

Social Capital of Local Community Businesses in Border Towns and Their Contribution to Supporting Tourism in Betong District, Yala, Thailand

Manus Suttikan¹  

¹ Faculty of Management Science, Yala Rajabhat University, Yala, Thailand, © Author

Article history:

Received: December 1, 2024

Revised: January 16, 2025

Accepted: January 17, 2025

Keywords:

Social Capital,
Community Tourism,
Local Community Businesses,
Border Area/Border Town

Abstract

The development of local community businesses in border areas, particularly in Betong District, Yala Province, Thailand, is crucial for supporting tourism, a key source of income for the community. Social capital, consisting of human capital, cultural capital, and network capital, is a critical factor in enhancing the potential of local businesses. Human capital in Betong enables entrepreneurs to develop products and services that meet the needs of tourists. The area's rich cultural diversity, a blend of Thai, Chinese, and Malay influences, serves as a unique attraction for visitors. Network capital, which includes relationships between entrepreneurs, the community, and government agencies, fosters collaboration in sustainably developing local businesses. The research methodology involves studying relevant documents and research, as well as conducting field surveys in Betong District, Yala Province, to gather information about local community businesses with the potential to support tourism. The focus is on businesses related to local products. Data is collected from local business operators through in-depth interviews to obtain relevant information. The analysis, using SWOT and TOWS Matrix tools, revealed that local community businesses in Betong District have strengths in natural resources, local culture, and robust social capital. However, they face challenges, such as a shortage of trainers for developing local products and incomplete infrastructure in certain areas. The findings are used to develop strategic plans for adapting and improving community businesses to fully meet the demands of the tourism market. While Betong District faces challenges in business development and infrastructure, the effective utilization of social capital can enhance competitiveness and promote sustainable tourism development in the area.

Introduction:

Betong District, located at the southern of Thailand, is surrounded by high mountains that give the area a cool climate year-round. Its unique geographical characteristics have made Betong an enchanting and attractive tourist destination. The district is home to numerous

distinctive and beautiful attractions, such as the world's largest post box, Thailand's first mountain-surrounding car tunnel, the highest-altitude sports stadium in the country, the first and largest Chinese language school in Betong, the largest bronze Buddha statue in Thailand, and the only winter flower garden in southern Thailand.

Beyond these natural and man-made attractions, Betong also stands out for its unique way of life, culture, traditions, and cuisine. These are shaped by the harmonious coexistence of diverse ethnicities and religions, each contributing its unique cultural identity. This blend has created a rich multicultural environment, making Betong one of the most culturally diverse areas in the country. Moreover, it is one of the most economically significant tourist destinations in southern Thailand, generating considerable revenue for the nation (Kaewngam and Wongwilaikasem, 2019). In 2020 the Aiyerweng Skywalk offering breathtaking views of the sea of mist, opened for the first time to both Thai and international tourists. It quickly gained popularity, particularly during festivals such as Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, and public holidays in Thailand and Malaysia, attracting a large number of visitors. However, there were periods during the COVID-19 pandemic when tourist numbers dropped significantly due to restrictions, although these periods were brief. Feedback from tourists visiting the area revealed a common sentiment: the lack of signature souvenirs representing Betong. This feedback prompted researchers to investigate the reasons behind this shortfall and work collaboratively with local authorities to address the issue. Strategies were developed to improve local community businesses through strategic planning and targeted projects, aiming to create a comprehensive tourism ecosystem in Betong. Efforts focused on identifying standout local businesses, especially those related to souvenir production, to fill the gaps in the tourism cycle. Strengthening these businesses has helped unify the community, increase income, and provide sustainable livelihoods. This initiative also capitalizes on Betong's diverse tourist attractions, such as the Aiyerweng Skywalk, hot springs, flower gardens, and tunnels, enhancing the area's overall tourism appeal. By fostering community-based businesses and integrating them into the

broader tourism framework, Betong is better positioned to accommodate growing tourist demand while preserving its unique identity and contributing to the local economy.

Tourism in border areas serves as a crucial mechanism for driving economic growth, particularly in Betong District, Yala Province. This unique destination stands out for its distinctive geography, culture, and local way of life. With a cool climate year-round and stunning natural attractions, Betong captivates both Thai and international tourists alike. However, to accommodate the growth of tourism, local community businesses in the area must develop and adapt to meet market demands effectively.

Social capital is a critical factor that contributes to the resilience of local community businesses. It not only enhances their competitive potential but also serves as a tool for preserving cultural identity and ensuring sustainable tourism in the region. By utilizing social capital effectively and appropriately, community businesses can adapt and grow steadily in the highly competitive tourism market. This article examines ten local community businesses in depth: 1. Betong Shogun Orange Business, known for their exceptional taste, Betong Shogun oranges are a highlight for tourists. Visitors are often eager to experience the famed flavor of these oranges, making them a signature product of the area. 2. Watercress Farming, Watercress is a unique agricultural product of Betong, thriving in the region's specific conditions where it is challenging to grow elsewhere. It is versatile in cooking, with the most popular dish being stir-fried watercress, which has gained wide acclaim. 3. Handicrafts Business, Handicrafts products are an essential cultural heritage worth supporting. Items include elegant bags, thermos holders, durian baskets, tissue boxes, and more. However, the industry faces challenges due to a lack of skilled trainers in advanced techniques, such as pattern design, dyeing, fabric lining, and

