

Interpreting Cultural Heritage towards Sustainable Tourism in Si Phanom Mat, Laplae, Uttaradit, Thailand

การตีความหมายมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมต่อการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน
ตำบลศรีพนมมาศ อำเภอลับแล จังหวัดอุตรดิตถ์ ประเทศไทย

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Abstract

This article reports highlights of dissertation work for the Doctor of Philosophy Program of Architectural Heritage Management and Tourism at Silpakorn University titled “Interpreting Cultural Heritage towards Sustainable Tourism in Si Phanom Mat, Laplae, Uttaradit, Thailand”. The research objectives for the dissertation are 1) to interpret values of cultural heritage for specific groups of stakeholders and 2) to create plans for sustainable tourism that can benefit tourists, local communities and the government, as well as provide a framework for researchers who want to study community participation in similar contexts. The research site, Si Phanom Mat, is rich in cultural heritage resources, yet the local tourism industry largely does not exploit these assets, nor does it prioritize the most valuable heritage resources in terms of developing sustainable tourism and the tourism industry in general. Consequently, this research seeks to interpret the values of heritage and create a plan for sustainable tourism.

Key words: 1) sustainable tourism development 2) participation
3) community based tourism 4) heritage 5) interpretation
6) Si Phanom Mat, Laplae

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บทคัดย่อ

เนื้อหาสาระสำคัญของบทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของดุษฎีนิพนธ์สาขาการจัดการมรดกทางสถาปัตยกรรมกับการท่องเที่ยว มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร ในหัวข้อ "การตีความหมายมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมต่อการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน ตำบลศรีพนมมาศ อำเภอลับแล จังหวัดอุตรดิตถ์ ประเทศไทย" ซึ่งวัตถุประสงค์ของดุษฎีนิพนธ์นี้ ประกอบด้วย 1) ตีความหมายของมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมสำหรับกลุ่มผู้มีส่วนได้เสียเฉพาะกลุ่มและ 2) สร้างแผนการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืนซึ่งจะเป็นประโยชน์ต่อนักท่องเที่ยว ชุมชนและรัฐบาลท้องถิ่น รวมถึงการจัดเตรียมกรอบความคิดสำหรับนักวิจัยที่ต้องการศึกษาการมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนในบริบทที่คล้ายคลึงกัน ที่นี่ทิวจัยในตำบลศรีพนมมาศนี้ ทรัพยากรมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมมากมาย อุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวในท้องถิ่นส่วนใหญ่ของตำบลนี้ไม่ได้ใช้ประโยชน์จากสินทรัพย์เหล่านี้และไม่ให้ความสำคัญกับการจัดลำดับทรัพยากรมรดกที่มีค่าที่สุดในด้านการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืนและการท่องเที่ยวโดยทั่วไป ดังนั้นการวิจัยครั้งนี้จึงค้นหาการตีความหมายคุณค่าของมรดกและสร้างแผนเพื่อพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน

คำสำคัญ:

- 1) การพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน
- 2) การมีส่วนร่วม
- 3) การท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชน
- 4) มรดก
- 5) การตีความหมาย
- 6) ตำบลศรีพนมมาศ อำเภอลับแล

1. Introduction

Tourism can be a major source of revenue for countries and communities. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2017), 32,588,303 foreigners visited Thailand in 2016. Of these, 21,664,430 came from East and Southeast Asia, 6,170,481 from Europe, 1,405,611, from the Americas, 1,522,873, from South Asia and 747,135 from the Middle East. Thailand is especially famous for its cuisine, beaches, and reputation for friendly people and a laid-back environment. Tourists come to Bangkok for shopping and nightlife, and go upcountry for beaches and outdoor activities such as diving, rock-climbing, hiking and rafting. Laplae is a small district in Uttaradit province, located roughly 500km from Bangkok. It has

eight sub-districts: Si Phanom Mat, Fai Luang, Mae Phun, Na Nok Kok, Chai Chumphon, Phai Lom, Thung Yan, and Dan Mae Kham Man. Laplae offers numerous cultural and natural resources, such as the story about the Widow of Laplae, Teen Jook dress and Mae Poon Waterfall.

Si Phanom Mat is a sub-district in Laplae. Although considered a secondary destination, it features sites such as temples, statues, old shophouses, city gates, a market and a museum. The famous tale of the Widow of Laplae, which teaches never to lie, is an important symbol of local culture, and traditional fabric weaving and apparel continue to be passed down from one generation to the next.

With these cultural assets in mind, Si Phanom Mat would greatly benefit from the development of sustainable tourism, which would boost the economy as well as preserve local heritage. For this to happen, the right methodology needs to be implemented. This paper provides research methodology which can be used to support the plan for Si Phanom Mat to meet sustainable tourism. The map below shows the location of Si Phanom Mat.

