

# **A Model for Human Capital Competency Development by Upgrading the Basic Economy through Community-Based Tourism under the Concept of Innovative Businesses for Society and Communities and the Creative Economy to Develop Tourism for Thai Tourists in Suphan Buri Province in the New Normal**

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## **Abstract**

This study aimed to: 1) investigate a participatory community-based tourism management model for Thai tourists in Suphan Buri during the New Normal; 2) examine a model for human capital competency development through community-based tourism for Thai tourists in Suphan Buri during the New Normal; and 3) propose guidelines for enhancing human capital through community-based tourism by integrating innovative business and creative economy concepts. Research instruments included questionnaires from 400 residents, in-depth interviews with 100 key informants, and focus group discussions involving 30 community leaders and members. Data were analyzed using statistical methods such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, followed by a synthesis and interpretation of qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. The findings revealed high levels of participatory tourism management in Suphan Buri, covering aspects like environment, facilities, community involvement, and human resources. Human capital competency, particularly in leadership, partnerships, resource mobilization, and skills and knowledge, was also found to be high. The proposed guidelines emphasize targeted training for tourism-related groups, focusing on skills in community-based tourism management, knowledge of destinations, basic English communication, tourist service excellence, and health and safety standards.

## **Keywords**

Competency, Human capita, Community-based tourism

## **Introduction**

The challenges posed by the tourism industry's impacts on communities have led to the development of tourism that uses cultural capital. The objective is to conserve and maintain local communities' environment, traditions, and culture. The concept of cultural tourism aims to facilitate connections between communities and tourists. The concept of cultural tourism seeks to foster connections between communities and tourists by involving the community in tourism management. This encompasses managing local resources and organizing community-based tourism activities that directly benefit the community. Furthermore, it enhances the potential for local tourism management by mitigating negative impacts that may arise within the community. Community members possess the most comprehensive understanding of their social context, including which resources are valuable and worthy of preservation or presentation to visitors and how to manage these resources effectively while engaging in tourism activities to generate economic income (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002).

The development of the basic economy is a crucial process in the development and upgrading of the nation towards achieving a high-income country with thorough income distribution. This effort aims to establish a stable foundation for the future of Thailand's economy. Promoting the strength, competitiveness, and self-reliance of a basic community economy will contribute to improving the standard of living and well-being of community members. This effort aligns with the goals of the National Strategy Development, aiming to address issues of poverty, inequality, and inequity. A key focus is on creating opportunities and promoting social equality to ensure that all individuals benefit from development inclusively and equitably. This is achieved through economic and structural reforms, enhancing competitiveness by developing and adding value to agricultural products to increase farmers' income and supporting start-ups and community enterprises to become strong, self-sufficient, mutually supportive, and ethical. Such initiatives play a crucial role in establishing an economic system that facilitates development across various sectors, promoting job creation and income generation while simultaneously addressing issues of inequality and inequity at the community level (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2018).

Tourism not only fulfills a fundamental human need for education, personal enrichment, and direct experience but also serves various other purposes such as recreation, business, familial visits, and the exploration of historical sites (Kuri et al., 2022). Traditional tourism in Thailand, with its focus on mass tourism, aimed to maximize the volume of tourists by developing extensive services and facilities to cater to both Thai and foreign visitors. This approach primarily focuses on strategies to draw in large numbers of tourists. However, contemporary trends in tourism have shifted towards more meaningful experiences, emphasizing learning activities that contribute to personal and communal enrichment.

Despite these advances, challenges persist in community tourism management due to a lack of knowledge and understanding among community members, as well as insufficient cooperation and unity among community leaders. The resultant fragmentation often adversely affects local traditions, culture, nature, and the environment. To address these issues, it is crucial to promote conservation and encourage tourist participation in sustainable activities, for sustainable community development (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). Community tourism, which seeks to ensure the sustainability of society, culture, the environment, and local inhabitants, emphasizes learning activities that enhance the tourist experience. Strong community members who align their goals and visions, recognizing the mutual benefits of an equitable and fair distribution of tourism returns, collaborate to ensure successful community tourism. This unified approach ensures that tourism management within the community advances in a coherent and beneficial direction (Bailee et al., 2015).