zipper installation, which could significantly enhance product quality and value. 4. Grass Jelly Business, Betong's grass jelly is a popular local delicacy sought by tourists. By improving packaging, it could become a valuable souvenir representing the region's culinary heritage. 5. Betong Chicken Business, Betong chicken is highly regarded for its quality, as seen from the high demand by restaurant owners in Hat Yai and Bangkok. This product's unique taste makes it a prized ingredient in upscale restaurants. 6. Krua Tuan Restaurant, This Muslim-owned restaurant offers a wide array of Betong-style dishes, standing out with its unique signature flavors that cannot be found elsewhere, adding to the culinary appeal of the region. 7. Kopi Business, Betong's traditional coffee or kopi, is a favorite among coffee lovers. By enhancing packaging and adding multilingual labeling, this product could cater to international tourists and become a premium souvenir. 8. Rim Than Resort Business, this resort-style homestay showcases Betong's pristine natural beauty. However, some areas require government support in improving basic infrastructure to fully capitalize on its potential. 9. Garcinia Business, Garcinia a fruit abundant in Betong year-round, offers significant potential. With proper processing, it could be transformed into diverse products, making it an excellent souvenir option. 10. Nile Tilapia Business, Betong's unique tilapia farming technique involves raising fish in large ponds with continuously flowing mountain water. This method ensures the fish are free from muddy odors, making them ideal for various dishes. A standout menu item is "khlooi pla nin" (crispy tilapia rolls), a signature dish that tourists frequently buy as a gift to take home. This study delves deeply into various dimensions of these

businesses, examining their challenges and opportunities. By integrating social capital effectively, these enterprises can strengthen their economic standing, foster sustainable livelihoods, and enhance the overall tourism ecosystem of Betong.

Therefore, the study of the social capital of local community businesses in border towns and their contribution to supporting tourism in Betong District, Yala, Thailand, serves as an alternative avenue for devising strategies to create opportunities for local border communities to accommodate future tourism. This approach aims to provide deeper insights into the practical adaptation of local community businesses while preserving and leveraging the unique features of the area. It aligns with the development plan of the Model City for Stability, Prosperity, and Sustainability and fills gaps in the tourism ecosystem of Betong District, making it more comprehensive. This is achieved through the contributions of local border community entrepreneurs in Betong District. This research article focuses on analyzing the role of social capital in local community businesses in Betong District. It seeks to understand how these resources can be utilized to develop sustainable tourism in the area and effectively accommodate tourists.

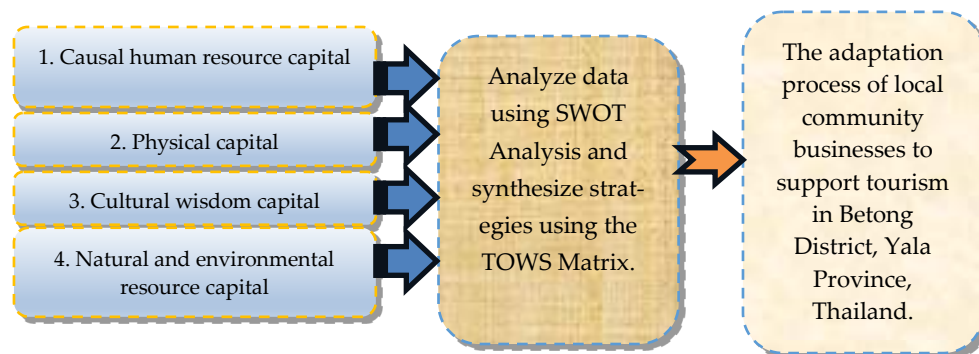
Research Objective

To study the social capital of border community businesses in Betong that influences the adaptation process of local community businesses to support tourism in Betong District, Yala Province, Thailand.

Research Framework

Figure1

Research Framework



Literature Review

The Concept of Social Capital

Social capital has been highly emphasized since Thailand faced the economic crisis in 1997. It has been continuously applied in the dimension of development, both in academic circles and among practitioners. Empirical evidence demonstrates its transformation into strategies and policies for sustainable development, using social capital as a key tool. This involves encouraging communities to identify their social capital and utilize it in community management. The types of social capital within each community depending on the contextual conditions of the area.

From a review of the literature, it was found that studies on social capital in Thailand generally share a common framework for analysis and classification of social capital, albeit with considerable variation in details. This means that the frameworks are often defined based on definitions that emphasize the distinctiveness or identity of the area under study. However, social capital is integrated into various research themes. Totum and Dokduang (2022) proposed a framework of five types of social capital in studying the development of social capital as learning centers and promoting secondary city tourism. These include human capital, institutional capital, intellectual capital, cultural capital, and natural and environmental resources capital. Meanwhile, Phetsatit

(2019) offered an interesting classification of social capital related to driving community businesses into four types: human capital, physical capital, indigenous knowledge capital, and kinship network capital. These were based on the target area of the study. In addition, the study by Phiwphun and Kobamrung (2023) summarized four main social capital frameworks for analyzing causal relationships influencing the development of local economic capital to enhance the competitiveness of community enterprise entrepreneurs in the Northern Region of Thailand. These frameworks include physical capital, financial asset capital, cultural wisdom capital, and human resource capital, with direct influences on competitiveness in terms of low-cost structures, differentiation, innovation, market potential, and quality.

This study will examine social capital by integrating it with community businesses and tourism. The researcher will adopt the frameworks from the aforementioned studies to define the social capital framework for this research into four key dimensions: 1. Causal human resource capital directly influencing competitiveness in areas such as low-cost structures, differentiation, innovation, market potential, and quality. 2. Physical capital. 3. Cultural wisdom capital. 4. Natural and environmental resource capital.