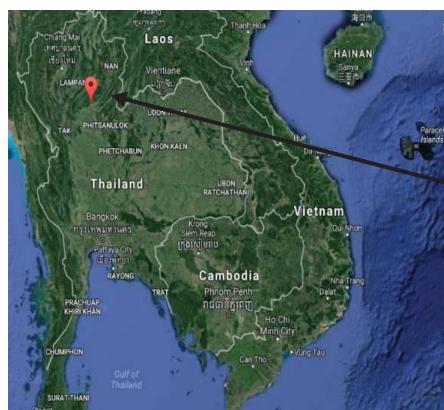


Figure 1: Map of Thailand
Source: Google Maps, October, 20,

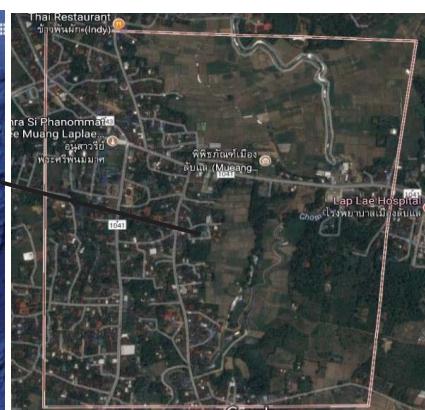


Figure 2: Map of Si Phanom Mat
Source: Google Maps, October, 20, 2017

2. Objectives

- 1) To interpret values of cultural heritages to specific groups of stakeholders.
- 2) To form the plans for sustainable tourism that can benefit tourists, the local community and local government, as well as create a framework for future research on community participation in sustainable tourism development.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology focuses on qualitative methods. The research methods employed include primary and secondary data collection aimed at identifying the sites and their overall problems, issues and challenges. Primary data collection methods are in-depth interviews, focus groups and participation observations, while the secondary method is review of documents. Based on these research methods, problems are divided and then analyzed in terms of three dimensions: sociocultural, economic, and environmental.

4. Literature Reviews

The literature review for this part of dissertation includes a literature review that focuses on concepts related to sustainable tourism, participation, interpretation, empowerment, informing and involving participants, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Good Governance. The literature review is used as a foundation for the recommendation.

4.1 Definitions of “Sustainable”

To define and evaluate concepts of sustainable tourism, it is necessary to first consider the meaning of “sustainable” in this context. Academics and industry practitioners have used this term differently, emphasizing various aspects that fall under the broad concept of sustainability.

According to Swarbrooke (2005), “sustainable” generally refers to development that meets current needs or goals without compromising the ability of people in the future to meet their own needs. Therefore, sustainability requires a longer-term perspective than usual economic and other decision-making. Accordingly, plans for sustainable development require a special awareness of the future. Hägerhäll, as cited in Aronsson (2000), in the Brundtland Commission’s report *Our Common Future*, provides a similar definition. He writes that sustainability “is to ensure that development provides for today’s needs without jeopardizing the chances for coming generations to satisfy their needs” (Aronsson, 2000: 16)

Nevertheless, it is vital to look beyond the surface meaning of “sustainable” and into the elements that are being used to create sustainability. In other words, what makes “sustainable” meaningful? Aronsson (2000), provides an interesting explanation of the term that lends deeper insight into sustainability. He states:

The concept is multiple dimensional, which makes it difficult to define. If it is interpreted in its broadest sense, it has economic, social and cultural, political, geographical and ecological aspects, which means that we must adopt an interdisciplinary approach. The economic aspect is primarily a matter of satisfying human material needs and goals. The social and political aspects relate in general to questions of equity, justice and influence, whereas the geographical ones concern, for instance, the consequences of man’s spatial behavior, and the ecological ones the problem of protecting the natural variety and preserving the natural cycle intact (Aronsson, 2000: 15)

Therefore, sustainability involves three dimensions which span economic, social and environmental concerns; furthermore, these three dimensions are independent and must be addressed separately as well as collectively. Accordingly, United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization (2005) argues that the meaning of the three dimensions can be seen as three pillars, which are as follow:

Economic sustainability, which means generating prosperity at different levels of society and addressing the cost effectiveness of all economic activity. Crucially, it is about the viability of enterprises and activities and their ability to be maintained in the long term.

Social sustainability, which means respecting human rights and equal opportunities for all in society. It requires an equitable distribution of benefits, with a focus on alleviating poverty. There is an emphasis on local communities, maintaining and strengthening their life support systems, recognizing and respecting different cultures, and avoiding any form of exploitation.

Environmental sustainability, which means conserving and managing resources, especially those that are not renewable or are precious in terms of life support. It requires action to minimize pollution of air, land and water, and to conserve biological diversity and natural heritage (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2005)

With careful balance of the three dimensions above, sustainability can be advanced to benefit people, society and the environment (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2005: 9).

4.2 Towards Sustainable Tourism Development (STD)

To apply the concept of “sustainable” to tourism, it is also necessary to precisely define “tourism” itself. This will allow the term “sustainable tourism” to be better understood and further developed.