Recognized as a long-term investment, the enhancement of human resources through education and skill development is essential for maximizing individual potential and boosting national productivity (Kertpolsert, 2015). This holistic approach emphasizes the learning process's dual role as both the primary objective and the resultant outcome of human capital development efforts. Both the private and public sectors recognize human capital as a fundamental driver of competitiveness and sustainable business growth, essential to their strategic frameworks. As outlined in the National Industrial Development Master Plan, the development of human capital is not only central to modern enterprise management but also pivotal for fostering innovation and leveraging wisdom to add value. This approach emphasizes the application of knowledge to enhance growth and sustainability, as organizations rich in high-performing human capital attain significant competitive advantages by generating intellectual capital and promoting innovation (Chiang & Shih, 2011). Accordingly, systematic development of human capital is essential, positioning personnel as the most valuable asset within any organization. Moreover, human capital development transcends organizational boundaries, playing a crucial role in societal advancement. The vision articulated by Wasi (2015) emphasizes the importance of developing strong citizens who actively engage as co-thinkers and co-creators in national initiatives, thereby contributing to robust societal structures and national reform. Thus, the cultivation of human resources remains a primary mission for both governmental and private entities, aiming to fulfill responsibilities and duties towards societal betterment and the cultivation of resilient national citizens.

The strength of a community hinges significantly on the development of its citizens, regarded as vital "human capital" (Yang, 2023). Strategic knowledge management and attitude transformation through comprehensive training programs facilitate this development. In Thailand, the potential of human capital transcends distinctions of gender, age, status, or

occupation, offering a universal opportunity to enhance awareness and catalyze societal progress. Central to this endeavor is the promotion of learning processes that are integral to human capital and resource development. These processes not only enable individuals to achieve self-actualization but also foster sustainable development. Indeed, the concept of human capital development extends beyond mere knowledge acquisition to include experiential learning and practical application, effectively integrating various forms of capital such as social, intellectual, and emotional capital (Jakubik, 2020). Suphan Buri Province is characterized by its significant potential for cultural tourism, particularly concerning the cultures of its ethnic groups. The province predominantly consists of lowland areas, through which flows the notable "Suphan Buri River." The majority of the population in Suphan Buri Province is engaged in agriculture and other economic activities that leverage the region's diverse natural resources. The Suphan Buri River basin exemplifies a convergence of ecological and community cultures, presenting the roots of the landscape and its inhabitants. This region showcases the richness of biodiversity, lifestyle, and cultural heritage. The establishment of a clear identity that embodies the connection between the river and its inhabitants has fostered a river basin community culture. This culture has emerged as a significant resource for tourism development, effectively attracting visitors to the region (Chiangchai, 2015).

Nowadays, Suphan Buri Province has evolved into a prominent tourism city, supported by the Tourism Authority of Thailand's initiatives aimed at enhancing local tourism and elevating the profile of secondary cities. This strategic development has facilitated the equitable distribution of income across various regions by capitalizing on the province's rich natural resources, historical sites, and cultural heritage. Suphan Buri is now well-equipped with essential infrastructure, offering comfortable travel routes to diverse attractions that showcase the local community's unique characteristics, particularly in community tourism. This expansion of tourism from major cities to local communities has brought to light the province's valuable cultural assets, such as traditional arts, cultural practices, ancient sites, and local wisdom, which are integral to the community's identity and way of life. However, it was observed that several communities possess the potential and readiness to develop into sustainable tourist attractions within the province, particularly through cultural tourism focused on various ethnic groups. Therefore, human capital development within these communities, especially by empowering them to manage their affairs, will improve the effectiveness of government administration because many issues arise within the community itself.

The community is best positioned to understand its problems and can effectively address these issues with minimal reliance on the government, thereby reducing the burden and dependence on central authorities. When government agencies are subject to scrutiny

through public participation, transparency will increase, fostering an “aware” populace and a “strong” community. The need to boost Suphan Buri Province’s basic economy, which has historically seen limited potential and management capabilities of community groups, motivates this interest. The proposed development aims to improve the living standards of local residents, generate sustainable income, and advance the economic, social, and cultural sustainability of the community. Given these dynamics, our research team is interested in exploring a model for human capital competency development by upgrading the basic economy through community-based tourism under the concept of innovative businesses for society and communities and the creative economy to develop tourism for Thai tourists in Suphan Buri province in the new normal.

### **Research Objectives**

The research objectives are designed to enhance understanding and operational strategies for community-based tourism in Suphan Buri Province, especially in the context of the New Normal. Firstly, this study aims to investigate a participatory community-based tourism management model that could effectively develop tourism tailored to Thai tourists. Secondly, it seeks to examine how human capital competency can be developed through community-based tourism initiatives, again with a focus on catering to Thai tourists. Lastly, the research intends to propose practical guidelines for the development of human capital competencies. This will involve upgrading the basic economy through innovative business models that are community-centric and embedded within the creative economy framework. These guidelines are expected to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism for Thai tourists in Suphan Buri Province, aligning with contemporary societal and economic shifts.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Public Participation in Tourism Management**