The Concept of Adaptation in Local Community Businesses

Adaptation for survival involves adjusting to ensure that businesses can continue to operate or enhance the capacity of local businesses to become resilient and capable of competing with large-scale corporations. This is achieved through various methods and strategies to foster consumer satisfaction and trust, enabling businesses to maintain control and determine their operational direction. It also allows businesses to understand the true needs of consumers, keeping them aware of rapid changes in the modern era. Entrepreneurs must consistently stay updated with technology, news, and current events (Thavonsiri et al., 2015). Laihang (2013) stated that creating differentiation to impress consumers is a key factor for marketing success. This approach can convey a sense of uniqueness in various ways, making products stand out by offering diverse options tailored to specific needs. Additionally, maintaining manageable marketing sizes allows businesses to better understand customer behavior, truly comprehend their customers, and anticipate future demands. This understanding enables businesses to achieve consistent sales, fostering repeat purchases and ultimately cultivating customer loyalty toward both the product and the entrepreneur.

Phonphonatham (2008, p.93) stated that consumer purchasing behavior has changed significantly. Therefore, small businesses must adapt in various ways to meet the needs of modern consumers, who prioritize convenience and alignment with current preferences. These adaptations include the following:

1. Business Owner Attributes. Small business owners must elevate themselves from being mere sellers to becoming business managers, with the following key attributes: 1.1 Knowledge about their business. 1.2 Learning additional principles of business management. 1.3 Enhancing diverse

skills. 1.4 Having a good personality. 1.5 Decision-making ability and a proactive mindset.

2. Location. Small businesses often face financial constraints when choosing prime locations in communities or city centers with high customer traffic. Therefore, several factors should be considered: 2.1 The cost of the location relative to the potential revenue generation, ensuring a worthwhile investment. 2.2 Building brand awareness through effective communication strategies.

3. Sales Management. Traditional sales methods involve passively waiting for customers to visit, but modern sales strategies focus on driving and achieving sales targets through the following approaches: 3.1 Studying customer needs. 3.2 Setting sales goals. 3.3 Managing sales effectively. 3.4 Utilizing technology to enhance sales management.

4. Pricing. Small businesses often face disadvantages in pricing due to higher product costs from lower purchase volumes. To avoid direct price competition, small businesses can consider: 4.1 Selecting products to sell strategically. 4.2 Observing customers' purchasing power.

5. Other Factors: 5.1 Purchase timing. 5.2 Essential products. 5.3 Target groups.

Strategic Adaptation: The Four Key Strategies

1. Service Quality. High-quality service is crucial for differentiating a business and outperforming competitors. Delivering consistent, exceptional service that exceeds customer expectations builds loyalty. Customer expectations are shaped by past experiences, word-of-mouth recommendations, and advertising. If the service received meets or exceeds expectations, customers are likely to return; otherwise, they lose interest.

2. Creating Differentiation. Differentiation involves making products and services unique and superior in the eyes of customers. This uniqueness can stem from product design, convenience, quality, service, branding, innovation, technology, or production processes. Even if the

product is more expensive, customers may be willing to pay for the perceived value and quality.

3. Niche Market Focus. Focusing on smaller target markets allows businesses to deeply understand customer behavior and predict future needs. Success in niche markets can lead to repeat purchases and customer loyalty, enabling businesses to sustain long-term sales and maintain a competitive edge.

4. Building Customer Relationships. This involves continuous marketing activities directed at customers, whether end-users or intermediaries in the distribution channel. The aim is to foster understanding, positive perceptions, and affinity toward the business and its products or services. Emphasis is placed on two-way communication to develop mutually beneficial, long-term relationships between the business and its customers.

In summary, the adaptation of local border-town community businesses requires diverse skills and capabilities. Business owners must pay close attention to and thoroughly study their operations to cater to the growing number of tourists, both domestic and international, visiting the Betong area. Key areas of focus include: Quality of Products and Services, Creating Differentiation, Targeting Niche Markets, Building Special Relationships, Monitoring Local Events, Embracing New Technology, Employee Training, Honesty and Integrity.

Concept of Border Town and Special Economic Zone Development

The development of special economic zones (SEZs) in the past was primarily a policy aimed at promoting investment and macroeconomic development, leveraging four key advantages of the area:

1. Geographic advantage: Strategic locations with abundant natural resources ready for production.

2. Low import-export costs: SEZs were typically established in border areas or near international shipping ports to minimize transportation expenses.

3. Abundant low-cost labor: The availability of inexpensive labor in large numbers.

4. Government incentives for investment: These included tax exemptions or reductions, relaxed regulations, and facilitated investment processes within SEZs to attract investors by offering lower operational costs compared to other areas (Noumtanom, 2017). Currently, the government places greater emphasis on the service, technology, tourism, and innovation sectors. Consequently, the concept of SEZs has evolved to accommodate new investment formats. These include developing SEZs with an environment conducive to service and innovation sectors, advanced education systems, and skilled workforce training in innovation. Additionally, SEZs aim to create modern cities and environments for the new generation, providing facilities such as advanced communication systems, transportation networks, startup incubation services, financial services, and investment support. This approach is more complex and diverse compared to the heavy industry-focused SEZs of over 30 years ago (Farole, 2011). Moreover, it is crucial to develop the cities and external environments surrounding SEZs to enhance their potential and mutual benefit. Without this, SEZs may not achieve success or sustainability (Jong Woo Kang, 2017).