According to the World Tourism Organization (2011), “Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.” United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization (2005) further

defines tourism as involving the relationship among three elements: consumers (visitors), the industry, and the local environment (including local communities).

Due to the relationship among these three elements and because of the dynamism and growth of the tourism sector and its contribution to the economies of many localities, tourism can greatly contribute to sustainable development. The relationship between tourism and sustainable development thus involves three important dimensions:

Interaction: The nature of tourism as a service industry based on delivering new experiences in new places means that it involves a considerable amount of interaction, both direct and indirect, between visitors, host communities and their local environments.

Awareness: Tourism makes people (visitors and hosts) become far more conscious of environmental issues and differences between nations and cultures. This can affect social attitudes and concerns for sustainability issues—not only while people travel but throughout their lives.

Dependency: Much of tourism is based on visitors seeking to experience intact and clean environments, attractive natural areas, authentic historic and cultural traditions, and welcoming hosts with whom they have a good relationship. The industry depends on these attributes being in place (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2005: 9-10).

Regardless of the type and scale of a tourism sector in a particular location, the three dimensions above are central to sustainability.

So, “sustainable tourism” can be defined as tourism—interactions of people, places and experiences—according to the principles of sustainable development. Successful sustainable tourism would require

these dimensions to be carefully managed (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2005):

- 1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural resources and biodiversity.
- 2) Respect the social and cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.
- 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing social and economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2005: 11).

Therefore, we can say that sustainable tourism development requires the cooperation of all stakeholders and strong political leadership to ensure this involvement—from stakeholders of all levels—and that this is carefully monitored and evaluated managed (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2005). It is also possible to say that sustainable tourism development requires careful analysis of important factors including environment, sociocultural and economy. With careful analysis of these three dimensions along with the cooperation above, a location can move towards sustainable tourism.

4.3 Participation

Participation in the local tourism industry is important for the community because communities with high levels of participation can

generate greater trust with tourists, lower crime levels (by tourists and by locals), and in general better community health (Porritt, 2007).

However, it is noted that Brehony (1989) refers to the agreement among scholars such as Oakley (1987) and Cohan and Uphoff (1980) that it is not possible to define the term “participation” with universal meaning. Nevertheless, the literature provides many definitions of participation ranging from involvement of people to autonomous decision making (Brehony, 1989: 26).

Brodie et al. (2009) believe the term “participation” can be used interchangeably with other words such as “involvement” and “engagement”, and that it can be categorized at different levels including individual, community, society and public. Brehony (1989) refers to agreement among commentators, such as Oakley (1987) and Cohan and Uphoff (1980), that it is impossible to establish a universal definition of participation. However, government policy has tended to focus on public participation, ignoring the other areas (Green & Brock 2005).

4.4 Interpretation

According to Tilden (1997), interpretation is an educational activity that discloses meaning and relationships through the use of objects, by direct experience, and by instructive media, rather than the simple communication of facts and figures. In the other words, it is not transmitting information but educating people. Tilden explains that personal interpretation is the most effective form of interaction, but he cautioned that poor quality live interpretation is worse than no interpretation at all (Risk, 1994: 329). Nearly always, interpretation is seen in a positive light as it not only educates and entertains visitors but also causes them to reflect on environmental and cultural values.

Most interpretative media fall into one of two categories, or into both: personal and non-personal (Ham, 1992; Regnier et al., 1994; Sharper, 1982). According to Timothy and Boyd (2003: 218), “Personal media are

those that utilize a living person as the actual medium for disseminating information. Non-personal media are mechanisms and set-ups that require no intervention on the part of staff for visitors to obtain the information they need.” So, for example, tour guides would fall into the personal category and signs and digital presentations would fall into the non-personal category.

4.5 Empowerment

The term “empowerment” is applied widely across different fields, creating variations in definitions and interpretations. The concept is frequently used in terms of individual-, family-, and community-level development (Rappaport, 1984).

Furthermore, it is vital to be aware that the empowerment for tourism-oriented communities will usually concern both social and institutional change. The result should allow a reallocation of power that ensures appropriate development (Petrić, 2007).

4.6 Informing and Involving Participants

Informing and involving participants is critical to the success of tourism development. This can take two broad forms: a top-down approach and a bottom-up approach. A purely top-down model utilizes external (i.e. from outside the community) leadership and resources to plan, implement, and evaluate development programs (Macdonald, 1995). Carey et al. (2015: 167) state “top-down refers to initiatives that are directed from an ‘authoritative core’ at strategic levels of government.” “In a tourism context, the ‘bottom-up’ policy approach indicates challenges and opportunities for destination communities to work with the public and private sectors”. According to Theerapappisit (2012), “in a tourism context, the ‘bottom-up’ policy approach indicates challenges and opportunities for destination communities to work with the public and private sectors”.