Public participation is a process by which individuals or groups have the right and duty to solve problems, come up with ideas as a group, take part in events, share results, and take responsibility to ensure that the work progresses as planned. This participatory process must be characterized by freedom, equality, and capability (Phrathawatchai Sāntidhammo (Wannawin), 2018). Public participation can be categorized into four forms: 1) Participation in decision-making, which is a process that involves setting and prioritizing goals, making decisions, and taking action together. 2) Participation in implementation, which requires work division and involves various methods, resource support, and assistance to ensure the success of the activities. 3) Participation in benefit sharing, apart from tangible and intangible benefits, it's crucial to consider distributive justice among stakeholders. 4) Participation in evaluation, which is the final step for reviewing the results of activities and

making necessary adjustments if there are any errors during the implementation (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). Thus, the participatory process of community members leads to the highest benefits when they undertake actions for the common good. Actions aimed at benefiting the majority of society result in the development of local communities and an improved quality of life. This is achieved by generating income for the community, preserving tourism resources, conserving the environment, and maintaining the community's culture in line with the community's objectives.

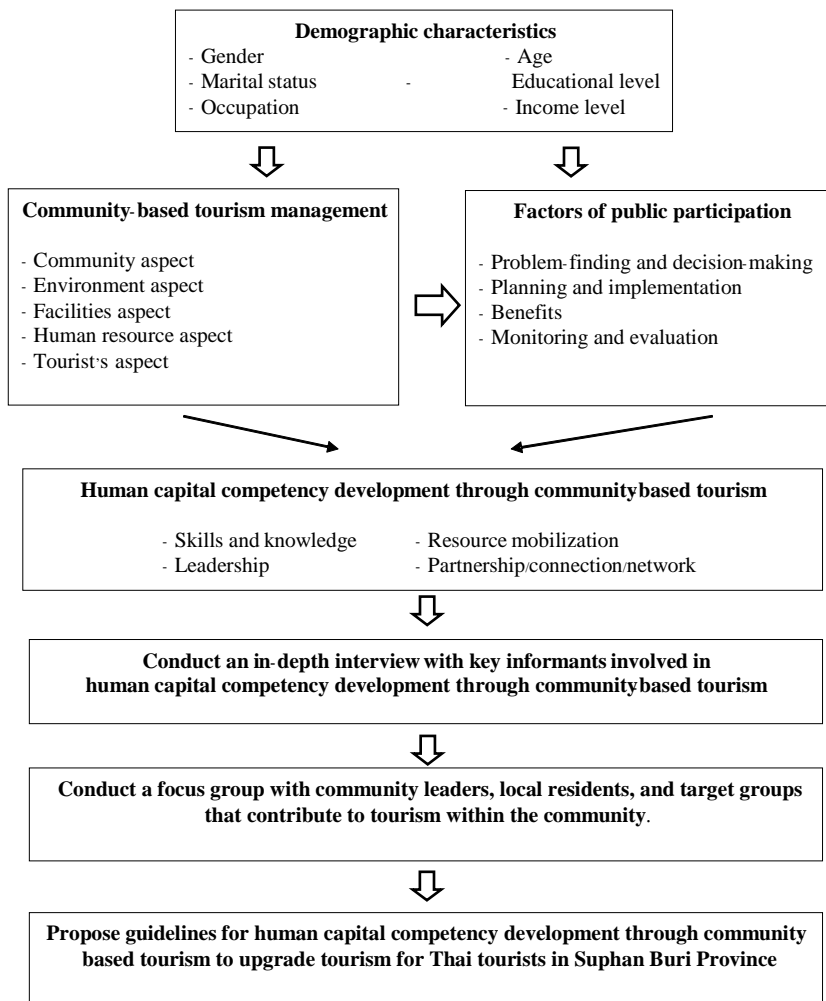
### **Community-Based Tourism Management**

Community-based tourism is a unique type of tourism rooted in the principles of ecotourism and evolves into a sustainable tourism that encompasses three key aspects: environment, society, and culture. Community-based tourism implements a system and mechanism that enables community ownership and active participation in the development and management of tourism. This framework includes decision-making and the establishment of tourism activities' direction. Preserving traditions, cultures, and local ways of life promotes cross-cultural learning. This approach aims to improve quality of life, ensure sustainability for future generations, and provide fair benefits for residents and all stakeholders through effective income distribution for the community's public benefit. Therefore, in community-based tourism management, community members must recognize the significance of their involvement and cooperate with a unified objective. This collective engagement is essential for effectively driving the initiatives forward (Wongkam et al., 2020).