Key Success Factors in Border Town and SEZ Development

The establishment of SEZs requires several critical factors for success. According to Douglas Zhihua Zeng (2015), the following elements are essential:

1. Strong Commitment and Support of the Government: A robust policy mechanism must be in place, including: Establishing organizations responsible for driving policies at both national

and local levels. Assigning specific tasks and responsibilities to specialized units. Enacting laws, orders, or regulations essential for implementing state authority measures (e.g., tax incentives, land ownership management, urban planning, customs procedures, and exemptions or relaxations of state controls). Signing cooperation agreements with neighboring countries on SEZs. Developing clear long-term, medium-term, and annual budget allocation plans for policy implementation.

2. Clear Objectives and Benchmarks: Setting specific goals such as boosting economic growth rates, export value, employment figures, and revenue generated by SEZ management organizations.

3. Location Advantage: Selecting strategically advantageous locations and appropriately sized SEZ areas, ensuring the size is neither too small nor too large.

4. Investment Incentives and Institutional Autonomy: Ensuring good governance in investment promotion to prevent issues such as rent-seeking behavior in area management.

5. Infrastructure Development: Implementing plans or projects to build or improve infrastructure that can support existing or emerging economic bases in the area.

6. Supportive Measures: Introducing measures that promote investment, employment, and business operations, ensuring ease of decision-making, efficiency, and minimal costs for entrepreneurs.

7. Technology Transfer Mechanisms and Capacity Building: Establishing mechanisms for local or national businesses to integrate the SEZ economy with local and national economies effectively. This requires collaboration between entrepreneurs inside and outside the SEZ.

8. Management of Cities and Surrounding Environments: Managing urban areas and environments within and around SEZs to facilitate business operations and enhance the quality of life for urban residents sustainably.

The development of border towns and SEZs involves multiple critical factors. The government must play a leading role in establishing and overseeing systems by setting clear objectives and goals, involving local administrative organizations and private sectors in the development process, and introducing supportive measures. Additionally, creating systemic linkages with the national economy is essential for achieving comprehensive and sustainable development.

Research Methods

The research article titled "Social Capital of Local Community Businesses in Border Towns and Their Contribution to Supporting Tourism in Betong District, Yala, Thailand" employs a qualitative research approach to obtain in-depth insights into social capital and the development of local community businesses. The research process includes the following steps:

1. Document and Literature Review. This step involves studying research, literature, and documents related to social capital, local community business development, and tourism, particularly in border areas and culturally diverse regions. The aim is to establish a comprehensive conceptual framework for analyzing social capital and the adaptation of local community businesses in Betong District.

2. Field Survey. A field survey is conducted in Betong District, Yala Province, to collect data on local community businesses with the potential to support tourism. The focus is on businesses related to local products, such as homestays, traditional restaurants, agricultural products, and souvenirs. This is to understand the local context and the existing social capital within the community.

3. Data Collection from Local Entrepreneurs. In-depth interviews were conducted with local business operators in Betong District, covering a total of 10 businesses: 1. Betong Shogun Orange Business

2. Watercress Farming 3. Handicrafts Business
 4. Grass Jelly Business 5. Betong Chicken Business
 6. Krua Tuan Restaurant 7. Kopi Business 8. Rim
 Than Resort Business 9. Garcinia Business 10. Nile
 Tilapia Business. A total of 14 participants were
 interviewed, using a combination of individual in-
 -depth interviews and focus group discussions.
 The aim was to gather information on causal
 human resource capital, physical capital, cultural
 wisdom capital, and natural and environmental
 resource capital within these businesses, as well
 as the challenges and opportunities for developing
 these businesses to support tourism. The interviews
 utilized semi-structured questionnaires to ensure
 comprehensive and qualitative data collection.

4. Data Analysis Using SWOT Analysis and
 TOWS Matrix. Collected data is analyzed using
 SWOT Analysis to assess the strengths, weak-
 nesses, opportunities, and threats of community
 businesses in the area. The results are then
 applied to the TOWS Matrix to develop strategies
 for adapting and enhancing social capital for
 supporting tourism.

5. Strategic Recommendations. Based on the
 analysis, the research findings will lead to strategic
 recommendations for the development of local
 community businesses. The focus is on effectively
 utilizing social capital to promote sustainable
 tourism and business development in the border
 area of Betong District.

This research aims to enhance the under-
 standing of the role of social capital in developing
 local community businesses in Betong District.
 It also provides a framework that can be applied
 to other areas with similar characteristics to
 promote tourism and community development.

Results

The study of theories and related literature,
 it was found that there are four key types of capital:
 1. Causal Human Resource Capital 2. Physical
 Capital 3. Cultural Wisdom Capital 4. Natural
 and Environmental Resource Capital. These were
 analyzed in the context of 10 local community
 businesses in Betong. The details can be summarized
 in the following table.

Table 1

Summary of the Social Capital of 10 Local Community Businesses in the Border Area of Betong District, Yala Province.

Local Community Businesses	Social Capital of Businesses
1. Betong Shogun Orange Business	<p><u>Causal Human Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing: High market demand for this type of orange. - Production: A challenging fruit to cultivate but has strengths in production processes, cultivation methods, and care techniques that leverage Betong's suitable geography and climate. <p><u>Physical Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geography: The geographic conditions are more favorable compared to other areas. <p><u>Cultural Wisdom Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stories: Features unique and interesting stories or historical backgrounds. - Identity: Known for its high-quality and distinctive oranges with unmatched characteristics in terms of yield and taste.
2. Watercress Farming	<p><u>Causal Human Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing: A key economic crop of Betong District with high market demand. Production of the area help reduce production costs. <p><u>Physical Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geography: Cultivation requires specific conditions and can only thrive in suitable environments like Betong. - Location: Situated at Piyamit Tunnel, a historical and tourist site in Betong District. <p><u>Natural and Environmental Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nutrition: A crop rich in nutrients and health benefits, particularly aiding in gut health.