4.7 Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

The Tourism Authority of Thailand produced The Second Thailand National Tourism Development Plan (2017-2021) (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017), building on Thailand's 20-Year National Strategy (2017-2036) (Royal Thai Government, 2017) and The Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017). These rely on Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, developed by the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, as their foundation. This is illustrated in the figure below.



Figure 3: Plan of Thailand

Source: The Author

SEP was proposed by the King Bhumibol in December 1997 and has influenced both government policy and the economic decision making of individuals in Thailand. At its core, the philosophy guides people to live according to what is called a 'middle path'. This means that people should live their lives without not extremes or excess (Mongsawad, 2010). Specifically, Theerapapposit (2003) states that this concept "applies to conduct at the level of the individuals, families and communities, as well as to the choice of a balanced development strategy for the nation. This

provides modernization in line with the forces of globalization, while providing a shield against the inevitable shocks and excesses that arise”.

SEP consists of four statements. The first statement states that the philosophy can be applied to all levels of society. The second talks about the concept of the ‘middle path’, avoiding extreme thoughts, behaviors and actions. The third asserts the three core elements of the philosophy: moderation, reasonableness and resilience. The final statement explains that the philosophy will work best under two conditions. The first is moral behaviors, which include valuing knowledge, integrity, and honesty, while the second encourages people to live their lives with perseverance, tolerance, and wisdom (Wibulswasdi et al., 2012). The figure below shows the four statements.

“Sufficiency Economy is an approach to life and conduct which is applicable at every level from the individual through the family and community to the management and development of the nation.”

“It stresses a middle path, especially in developing the economy to keep up with the world in the era of globalization.”

“Sufficiency has three components: moderation; reasonableness; and the need for built-in resilience against the risks which arise from internal or external change. In addition, the application of theories in planning and implementation requires great care and good judgment at every step.”

“At the same time, all members of the nation – especially public officials, academics, and business people – need to develop their commitment to the importance of knowledge, integrity, and honesty, and to conduct their lives with perseverance, tolerance, wisdom, and insight, so that the country has the strength and balance to respond to the rapid and widespread changes in economy, society, environment, and culture in the world.”

Figure 4: the four statements of SEP

Source: Adapted from Wibulswasdi et al. (2012)

Therefore, SEP addresses economic, social and cultural issues, and the environment—much like the concept of sustainability developed above. Mongsawad (2010) agrees that the concept of SEP can be applied to the individual, community and the national levels. He stresses by practicing these principles with the two conditions, people can live in harmony in a sustainable society and environment.

4.8 Good Governance

To create successful sustainable tourism, good governance is also important and must be prioritized in STD planning. According to the United Nations Development Programme (1997), governance can be defined as “the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligation and mediate their differences”.

5. Research Results

Apart from reviewing important resources, participation observation, and crucial in-depth interviews, the researcher conducted two focus groups of key local stakeholders. The research results shows values of cultural heritages. The research results also lead to the key recommendation, which can benefit tourists, the local community and local government, and create a framework for future research on community participation in sustainable tourism development. Specifically, titles 5.1 – 5.4 answer the first objective and provide a foundation for the key recommendation, which is used to answer the second objective.

5.1 Issues and Challenges in Tourism Development

Development of sustainable tourism requires that sociocultural, environmental, and economic factors be balanced. This research has discovered some important areas in Si Phanom Mat that are important for

tourism development. Apart from reviewing important resources, participation observation, and crucial in-depth interviews, the researcher conducted two focus groups of key local stakeholders.

The present research indicates that for local people, food is the most important tangible cultural resource, followed by dress and ancient houses. On the other hand, the story of the Widow of Laplae ranks as the most important intangible asset, followed by local beliefs Related to Spirits and Ghosts and the personalities of local people.

Specifically, samples of foods include Khao Khaep, which *used to be a staple* food for Laplae people (Cultural Office of Uttaladit, 2015: 23). It is made of rice flour mixed with water, salt, sesame seeds or other ingredients, and is made into thin sheets and dried. *Khao Khaep* can be used to make a variety of delicious food such as *Mi Phan*, which is cooked rice noodles stuffed in *Khao Khaep*. *Khao Phan Phak*, which is cooked *Khao Khaep* flour stuffed with mixed vegetables (Cultural Office of Uttaladit, 2015: 24). *Lot Chong Kem* is short rice noodles mixed with fishmeal and pounded dried shrimps and preserved sprouts. Fish oil, lemon juice, coriander, and cayenne pepper are added as condiments (Cultural Office of Uttaladit, 2015: 30). Although it is not as famous as the foods above, *Laplae Tom Yam Noodles* is a spicy noodle soup with ground, roasted peanuts. In some places, the chefs also add cilantro.