### **Human Capital Competency Development**

Human capital is considered the most valuable resource for a community. Therefore, it is essential to emphasize the development of human skills, abilities, and competencies. The more efficient and skilled the individuals in the community are, the greater the collective benefits will be. These benefits, derived from loyalty, creativity, effort, and commitment, contribute to the community's success. Human success arises from both inherent competencies and those developed through learning. Each individual's success varies according to their unique skills and abilities, which reflect their values. However, deliberate investment in ideas, education, and past experiences can enhance personal skills and abilities. Therefore, the collaboration of people in the community, particularly community leaders, is an influential key to achieving efficiency and effectiveness in work. Emphasizing the importance of joint participation among all stakeholders fosters strength and unity (Swanson & Holton, 2009).

Figure 1 depicts the study's conceptual framework, which includes concepts such as community-based tourism management, human capital competency development, and public participation in tourism management.



**Figure 1** Research conceptual framework.

## Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative research, qualitative research, and action research methodologies. The research methods are organized as follows:

### Quantitative Design

The quantitative design of this research encompasses a comprehensive approach to understanding community-based tourism in Suphan Buri Province, informed by a rigorously selected sample and detailed questionnaire. The population of this study is derived from the 831,146 residents of Suphan Buri Province as recorded by the National Statistical

Office as of December 31, 2022. Employing the formula suggested by Taro Yamane (1975), a sample size of 400 individuals was determined to be representative with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This sample was selected using simple random sampling, ensuring each individual in the population had an equal probability of selection, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

The primary research instrument used was a structured questionnaire divided into 5 key sections. The first section gathered demographic data through closed-ended questions on gender, age, marital status, educational level, occupation, and average monthly income. The second section focused on various aspects of community-based tourism management in Suphan Buri, including community, environmental, facilities, human resources, and tourist aspects, which assigns values on a 5-point scale based on the Likert method (Silpcharu, 2014). The third section assessed public participation in tourism management, addressing issues from problem identification to monitoring and evaluation across 20 items, which assigns values on a 5-point scale based on the Likert method (Silpcharu, 2014). The fourth section was also rated on a Likert scale and evaluated human capital competencies related to community-based tourism, covering areas such as skills and knowledge, resource mobilization, leadership, and networking. The final section solicited open-ended responses for suggestions.

Data collection involved the research team distributing questionnaires and subsequently gathering responses from residents across various villages in Suphan Buri Province, reaching a total of 400 participants. The team then verified the accuracy and completeness of each questionnaire. Following this, the quantitative data were recorded and analyzed using the SPSS program.

Data analysis involved the application of descriptive statistical methods to evaluate all questionnaires, which included an examination of demographic characteristics utilizing frequency and percentage statistics. Additionally, data related to public participation, community tourism management, and human capital development through community tourism were analyzed using mean and standard deviation statistics.

### **Qualitative Design**

The qualitative component of this research was designed to delve deeper into the development of human capital competencies through community-based tourism in Suphan Buri Province, with a focus on upgrading the basic economy. The study targeted a specific population of key informants integral to this developmental process. This included 100 key informants: 30 Chief Executives and 30 Deputy Chief Executives of the Subdistrict Administrative Organization (SAO), 30 Chief Administrators (Municipal Clerks), and 10 community leaders. A structured in-depth interview method was employed, leveraging



purposive and voluntary random sampling to select participants, thereby ensuring that the respondents had direct involvement and expertise in community-based tourism.

The interview tool was thoroughly designed to facilitate comprehensive and open-ended responses, allowing informants to articulate their insights fully. The interviews were organized into two main sections. The first section gathered general information about the interviewees to establish their background and context. The second section focused on their opinions regarding human capital competency development within community-based tourism. This section explored several aspects: the specific aspects of human capital competence that community members want to enhance, the problems and obstacles encountered in the development of human capital competencies for community-based tourism, and additional recommendations for human capital competency development to upgrade the basic economy through community-based tourism.

Upon finalizing the interview guides, formal invitations were sent to the informants. Data collection involved conducting these structured interviews, ensuring a rich, qualitative depth of information was gathered. The data from these interviews were then comprehensively analyzed using content analysis techniques. This involved synthesizing, interpreting, and summarizing the data to distill key insights and recommendations. The outcomes of this analysis aimed to provide strategic guidelines for enhancing human capital competencies, which are crucial for advancing a sustainable, community-focused tourism sector in Suphan Buri Province, especially in the context of the new normal. These findings are expected to contribute significantly to the theoretical and practical understanding of integrating innovative business strategies with community development efforts in the tourism industry.