Local Community Businesses	Social Capital of Businesses
3. Handicrafts Business	<p><u>Causal Human Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative and Innovative Thinking: Inspired by study tours and an interest in handicrafts, leading to the idea of establishing a handicraft weaving group. - Product Design: The products are durable and offer great value for use.
4. Grass Jelly Business	<p><u>Causal Human Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing: Highly sought after by tourists; consuming grass jelly is a must-do for visitors to Betong. - Technology: Utilizes technological equipment to aid in production. - Product: Complex to produce, with intricate processes that require time and meticulous attention to quality at every stage. <p><u>Physical Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism: Included in tour group programs organized by travel companies and promoted through word-of-mouth. - Social Media: Online platforms have increased its visibility, with well-known reviewers and YouTubers visiting the shop, filming, and advertising the grass jelly. <p><u>Cultural Wisdom Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stories: The grass jelly has a rich history and legends passed down through generations, already renowned in Betong District. - Identity: Features a unique identity that makes it incomparable to grass jelly from other regions. <p><u>Natural and Environmental Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raw Materials: Made from high-quality grass jelly plants imported from abroad.
5. Betong Chicken Business	<p><u>Causal Human Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing: Betong chicken has high market demand both domestically and internationally. - Production: Raising Betong chickens incurs higher costs than other breeds and requires intensive care, leading to significant production expenses. <p><u>Cultural Wisdom Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stories: Rich historical background with notable and interesting narratives, supported by diverse sources of information. - Identity: Recognized for its unique body shape and distinctive physical characteristics. - Taste: Offers a distinctive taste and high-quality meat and skin, characterized by a tender, sweet, firm, and aromatic flavor, unlike other chicken breeds.
6. Krua Tuan Restaurant	<p><u>Physical Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value and Perception: Creates a high-quality impression for customers. - Social Media: Online platforms have increased its recognition, with well-known reviewers and YouTubers visiting the restaurant, filming, and promoting it. <p><u>Cultural Wisdom Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stories: Features narratives passed down through generations. - Identity: The food and its flavors possess a unique and distinctive character.
7. Kopi Business	<p><u>Causal Human Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing: High demand from both the domestic market and tourists, including Thai and Malaysian visitors. <p><u>Cultural Wisdom Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identity: Possesses a unique character with an aromatic, rich, and flavorful taste, as it is traditionally hand-pounded and roasted with firewood, preserving and maintaining the traditional production methods.
8. Rim Than Resort Business	<p><u>Physical Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Location: Situated near tourist attractions in a peaceful, natural environment, making it ideal for relaxation and tourist activities.
9. Garcinia Business	<p><u>Causal Human Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Production: The production process involves multiple steps and requires time, with careful attention to quality at every stage. <p><u>Cultural Wisdom Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taste: Has a unique, delicious flavor and is processed into various products from Garcinia Cambogia.

Local Community Businesses	Social Capital of Businesses
10. Nile Tilapia Business.	<p><u>Causal Human Resource Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Production: Fish farming requires significant effort and meticulous care at every stage, from selecting fingerlings, managing ponds, feeding, monitoring fish weight, and controlling the farming duration to ensure the highest quality fish. - Marketing: Flowing Stream Tilapia* is a highly sought-after dish among tourists visiting Betong. <p><u>Physical Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geography: The area benefits from natural water sources, including a dam and mountain streams, with a continuous water circulation system and a climate more suitable for fish farming than other regions. - Location: Situated near major tourist attractions, including the Winter Flower Garden and Piyamit Tunnel, making it a popular dining stop for visitors. <p><u>Cultural Wisdom Capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taste: The fish has a distinctive quality and flavor—tender, naturally sweet, and free from any muddy odor—ensuring freshness as it is sourced directly from the pond for cooking.

Based on the collected data, the research team analyzed and assessed the effectiveness of utilizing social capital to support tourism in Betong District, Yala Province. The findings indicate that three key types of capital are essential for achieving effective outcomes: Human Capital, Cultural Capital, Network Capital. The details of each type of capital can be summarized as follows:

1. Human Capital. The research reveals that human capital in Betong is a vital factor influencing the ability to develop local businesses. Entrepreneurs in the area possess skills and experience in producing unique local products such as Shogun oranges, watercress, and Betong chicken, as well as providing services that meet the needs of tourists effectively. However, the lack of training and opportunities for specialized skill development remains a limitation that requires support from the government and relevant agencies.

2. Cultural Capital. Betong's diverse cultural heritage serves as a distinctive strength that

promotes cultural tourism. The blending of Thai, Chinese, and Malay cultures has created unique traditions, cuisines, and ways of life that attract tourists. This cultural capital can be further leveraged to develop tourist attractions and create distinctive local products. Nevertheless, the lack of continuous conservation and promotion of cultural capital could diminish the area's appeal over time.

3. Network Capital. Building networks and fostering collaboration among communities, local entrepreneurs, government agencies, and external organizations is a key factor in strengthening community businesses in Betong. Collaborative efforts to develop infrastructure, such as the Skywalk and the Aiyerweng, as well as tourist facilities, have significantly enhanced the area's capacity to accommodate tourists and promote local business growth. However, establishing robust and sustainable networks remains an area that requires further development.

Table 2

Distribution of Social Capital in 10 Local Community Businesses in Betong District, Yala Province, Thailand.