Research discovered that the local population ranks *Pha Sin Teen Jook* dress as their second most important cultural heritage resource. It is a cultural symbol in Laplae that has been passed on from one generation to the next. For generations, women in Laplae have woven *Teen Jook* styles with many different patterns, which can be worn as clothing in ceremonies and daily *life* (Cultural Office of Uttaladit, 2015). The ancient houses are ranked third, as they reflect the feeling and culture of old *Si Phanom Mat*. In term of intangible cultural heritage, the research has found that the story of the Widow of Laplae is an intangible heritage

resource that is ranked first. The legend of the Widow of Laplae is also represented in tangible heritage with a statue and with text describing the story in brief. According to Jassadra Suthisut, mayor of Si Phanom Mat, the story is about a man who loses his way on a road, and happens to meet a young woman from Laplae. They fall in love and have a baby, and go to live together in Laplae. There, the man is asked to follow one simple rule: never tell a lie. One day, the man accidentally tells a white lie to his child, in order to stop the child from crying. The wife learns of this lie and tells him to leave the house, sending him off with a bag she packs. While the husband is walking with the bag, he feels that the bag is heavy and sees turmeric inside, so he decides to throw most of it away. When the husband gets home he opens the bag and realizes that turmeric has become gold, so he goes back to find what he dropped, but cannot (ASTVManageronline, 2015).

Research found that local beliefs related to ghosts are ranked second in terms of intangible heritage. The Cultural Office of *Uttaladit* (2015: 92-94) gives extensive information on these subjects. According to the Cultural Office, when a family member is sick local people perform a ceremony called *Gaan Song Pee* because they believe that the sickness is caused by ghosts and the ghosts want merit from the sick person, so this ceremony is performed to send the ghosts away. The ingredients are uncooked rice, streamed rice, dried Chile, cane juice, ripe banana, uncooked preserved fish, and betel nut. These items are placed on the spathe of a betel palm (*Cultural Office of Uttaladit*, 2015: 92). Moreover, Lapae people believe that spirits look after the land, the house, and the household area to make sure there is harmony. This is called “*dtoop bpoo jao tee*.”

Laplae people build spirit houses and provide offerings of food such as pig's heads, chicken, eggs, and vegetables (*Cultural Office of Uttaladit*, 2015: 92-93). A person who can talk to the spirit will ask for a

sick person's shirt and tighten it to make a knot and then will ask what the spirit wants in order the leave the person. This ceremony is called "Gaan Huang Paa." After the ghosts leave the person, the sickness disappears (*Cultural Office of Uttaladit, 2015: 93-94*). Similarly, another ritual is called "Gaan Job Pee Maa Nang Kai". If a person gets sick, he can go to see a person who can communicate with ghosts and this spirit medium can cast the ghost into an egg and can negotiate with the ghost, to convince the ghost to stop harming the person (*Cultural Office of Uttaladit, 2015: 94*).

The personalities of people in Laplae ranked third. This is because Laplae people are friendly, and kind, and are willing to share with others and look after their guests well. These aspects also combine with the lifestyle focusing on slow life.

By understanding the findings above, local people should be able to better appreciate their heritage resources, and harness these resources to improve the local tourism industry. However, there are some issues and challenges related to tourism development. These areas of concern include issues related to policy makers and the community.

First, although the mayor has positive attitudes towards STD, the local government tends to employ a top-down approach. This means that they generally do not involve the local community in making policies related to tourism development and activities, so the decisions do not reflect the voice of community. In Si Phanom Mat, this creates problems because the local community feels that the policies do not always benefit the community as a whole or may negatively impact the well-being of the community. However, the authority feels that what they do is best for the community.

Another major point is that the local attitudes mentioned above can be double-edged swords. Since local people tend to focus on slow life, some feel that involvement in tourism development may change their lifestyle, so they don't want to get involved. Also, the level of willingness

to participate in the activities of the community is low. This can be seen by giving 30 Baht coupons to those who ride their bicycles to an event every Saturday in front of the museum. The street at the museum is turned into a walking street every Saturday. In the event, there are food and live music performances, plays, and dances. The coupons worth 30 Baht can then be used as cash at the event. This reflects the low level of local participation and need incentivize community members to help increase the overall level of participation.

It can be seen that the location and the weakness of the community creates problems for tourism development. There is a lack of job availability in Si Phanom Mat, so people have to travel to other areas to work and some settle in the new areas. Some of these people have local wisdom which has been taught from elders and their knowledge can add value to tourism development. However, when they go to get jobs in new places they take this local wisdom with them. Consequently, the cultural heritage of Si Phanom Mat is fading.

Given the poor transportation infrastructure, it is hard to increase the number of tourists. Unless the tourists have their own cars or come with a group in private vans or buses, it is hard to travel around the local area because there is only one kind of public bus. So some tourists have to pay high prices for taxis. Also, the marketing of Si Phanom Mat is not efficient. Although people may know about Laplae, but they may not know what the legends and culture are or how they are connected to the municipality of Si Phanom Mat. Furthermore, the fact that there is only one tour guide creates a lot of problems for tourism development. In many cases the tour guide is assigned to do tasks outside the office. For example, the tour guild may be assigned to be on the tram. As a result, when people visit the tourist information office, they may feel lost and feel that nobody cares about them. As a result, they visit Si Phanom Mat without gaining cultural-heritage knowledge, and they may not return or

recommend this spot to their friends or families. This obviously presents a problem that must be overcome.