## **Instrument Validation**

### **1. Content Validity**

Three academic experts evaluated the questionnaire to assess its content validity, scrutinizing its language appropriateness and alignment with the intended outcomes. Each questionnaire item was scrutinized for its Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) and reliability. The experts scored these items based on predetermined criteria, subsequently aggregating these scores to calculate the IOC. We deemed an IOC value ranging from 0.50 to 1.00 as acceptable, indicating sufficient congruence with the research objectives and justifying the inclusion of the item in the final instrument. In contrast, we either revised or removed items scoring below this threshold to enhance the questionnaire's focus and clarity, following the methodological standards set by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977).

## **2. Reliability Testing**

Prior to the main data collection phase, the questionnaire underwent preliminary administration to a sample of 30 participants to ascertain its reliability. The reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient formula, a robust statistical tool for evaluating internal consistency (Cronbach, 1990). The results revealed that the reliability values ranged between 0.917 and 0.957, as noted by Vanichbuncha (2017), categorizing the reliability level as very good. These findings substantiated the questionnaire's suitability for subsequent use in the study.

The reliability values for various dimensions of the questionnaire were categorized under three main sections. For the section on Participatory Community-Based Tourism Management, the scores were as follows: Community dimension at 0.933, Environment dimension at 0.941, Facilities dimension at 0.923, Human Resources dimension at 0.950, and Tourists dimension at 0.912. In the Public Participation section, the Problem-finding and Decision-making dimension scored 0.917, Planning and Operations dimension at 0.933, Receiving Benefits dimension at 0.925, and Monitoring and Evaluation dimension at 0.946. Lastly, under Human Capital Competency Development, the scores included Skills and Knowledge at 0.935, Resource Mobilization at 0.943, Leadership at 0.940, and Partnerships/Linkages/Networks at 0.957. These reliability scores across multiple dimensions affirm the comprehensive validity and applicability of the questionnaire for detailed analysis in the research.

## **Action research**

This action research focused on the Ban Wang Hora Ecotourism Community in Village No. 3, Ong Phra Subdistrict, Dan Chang District, Suphan Buri Province, where a purposively and randomly selected group of 30 community leaders and villagers participated. The objective was to harness local insights to drive developments in community-based tourism and enhance human capital competencies within the community.

The research tools were structured into three main sections to capture a comprehensive range of data. The first section collected general information about the participants, establishing a baseline understanding of the interviewees' backgrounds. The second section delved into the potential of community-based tourism, probing into various dimensions such as tourist attractions, types of accommodations, accessibility and transportation, community activities, facilities, organizational structures, tourism management, and learning within the community. These questions were aimed at uncovering both the existing assets and the areas needing improvement. The third section sought participants' perspectives on actionable strategies for enhancing community-based tourism. It encouraged participants to consider what should be developed further and propose how

these improvements could be achieved. This facilitated a goal-oriented discussion that aligned with the community's vision for its future.

The research team collected data by sending letters to community leaders and residents in Ban Wang Hora Ecotourism Community in Village No. 3, Ong Phra Subdistrict, Dan Chang District, Suphan Buri Province. A total of 30 individuals participated in this action research by providing information. The discussions were facilitated by a moderator who guided the conversation. They aimed to help participants articulate a clear identity and vision for their community—understanding 'Who we are,' 'Where we want to go,' and 'How we can reach our destination.' This format was chosen to foster a collaborative environment where community members could collectively brainstorm and reflect on their experiences and aspirations. The findings from these discussions were meticulously analyzed by the research team to identify key themes and insights. Where gaps in information appeared, additional questions were posed, or further data was gathered to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the community's tourism dynamics. This iterative process of data synthesis aimed to develop a robust model for human capital competency development by leveraging the unique aspects of community-based tourism to upgrade the basic economy. The resultant model was designed not only to enhance the community's tourism potential but also to ensure sustainable economic and social benefits for its members, thereby contributing to a more resilient and vibrant local economy.

## **Research Results**

### **1. Analysis of Community-Based Tourism Management and Public Participation in Suphan Buri Province**

The data analysis aimed at investigating a participatory community-based tourism management model for Thai tourists in Suphan Buri Province under the New Normal conditions are presented below.

The demographic profile of the participants shows a predominance of female participants, with 235 females making up 58.75% of the total. The majority of participants fell within the 41-50 age group, totaling 96 individuals or 24.00%. Additionally, 55.25% of participants were single, and nearly half, 48.00%, had an education level below high school. Regarding occupation, 31.50% of the respondents worked in agriculture, gardening, or farming. Moreover, about half of the participants, 48.25%, reported an average monthly income of less than 10,000 baht.