	Human Capital.	Cultural Capital.	Network Capital.
Betong Shogun Orange Business	1	1	1
Watercress Farming	1		1
Handicrafts Business	1		
Grass Jelly Business	1	1	1

	Human Capital.	Cultural Capital.	Network Capital.
Betong Chicken Business	1	1	
Krua Tuan Restaurant		1	1
Kopi Business	1	1	
Rim Than Resort Business			1
Garcinia Business	1	1	
Nile Tilapia Business	1	1	1

From Table 2, it is observed that all 10 community businesses possess some form of social capital, including human capital, cultural capital, and network capital, though most do not encompass all three types of capital. The findings reveal the following: 1. Businesses with all three types of social capital: There are Three businesses, that are Betong Shogun Orange Business, Grass Jelly Business and Nile Tilapia Business. 2. Businesses with two types of social capital: There are Five businesses, that are Watercress Farm, Betong Chicken Business, Krea Tuan Restaurant, Kopi Business, and Garcinia Business. 3. Businesses with one type of social capital: There are Two businesses, that are Handicrafts Business and Rim Than Resort Business.

To ensure that all businesses have the full potential and capability to support tourism in Betong District, Yala Province, at 100% in the future the government should provide support and enhance social capital in each business, ensuring they possess all three key types of capital. Additionally, each business should strive to develop itself comprehensively to attain these three types of social capital. This can be achieved through training and self-improvement via various channels. Today social media offers convenient and flexible access to knowledge through the internet. Furthermore, government financial institutions provide numerous low-interest funding options to support the operations of community enterprises.

4. SWOT Analysis and TOWS Matrix

The SWOT Analysis revealed that local community businesses in Betong District have strengths in natural resources, local culture, and strong social capital. However, they still face challenges such as a lack of trainers for local

product development and incomplete infrastructure (weaknesses). An opportunity for Betong is that it receives government support as part of the "Stable, Prosperous, and Sustainable Triangle Model City Project", endorsed by the Cabinet Resolution. This support includes budget allocations and other assistance aimed at developing Betong into a prominent tourist destination in Thailand. However, following the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand's economy has not fully recovered. Additionally, Malaysia's currency depreciation has affected tourism growth in the area, which has not expanded as projected (threats). The analysis suggests that leveraging social capital, along with developing human capital and strengthening collaborative networks, will enhance the area's capacity to support tourism and ensure the sustainability of community businesses. This leads to a 5-year strategic plan, synthesized through the TOWS Matrix, which consists of two key strategies:

Strategy 1: Promote, support, and develop border town local business products and marketing. This strategy aims to increase the value of agricultural products through the following methods: Encouraging coffee cultivation in the area, promoting the processing of agricultural products, supporting brand design, enhancing packaging development, expanding export markets, establishing a local product distribution center and promoting online marketing. These efforts are to be supported by government agencies such as the Yala Provincial Commerce Office, the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), Betong District, Yala Provincial Community Development Office, and Yala Provincial Agriculture Office.

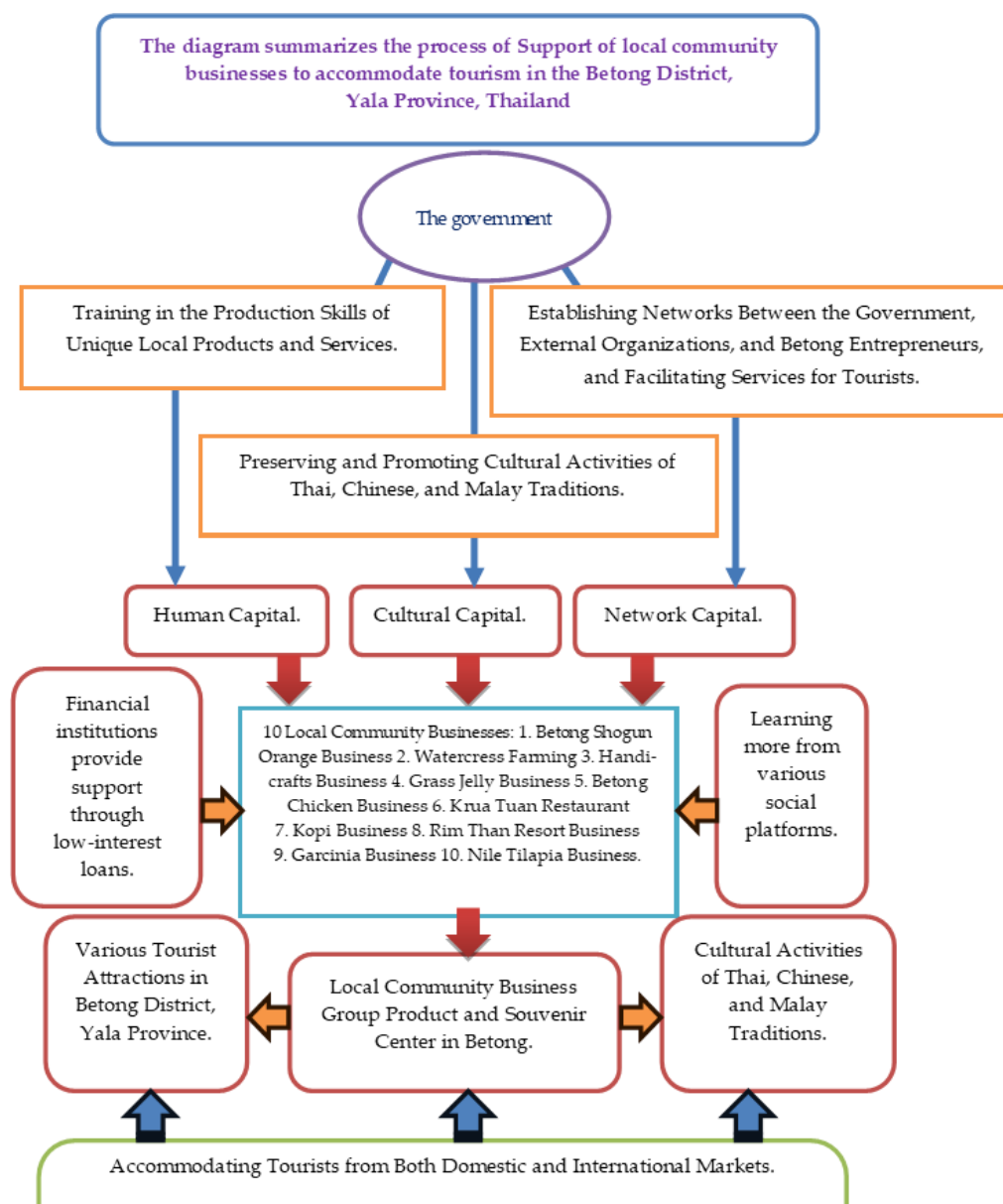
Strategy 2: Promote and develop diverse and interconnected tourism. This strategy focuses on expanding the tourism and service sectors through the following actions: Improving transportation routes to tourist attractions and related businesses, upgrading tourist sites, activities, products, and services, establishing learning centers for community businesses with potential to support tourism in Betong, promoting the use of modern technology in local businesses, enhancing management capabilities for community tourism, community enterprises, and local leaders. This strategy will be supported by government entities including the SBPAC, Betong District Office, Betong Municipality, the Forestry Department,