All in all, tourism development is important for Si Phanom Mat, and the existing issues and challenges may lead to problems that directly affect the tourism of Si Phanom Mat. Many areas need to be improved, such as the leadership style of the local authority, transportation, and lack of local jobs. Importantly, without local participation to help with policy-making, it would be hard for tourism development to be successful.

5.2 Tourist Attractions

This part of the journal discusses all tourist attraction assets of Si Phanom Mat. The tourist attractions in Si Phanom Mat consist of Laplae Museum, Gate of Laplae, Phar Si Phanom Mat Statue, the Statue of the Widow of Laplae, ancient houses, Teen Jok dress (Pha Sin Teen Jook). Also, in terms of food, tourists can eat Khao Khaep, Khao Mi Phan, Khao Pan Pak, Lot Chong Kem, Tom Yam Noodles Laplae in Si Phanom . There are also a parade during Songkarn, Songkran beauty contest competition and the Widow of Laplae contest.

The Laplae Museum, which cost 10 million Baht to build and which covers an area of five rai, represents the values of Laplae district. It promotes and preserves the valuable lifestyle and identity of the local people. It is a place for visitors to do activities, see performances, and learn about local culture and history. Tourists can also learn about the town (Laplae Museum Brochure). In the museum areas, there are the museum building, the old house in Laplae style, tourist information office, OTOP building with products and souvenir, a herb garden with rare flowers and trees. Inside the museum, tourists will experience the Laplae Museum Alive Learning Center, which has exhibits on local fabric weaving, sculpture, khon mask making and other things related to cultural heritage.

The museum also provides tram tours for visitors to enjoy Laplae scenery and lifestyle.

Apart from the museum, there are other interesting attractions. Gate of Laplae is the symbol of the city of Laplae, and was built in the Sukhothai architectural style. Tourists come to take pictures at the gate. It is near the center of attraction, which is Laplae Museum. There is also Pha Si Phanom Mat Statue. The Statue of Pha Si Phanom Mat is located at Laplae market intersection. Pha Si Phanommat developed Laplae by building roads, the first school in Si Phanommat, and water system. Consequently, the Statue of Pha si Phanommat was built to commemorate his honorable actions. There is also a statue of the Widow of Laplae. The story is about a husband who lies to his wife and is therefore cast out of the village. The story teaches people not to tell lies (see 5.1 for more detail about the story). Moreover, there are ancient houses, which are about 120 years old. They are located near the market and Pha Si Phanom Mat.

Also, there is an important traditional style of dress called Pha Sin Teen Jook. Pha Sin Teen Jook is a symbol of culture in Laplae that has been passed on from one generation to the next. For generations, women in Laplae have woven Teen Jok styles in many different patterns, which can be used as clothing in both ceremonies and daily life (Cultural Office of Uttaladit, 2015). It can be seen at the OTOP shop near the museum. In addition, in terms of food, tourists can visit Pracha U Thad road to eat Khao Khaep, Khao Mi Phan, Khao Pan Pak, Lot Chong Kem, Tom Yam Noodles Laplae. This street is nicknamed Kon Kin Street. Tourists can also visit Khao Nam Tok road or Khao Khaep Street. This street is famous for Khao Khaep (see 5.1 for more detail about food).

In Si Phanom Mat, there is a parade during Songkran. It starts from Laplae Gate to Pha Si Phanom Mat Statue. In the parade, there is music and people dance and splash water. Some women put on Teen Jook dress and dance along the way. Tourists from nearby areas come to see the parade and enjoy the festival. There is also Songkran beauty contest competition for overweight people as well. Recently, this year (2018) the event was held on April 13th. Another important event is the Widow of Laplae contest. Recently, last year (2017) the event was held on December 21st. In the event women wear Teen Jook dress and had their hair rolled up. Tourists can enjoy the activities along with local people, while learning about the heritage of Si Phanom Mat.

All of the tourist attractions in this section are important for Si Phanom Mat and help bring tourism revenue into the municipality. However, without understanding the historical and social context of the assets, tourists will find Si Phanom Mat less interesting.

5.3 Issues and Challenges in Heritage Conservation and Interpretation

This part of the journal deals with existing issues and future challenges in heritage conservation and interpretation in Si Phanom Mat, which seem to be major problems in Si Phanom Mat and can impact the perception of tourism in the area. The focus of this part is on the interpretation of overall issues related to Si Phanom Mat and the interpretation issues related to the priority tangible and intangible heritage assets in Si Phanom Mat.

