preserve, promote and renew future ways of managing the culture and traditions of their communities.

Cooperations in appropriate formats between government organizations and private enterprises bring essential continuous development of knowledge, production, branding, financial sources, marketing, and technology to result in nation-wide awareness as well as for social benefits and cultural tourism. Government agencies harness the potential of social product producers and integrate them into the master plan for the establishment of cultural tourism destinations. This approach promotes learning, heritage preservation and serves as a sustainable branding and marketing strategy. With stronger emphasis on sustainable development and cultural tourism, community products can see the daylight in their respective contribution towards sustainable economic development. Clear policies, coordination, and collaboration are primary to preserving heritage, promoting community, and improving tourism to wider audience domestically and later on, transnationally.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The research attempt highlights the relatedness between community product development, cultural tourism and community enterprises. As suggested by Chimplee [1], community businesses based on cultural knowledge and strong local ties promote the creation of individual products that resonate with holiday-makers interested in such styles of tourism. Effective communication through strong branding and social media platforms strengthens the customer connection with these unique products [2].

Regardless, there are significant setbacks to overcome. Product similarities and deficient integration with the modern market demand hinder efforts to elevate product standards. Fragmented development efforts and limited resources further impede the efforts. In fact, communities often struggle with producing products that lack a distinct identity and local authenticity. Furthermore, production methods tend to be either strictly traditional or solely driven by “what used to sell” and the traditional target audience. The lack of financial resources, entrepreneurial knowledge and expertise, and marketing experience further complicates the road to local product standard elevation.

Given these constraints and the necessity to achieve long-term development of community product standards and cultural tourism, engagement with key government sectors is vital in the success of such undertakings. Joint efforts can emphasise innovation, creating distinctive product designs, and adapting to changing market demands. Furthermore, integrating local beliefs, religion, culture, and customs into the narrative and branding can bring about uniqueness and marketability. Jatuyon [3] emphasises the importance of the marketing mix in influencing consumer decisions. Offering a variety of perceived high-quality products tailored to customer preferences, setting appropriate prices, establishing effective distribution channels, and promoting products through creative marketing strategies are all crucial elements for success.

In the final analysis, addressing the issues of product similarity and homogeneity, integrating local culture into product narratives, and adopting effective marketing strategies are essential to the establishment and sustainability of community product standards and cultural tourism. Sustainable development and continuous enhancement of local wisdom can be achieved through community-driven innovation, which serves as a channel for harnessing the collaborative power of community members in creating innovative solutions to address their own challenges, aligning with the study by Wongthianlai and Chaemchoy [4], innovators are those willing to risk and introduce novelty breaking away from tradition to promote innovation for the benefit of improving thinking and creativity, which potentially leads to the elevation of community product standards and travel programme creation in cultural tourism.

On a familiar note, Sriyuthai and Bunjoon's [5] initiative exemplifies the need of communicating social knowledge about tourism to the larger public and preparing community citizens to engage in such endeavours. Community leaders discover that their roles and responsibilities extends towards the target audience and connects them with a larger range of stakeholders, increasing the likelihood to participate in numerous community engagement activities. To be effective for all sorts of travel, communities must provide additional activities that fulfil the demands of holiday-makers, stress the diversity of tourism formats and experiences, and build tourism based on community resources.

Future research is to aim at the enhancement of the competitiveness of community products and provide knowledge on communication technology. To encourage research and development of community-based and/or localised products or services of novelty in current lines, this study directs future research towards the changes in the style of souvenirs and decorative items to widen the interests of larger group while reducing the competition in such a crowded marketplace, considering appropriate positioning, variety, and affordability in order to resonate with stronger relevance and appeals to the intended audience.

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