the Yala Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, and Yala Rajabhat University.

Social capital in its various forms plays a critical role in developing border town community businesses in Betong District to effectively and sustainably accommodate tourism. The development of human capital, cultural capital, and collaborative networks between communities and government agencies are essential factors in promoting community businesses. Strategic analysis indicates that systematically utilizing social capital for local business development will enable Betong to become a high-potential and sustainable tourism destination in the long term.

Figure2

The Adaptation Process of Local Community Businesses to Support Tourism in Betong District, Yala Province, Thailand.



Discussion

The findings of the study "Social Capital of Local Community Businesses in Border Towns and Their Contribution to Supporting Tourism in Betong District, Yala, Thailand" align with international research on the utilization of social capital for the development of local community businesses and cultural tourism in several key aspects:

1. **Human Capital and Capacity Development of Community Businesses.** The research by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (2009) emphasized the role of human capital in enhancing collaborative potential and fostering innovation in local businesses. Developing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of individuals within the community is a crucial factor in increasing the capacity of local community businesses to support the growth of tourism in the area. Our findings indicate that human capital in Betong, particularly specialized skills and knowledge in service provision and local product development, plays a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of local community businesses. This aligns with the research by Abane et al. (2024), which highlights the importance of the structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of social capital in fostering group cohesion and social relationships. These factors are vital for supporting the growth of new businesses in Ghana. Moreover, social capital can promote group solidarity and establish beneficial social relationships, thereby enhancing business growth. Similarly, the study by Zheng and Chou (2024), titled "Rebuilding the Resilience of Mountainous Rural Communities by Enhancing Community Capital through Industrial Transformation: A Case Study from Rural Fujian, China" found that human capital plays a critical role in facilitating industrial transformation in rural areas and improving community resilience. Their research also demonstrated that bonding social

capital within communities effectively supports development and helps build resilience. These studies collectively underscore the importance of human capital development and skill enhancement in local communities to improve competitiveness and foster innovation in community businesses. This is particularly relevant for the tourism sector and local product development, which are essential for supporting economic growth in the area.

2. **Cultural Capital and the Development of Cultural Tourism.** The findings align with the research of Richards and Wilson (2006), which highlighted the development of cultural tourism in areas with diverse cultural heritage. Their research emphasized that regions with cultural diversity can leverage it as a unique selling point to effectively attract tourists. Similarly, our study found that Betong's cultural diversity comprising Thai, Chinese, and Malay influences serves as a distinctive feature that adds value to tourism and creates engaging experiences for visitors. Furthermore, Smith and Richards (2013) emphasized the importance of preserving and promoting local culture in the development of cultural tourism. This resonates with our findings, which suggest that conserving local culture in Betong can be a strategic approach to attract tourists and ensure sustainability in tourism. Additionally, Bashi (2015) discussed cultural heritage as a key economic asset for tourism, capable of attracting international visitors. Heritage sites not only reflect a nation's history to younger generations but also serve as an honorable representation of Albania across Europe and beyond. These studies collectively enhance the understanding of the role of cultural capital and local cultural heritage conservation in developing cultural tourism in diverse areas like Betong. By leveraging cultural diversity as a strategy to attract tourists and create memorable experiences, local communities can strengthen their identity while promoting sustainable cultural tourism in the long term.