In general, there are many issues related to heritage interpretation which are important for their conservation. Without recognizing the importance of local heritage, people would not understand their value and may think there is no point to conservation of heritage assets; however, if people truly understand the importance of heritage assets in terms of their value both to local life and to sustainable tourism, it becomes clear that there is great need to conserve these heritage assets for the next generations. The problems related to heritage interpretation are discussed below.

Firstly, as mentioned above, the single tour guide cannot effectively support growing tourist numbers. Tourists need a tour guide to offer interpretation, suggest options, and answer questions related to tourism in Si Phanom Mat. Especially on special days such as national holidays and local festivals, there are many tourists. The tour guide cannot support all tourists. Consequently, some tourists don't receive sufficient information about tourism and heritage in Si Phanom Mat. Also, there are many nationalities of people visiting Si Phanom Mat as tourists. Some of the countries include Italy, France, Sweden, and Australia. However, the tour guide cannot speak languages other than Thai and some broken English. Consequently, many foreigners cannot ask questions or receive adequate support. Even worse, there is no proper English-language training for the tour guide so the guide needs to rely heavily on self-study.

Moreover, in the museum tourists can watch videos about the Widow of Laplae. However, the language is only Thai with English subtitles. This cannot benefit tourists who cannot understand Thai and cannot read English subtitles, such as some Chinese tourists. Also, around tourist locations of Si Phanom Mat, there are QR codes attached to objects for tourists to scan. When the QR code is scanned, it links to the Facebook profile of tourism in Si Phanom Mat. However, this profile is not updated

frequently, and the language used is only Thai, so foreigners cannot understand what is going on.

Inside the museum, there are many items and pictures related to local cultural heritage and assets. Nevertheless, the same problem also occurs: the language is only Thai. Again, it is hard for foreigners to understand the meaning of the assets. Although there are some signs at the tourist office, the museum, and nearby areas, these signs only appear in Thai, English, and Chinese. The use of language on signs in certain places is also ineffective. As can be seen in both male and female toilets, there is already a picture logo indicating a male or female toilet, which is universally understandable, but they appear in Thai, English and Chinese, which is unnecessary. Moreover, for tourist attractions that have leaflets. There are 7 leaflets related to tourism in Si Phanom Mat. Only one leaflet is in Thai, English, and Chinese. There is also one leaflet that uses English for its headings but the description under each heading is still in Thai.

In addition, there are two famous food streets which are rich in cultural heritage related to food. Si Phanom Mat does promote these streets in Si Phanom Mat. However, the interpretation along these two streets related to food is poor. Only shop and restaurant names appear, but there is no description or details regarding the food that they specialize in. For this reason, only local people know which restaurant is famous for what type of food but visitors would not know. Some shops use real food such as Kaew Kaep as display items, and if the dishes are interesting the salesperson can sell the food being shown. However, again, there is no language other than Thai. There are also problems with other important elements of tangible heritage. Teen Jook dress is shown in the museum and a shophouse nearby. However, in the museum, there is description only in Thai, and at the shophouse nearby the dress is displayed without any descriptions about heritage. For the old houses in

Si Phanom Mat, it is hard for people to know about associated heritage values since only one leaflet mentions them.

Similarly, the legendary story of the Widow of Laplae, with its moral concerning truthfulness is written on the Statue of the Widow of Laplae near the museum; however, again it is only in Thai, so foreigners would not understand the legend or profit from its wisdom. This is a crucial omission as this element is ranked first as the most important local intangible heritage asset. Another major point is that local beliefs related to ghosts and spirits, ranked second in importance by local residents, are only mentioned in a book (*Knowledge of Local Wisdom in Mueang Laplae*) provided at the office of tourism and in a sign board at the museum but have not been interpreted, detailed, or explained anywhere else. Even worse, the personalities of people in Laplae, ranked third, have not been interpreted at any of the tourist attractions in Si Phanom Mat.

All in all, the analysis above demonstrates that there are many problems in terms of the interpretation of both tangible and intangible assets of Si Phanom Mat. It is impossible to support tourists with only one tour guide, and without proper translation of all leaflets, documents, and signs—into English and Chinese, at a minimum, it will be hard for foreigners to appreciate the unique cultural value of this heritage. There are only a few heritage interpretation techniques being used here.

6. Concluding Remarks

This section makes the key recommendation for STD in Si Phanom Mat: the creation of a local tourism council. It critically examines the current approach of the local government of Si Phanom Mat in the area of tourism development and its limitations, plus relevant ethical issues and concerns. Finally, it suggests a suitable model for the council based on the principles of good governance, a bottom-up approach,

empowerment, and the sufficiency economy philosophy, and stresses how a tourism council can help achieve these aims.

Good governance can be defined as “the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligation and mediate their differences” (United Nations Development Programme, 1997). Furthermore, good governance involves openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). The concept of good governance will provide a foundation for the planning process to create a local tourism council at Si Phanom Mat.