Analysis of community-based tourism management, with a focus on public participation in Suphan Buri Province, indicated a high overall level of management effectiveness across various aspects including environmental, facilities, community, tourist, and human resources, as presented in Table 1. This high level of effectiveness in managing

community-based tourism suggests robust participation and engagement from the community in sustaining tourism activities.

**Table 1** Overall means and standard deviations of participatory community-based tourism management

(n = 400)

Participatory community-based tourism	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
1. Community	3.41	0.777	High	3
2. Environment	3.46	0.797	High	1
3. Facilities	3.43	0.766	High	2
4. Human resources	3.37	0.734	Moderate	4
5. Tourists	3.41	0.760	High	3
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.42</b>	<b>0.651</b>	<b>High</b>	

Nonetheless, the level of public participation in specific management activities of community-based tourism was found to be low, as shown in Table 2. This includes participation in receiving benefits, monitoring and evaluation, problem-finding and decision-making, and planning and operations. The low engagement in these critical areas highlights potential areas for improvement in involving the community more deeply in decision-making processes and operational activities to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of tourism management.

These findings indicate the need for strategies to increase community involvement in the management processes to ensure that the benefits of tourism are more equitably distributed, and that the community has a significant role in shaping tourism development in line with the New Normal. This will not only improve the management of tourism but also ensure that it contributes more effectively to the local economy and social fabric of Suphan Buri Province.

**Table 2** Overall mean and standard deviation of public participation in community-based tourism management

(n = 400)

Public participation	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
1. Problem-finding and decision-making	2.31	0.858	Low	3
2. Planning and operations	2.20	0.839	Low	4
3. Receiving benefits	2.59	0.848	Low	1
4. Monitoring and evaluation	2.50	1.011	Low	2
<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.40</b>	<b>0.780</b>	<b>Low</b>	

## 2. Analysis of Human Capital Competency Development in Community-Based Tourism

The data analysis aimed at examining the effectiveness of human capital competency development within the framework of community-based tourism in Suphan Buri Province, particularly within the context of the New Normal, revealed nuanced findings. The overall level of human capital competency development was assessed as moderate. This suggests that while there are foundational strengths, there remains substantial room for improvement across several competencies critical to the success of community-based tourism.

Specifically, as depicted in Table 3, the aspect of leadership within the community emerged as a strong point, being the only dimension rated at a high level. This indicates that community leaders are likely effective in guiding tourism initiatives and influencing positive outcomes in community-based tourism projects. Conversely, other critical dimensions such as partnership/connection/network, resource mobilization, and skills and knowledge, displayed lower levels of development. The partnership/connection/network aspect, although following closely, still did not reach the high rating, suggesting potential gaps in effective collaboration and networking that are essential for sustainable tourism development. Similarly, resource mobilization and skills and knowledge aspects were rated even lower, indicating that while some capabilities exist, the community needs further enhancement in these areas to fully leverage local assets and knowledge in promoting tourism.

These findings reflect the importance of a targeted approach in human capital development strategies, particularly focusing on enhancing skills, improving resource mobilization, and strengthening networks. Such efforts are crucial for empowering communities to fully exploit the burgeoning opportunities in tourism under the New Normal, ensuring a comprehensive and sustainable development of tourism in Suphan Buri Province.

**Table 3** The overall mean and standard deviation of human capital competency development through community-based tourism.

(n = 400)

Human capital competency development	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
1. Skills and knowledge	3.14	0.787	Moderate	4
2. Resource mobilization	3.24	0.831	Moderate	3
3. Leadership	3.42	0.772	High	1
4. Partnerships/Linkages/Networks	3.27	0.779	Moderate	2
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>0.656</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	

### **3. Strategic Guidelines for Human Capital Development in Community-Based Tourism**

The data analysis aimed at proposing guidelines for the enhancement of human capital to support the local economy through community-based tourism under innovative social and economic initiatives in Suphan Buri Province has yielded comprehensive strategies. These strategies are designed to bolster the competencies of local communities, enabling them to effectively engage with and benefit from the tourism sector in the New Normal era.

#### **Key Guidelines:**

1) Language and Communication Skills: Implementing training programs in basic English and Chinese to equip villagers, especially those in tourism-related jobs, with necessary language skills to communicate effectively with tourists.

2) Tourism Education and Attitude Development: Providing comprehensive education about tourism and tourist services is crucial. This includes training aimed at fostering a positive attitude toward careers in local tourism, such as becoming local guides, local wisdom scholars, or youth ambassadors for tourist attractions.

3) Career Development Opportunities: Expanding vocational training in areas like agricultural product processing to enhance the economic prospects of community members. Additionally, developing new tourism-related careers would be advantageous. For instance, Batik making in the Southern region, agro-tourism, and ecotourism management could diversify economic activities within the community.