3. Network Capital and Building Community Collaboration. The importance of network capital in fostering collaboration between communities and the public sector, as highlighted in our research, aligns with the work of Adler and Kwon (2020). Their study emphasized the development of network capital and cooperation within local communities as a means to enhance business development potential. Collaboration among entrepreneurs, government agencies, and communities plays a crucial role in building robust networks that can support the sustainable growth of local businesses. Burt (2021) also noted that strong and sustainable relationships within networks enhance competitive potential and increase access to critical resources for businesses. This insight is reflected in our findings, particularly within the context of Betong's community businesses, which require cooperation from all sectors to promote tourism and develop infrastructure. Moreover, Vongvisitsin, Huang, and King (2024) filled knowledge gaps in community-based tourism development in urban settings by integrating fieldwork insights with social capital frameworks. Their research highlighted how interactions among various forms of social capital could lead to diverse outcomes, offering a theoretical perspective for studying social capital and community-based tourism. They underscored the importance of diversity and inclusivity in fostering collaboration. These studies reinforce the vital role of network capital in fostering partnerships and supporting the sustainable growth of local businesses. Collaboration among local entrepreneurs, government agencies, and other stakeholders such as local organizations emerge as a key strategy to enhance the competitiveness of local community businesses and support the development of critical infrastructure to attract tourists.

Limitation and Future Research

Limitations of this Research

1. Focus on a Specific Area. The study focuses exclusively on Betong District, Yala Province, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other border areas due to differences in culture, economy, and infrastructure.

2. Limitations in Data Quality. Data collection on social capital may face accuracy challenges, as it heavily relies on the interpretations and perspectives of informants, which could lead to errors or biases.

3. Changes in Social and Political Contexts. The rapidly changing social and political circumstances in border areas may affect the long-term applicability of the research findings.

4. Access to Resources and Government Support. The sustainable development of community businesses in border areas heavily depends on the availability of resources and support from various levels of government, which may be uncertain.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. Study in Other Border Areas. Future studies should expand to other border areas with different geographic and cultural characteristics to compare and identify approaches for developing local community businesses suitable for each context.

2. In-Depth Analysis of Each Type of Social Capital. Future research should conduct a deeper analysis of each type of social capital, such as human capital, cultural capital, and network capital, to better understand their roles and interconnections within different contexts.

3. Impact Analysis of Tourism on Local Communities. Additional research is needed to explore the economic, social, and cultural impacts of tourism on local communities to identify development strategies that genuinely promote sustainability.

4. Study on the Role of Technology. Further studies should investigate how technology can support community businesses in border areas, particularly the use of digital media and online platforms to promote tourism and expand markets.

References

- Abane, J. A., Adamtey, R., & Kpeglo, R. (2024). The impact of social capital on business development in Ghana: Experiences of local-level businesses in the Kumasi Metropolitan Area. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 9. www.sciencedirect.com/journal/social-sciences-and-humanities-open
- Adler, P. S., & Kwon, S. W. (2020). Social capital: Prospects for a new concept. *Academy of Management Review*, 45(1), 100–117.
- Bashi, E. (2015). Cultural heritage of Albania – A fabulous economic source for the sustainable economic development of tourism. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.03.342>
- Burt, R. S. (2021). Structural holes and good ideas. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(2), 349–399. <https://doi.org/10.1086/421787>
- Farole, T. (2011). Special economic zone: What have we learned? *The WB Economic Premise*, 64.
- Jong Woo Kang. (2017). Special economic zones should serve the purpose of smart urbanization. *Marketing It Magazine*.
- Kaewngam, K., & Wongwilaikase, W. (2019). Betong: Strategies of the tourism communication under the violence crisis in the three southern border provinces. *Journal of Communication Arts*, 37(3), 40–50.
- Laihang, K. (2013). Adaptation strategies for the survival of traditional retailers in Amphur Mueang, Nakhon Pathom Province. [Master's thesis, Silpakorn University].
- Nahapiet, J., & Ghoshal, S. (2009). Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage. *Academy of Management Review*.
- Noumtanom, A. (2017). The management of economic border town. [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University].
- Phetsatit, P. (2019). Social capital to drive community business in Lamet Subdistrict, Chaiya District, Surat Thani Province. *VRU Research and Development Journal Science and Technology*, 14(3), 232–244.
- Phiwphun, K., & Kobamrung, P. (2023). Analysis of the causal relationship path influencing local economic capital development approached for enhancing the capacity of community enterprise entrepreneurs in the lower northern region of Thailand. *Journal of SaengKhomKham Buddhist Studies*, 8(2), 260–281.
- Phonphonatham, P. (2008). *Retail and wholesale management*. Faculty of Management Science, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University.
- Richards, G., & Wilson, J. (2006). Developing creativity in tourist experiences: A solution to the serial reproduction of culture? *Tourism Management*.
- Smith, M. K., & Richards, G. (2013). *The Routledge handbook of cultural tourism*. Routledge.
- Thavonsiri, P., & Jadesadalug, V. (2015). The adaptation for survival of local drinking-water entrepreneurs in Muang, Kanchanaburi Province. *Veridian E-Journal, Silpakorn University*, 8(2), 2171–2187.
- Totum, B., & Dokduang, K. (2022). The development of social capital for being a source of learning and promoting tourism in secondary city by using GIS for Mekong particle management, Ubon Ratchatani. *Journal of MCU Ubon Review*, 7(2), 2313–2330.
- Vongvisitsin, T. B., Huang, W. J., & King, B. (2024). Urban community-based tourism development: A networked social capital model. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 106. Retrieved from <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/annals-of-tourism-research>
- Zeng, Z. (2015). Global experiences with special economic zones: Focus on China and Africa. Washington, D.C.

Zheng, Z. Q., & Chou, R. J. (2024). Rebuilding the resilience of mountainous rural communities by enhancing community capital through industrial transformation: A case study from rural Fujian, China. *Habitat International*, 149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2024.103086>