Field and secondary research shows that a big challenge for STD in Si Phanom Mat is the lack of stakeholder participation in the process for creating tourism policy. In short, the office of the Municipality of Si Phanom Mat employs a top-down management style to determine all local policies related to tourism, meaning that local participation is completely overlooked. Reviews of top-down versus bottom-up management styles indicate that the former is not be suitable for Si Phanom Mat. A purely top-down model does not emphasize on the idea of local participation as “top-down refers to initiatives that are directed from an “authoritative core” at strategic levels of government”, (Carey et al., 2015: 167).

Consequently, top-down management makes local people feel disconnected from tourism planning and fails to take their opinions, insights and needs into account. This leads to unsustainable tourism development because the voice of the local community is not heard. In the case of Si Phanom Mat, this suggests that top-down decisions made by the mayor’s office may not reflect what the community wants. Also, because their input is not valued, some locals feel that they are not

accountable for tourism in Si Phanom Mat. To ensure Si Phanom Mat is moving towards sustainable tourism development, the local authorities should implement good governance practices that take a bottom-up approach. In the context of tourism, this is effective for building cooperation between the destination community and the public and private sectors (Theerapapposit, 2012).

So, the office of Municipality of Si Phanom Mat should inform and involve participants (stakeholders) at all levels including the public sector, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and the local community. Thus, the bottom-up approach is more suitable for Si Phanom Mat because it fosters local involvement, which can lead to sustainable development in tourism in Si Phanom Mat.

However, Si Phanom Mat needs to be aware that bottom-up approach can also be problematic, particularly if there is a lack of ultimate oversight. This can permit misconduct, such as misappropriation of public funds, or for a flawed “bottom-up” process that in fact involves just a few elites or investors rather than representatives of all stakeholder groups in designing, planning, implementing and evaluating STD. In addition, to achieve the goals above using the bottom-up approach will require community stakeholders in Si Phanom Mat to work together, share their thoughts and cooperate. In the context of STD, empowerment should focus on five areas including self-help, equity, cooperation, participation and networking.

The participants should include all stakeholders who are significantly affected by tourism at the destination. If some of those participants cannot attend they can send a representative to the meeting instead. The meeting can be in a form of town-hall in which the stakeholders meet at the office of Municipality or another accessible public venue. There should be a mediator at the meeting whom local residents and the local authorities respect. During the meeting, the

moderator needs to ensure that all attendants can share their ideas and have equal opportunities to express their thoughts.

However, without good moral and ethics, the sustainable tourism planning council cannot be developed successfully. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), developed by the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej provides an appropriate ethical foundation for this. The office of Municipality should educate the stakeholders (participants) about SEP. SEP is particularly important because it is the foundation of The Second Thailand National Tourism Development Plan (2017-2021) (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017), and it is connected to sustainable development in Thailand's 20-Year National Strategy (2017-2036) (Royal Thai Government, 2017) and in The Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017). Therefore, by training local participants to understand the concepts of SEP, stakeholder participation can be improved in the STD planning process for Si Phanom Mat.

In addition, it is crucial for local participants to be aware that SEP will work best under two conditions. The first condition is moral behaviors. To meet this condition, participants should focus on valuing knowledge, integrity, and honesty. For the second condition, participants at Si Phanom Mat should live their lives with perseverance, tolerance, and wisdom (Wibulswasdi et al., 2012). Successful SEP implementation will promote sustainable tourism in Si Phanom Mat (see below for the Sustainable Tourism Council Model).

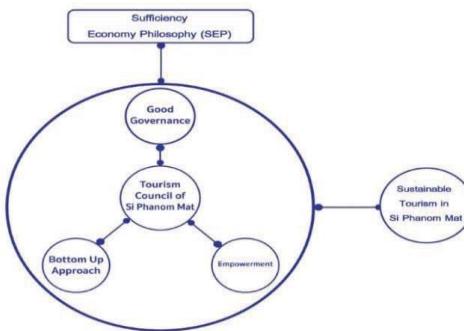


Figure 5: Sustainable Tourism Council Model

Source: The Author

The tourism council can reduce potential problems that could lead to sustainability issues with regard to tourism development. For example, the council can study about the future impacts of the three dimensions of the environmental, the economic and the socio-cultural and set up policy to reduce the future negative impact. It helps creating the plan for sustainable tourism that can benefit tourists, the local community and local government. This Sustainable Tourism Council Model can be used as a framework for future research on community participation in sustainable tourism development.

At the end, whether Si Phanom Mat will achieve its STD objectives depends largely on local community involvement and how seriously the government of Si Phanom Mat will follow the research recommendation. Based on the research of the cultural heritage resources of Si Phanom Mat and the evaluation of their relative values according to local people, all stakeholders can understand the importance of the area's tangible and intangible assets and be motivated to preserve this legacy, as well as develop a sustainable local tourism industry.

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