4) Skill Enhancement for Ancillary Jobs: Conducting practical training sessions for crafting souvenirs, cooking local cuisine, and sustainable practices like organic farming and horticulture, would not only enrich the tourist experience but also add economic value to the community's resources.

5) Educational Integration: Integrating local knowledge and wisdom into the formal education system to preserve cultural heritage and enhance the educational offerings related to community-based tourism.

6) Supporting Community Elders: Initiatives to foster well-being and societal value for the elderly, recognizing their role and contributions to the community, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

7) Entrepreneurship and Quality Control: Organizing workshops and events for community entrepreneurs to enhance their capabilities in managing tourism businesses, with a focus on maintaining high service quality for Thai tourists.

8) Community Development Education: Providing ongoing education on community development activities to ensure sustainable growth and the effective management of tourism ventures.

These guidelines are crafted to not only enhance the tourism appeal and capabilities of Suphan Buri Province but also to ensure that the benefits of tourism development are widespread and sustainable, fostering economic growth, cultural preservation, and community well-being. Through these strategic interventions, the community can leverage its unique assets in a manner that aligns with contemporary social and economic objectives, ultimately leading to a resilient and thriving local economy.

Nevertheless, the development of human capital competency in community-based tourism in Suphanburi Province faces several significant challenges that hinder its potential growth and sustainability.

1) Deficiencies in Vocational Knowledge: There is a notable gap in essential vocational skills among community members, particularly in areas such as marketing, accounting, and product design. This lack of expertise limits their ability to effectively develop and market tourism-related products and services.

2) Innovation Shortfalls: The community experiences a shortfall in innovative approaches to career development. This stagnation curtails the introduction of new and appealing tourism products or services that could attract a broader tourist demographic.

3) Language Barriers: A substantial barrier is the deficiency in basic English communication skills among locals. The lengthy process required to acquire these skills poses a significant challenge, as proficiency in English is crucial for effective interaction with international tourists.

4) Inadequate Educational Framework: The local educational curricula lack clear and specific guidelines for career development in tourism. This omission makes it difficult for individuals seeking to enter the tourism sector to gain the necessary skills and knowledge systematically.

5) Underutilization of Local Attractions as Educational Tools: There is an insufficient integration of local tourist attractions into educational programs as practical learning resources. Leveraging these attractions can provide hands-on learning experiences and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of local heritage among potential tourism professionals.

6) Ethical Concerns: Ethical and moral issues, including tourist scams, significantly tarnish the reputation of the tourism sector. Addressing these issues is crucial to maintaining the integrity and attractiveness of Suphanburi's tourism industry.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including the enhancement of educational curricula, the promotion of innovation in tourism-related careers,

the improvement of language training programs, and the development of ethical guidelines and standards for tourism practices. Such strategic improvements are essential for fostering a skilled and ethically responsible workforce that can contribute to the sustainable development of community-based tourism in Suphanburi Province.

Thus, to effectively upgrade the basic economy through community-based tourism within the innovative business framework and creative economy, several strategic guidelines can be implemented to develop human capital for enhancing tourism in Suphan Buri Province.

1) Community Involvement and Ownership: Relevant agencies are recommended to facilitate a public participation process that actively involves community members in the development of tourism. This should include knowledge sharing, collaborative brainstorming, and joint planning sessions. Such initiatives help instill a sense of pride and ownership among villagers, fostering a deep-seated appreciation and love for their cultural wisdom and local heritage.

2) Conservation Awareness: It is crucial to promote conservation awareness among tourists, local residents, and youth. This can be achieved by enhancing online visibility of natural attractions through websites, actively promoting community tourist spots, and organizing educational activities that highlight the importance of preserving natural resources.

3) Skill Development in Tourism: Developing a comprehensive body of knowledge on local guiding and tourism service provision within the community is essential. Training programs should aim to empower locals to take ownership of tourism businesses and activities, ensuring that they can effectively cater to tourists while promoting local culture and attractions.

4) Economic Development through Job Creation: Human capital development should focus on creating jobs and establishing professions within the tourism sector. This approach serves as a critical driver for local economic development and income distribution, leveraging tourism as a catalyst for broader community prosperity.

5) Inclusive Participation of the Elderly: Prioritizing the elderly in the tourism development process is vital. As custodians of local history, culture, and wisdom, they can play a significant role by imparting their knowledge and experiences to younger generations. This inclusion not only enriches the cultural fabric of the community but also ensures that the elderly feel valued and respected within society.

6) Youth Engagement and Career Development: Sustainable development must encompass the education and involvement of local youth groups. By providing targeted educational programs and career planning resources, these groups can forge pathways that either directly or indirectly contribute to the tourism industry, thereby ensuring long-term sustainability.



7) Leadership and Technology Integration: Finally, enhancing the capabilities of community tourism leaders through the use of information technology is critical. Leaders should be equipped to drive various community-based tourism activities, from marketing and customer service to resource management and data analytics, which are essential for modern tourism management.

These guidelines not only aim to develop human capital but also strive to create a sustainable, inclusive, and economically viable tourism sector that benefits all members of the community in Suphan Buri Province. See Figure 2 for training of community leaders and local residents.



**Figure 2** Training of community leaders and local residents.

**Source:** Authors

In summary, the research findings revealed that community members responsible for tourism services expressed a desire to improve their capabilities in being good hosts with a service mind. They emphasized qualities such as being good hosts, understanding local tourism service standards, analyzing tourist behavior, and improving language and communication used to welcome visitors. Key areas of improvement included community-based tourism management, service skills, English communication, public relations, tourism activity development, creating tourism routes, and maintaining hygiene and safety standards.

## **Discussion**

### **5.1. Public Participation in Community-Based Tourism Management in Suphan Buri Province**

The investigation into public participation within the framework of community-based tourism management in Suphan Buri Province, aimed at developing tourism for Thai tourists in the context of the New Normal, revealed a high level of engagement across various sectors, including environmental stewardship, facility management, community involvement, tourist satisfaction, and human resource development. This finding supports the assertions of Tancharoen (2018), who advocated for community-based tourism as a participatory approach where community members not only determine the direction of tourism activities but also equally share the benefits and responsibilities. This model leverages local assets such as natural landscapes, historical sites, cultural traditions, and community production methods to foster sustainable tourism management. By enhancing the knowledge and skills of community members and involving them significantly in decision-making and planning processes, the approach aims to deliver long-term benefits to future generations and considers the preservation of local ecological and cultural integrity as essential.

Moreover, the principles highlighted by Phuwanatwichit et al. (2015) further highlight the effectiveness of community-based tourism. They posited that such an approach not only stimulates the local economy by granting communities the autonomy to manage local resources, including natural, environmental, and social capital, but also enhances community pride and identity. Community-based tourism encourages collective ownership and management of resources, focuses on the effective utilization of these resources, and promotes local careers, thereby strengthening family and community bonds. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of sustainability, advocating for tourism models that respect the carrying capacity of the environment, thereby ensuring that the influx of tourists remains within manageable limits to prevent adverse impacts. The synthesis of these perspectives illustrates a comprehensive model of community-based tourism that is deeply embedded in the principles of sustainability, empowerment, and participatory governance. It highlights the transformative potential of such initiatives in fostering not only economic development but also social cohesion and environmental stewardship within the communities of Suphan Buri Province. This model serves as a blueprint for other regions aiming to develop tourism in a way that is inclusive, sustainable, and beneficial to all stakeholders involved.

Furthermore, the investigation into public participation within community-based tourism management revealed a pervasive low level of engagement across several crucial areas, namely in receiving benefits, monitoring and evaluation, problem identification and decision-making, and planning and operations. These findings align with research conducted

by Chongketkorn and Kaewnuch (2021), who observed similar patterns of limited participation in the sustainable tourism management of Phuket Old Town, particularly among Generation Y. Their study indicated that participation was notably deficient in areas such as accessing tourism-related information, contributing to decision-making processes, and engaging in monitoring and evaluation activities, with the latter being the least developed.

The theoretical underpinnings provided by Cohen and Uphoff (1980) emphasize that effective participation should ensure that all community members are involved and benefit from development activities. They argue that participation is not merely a mechanism for engagement but should also balance the distribution of both quantitative and qualitative benefits among the community members. It is crucial, therefore, to assess the benefit incidence—that is, who benefits from tourism development projects—and to consider the potential positive and negative impacts. Such impacts can have profound implications, potentially disadvantaging certain individuals or groups within society while benefiting others. This comprehensive approach to understanding participation reflects the need for a more structured and inclusive process within community-based tourism initiatives. Ensuring broad-based participation is essential for achieving sustainable tourism development that benefits the entire community. Moreover, the findings suggest a need for strategies that not only enhance the level of participation but also address the quality and effectiveness of that participation to ensure that it leads to tangible benefits and mitigates any potential negative outcomes. This requires a thoughtful consideration of how tourism development initiatives are planned, implemented, and evaluated, with a focus on equitable and inclusive practices that empower all community members.

## **5.2. Examination of the Human Capital Competency Development Model in Community-Based Tourism**

The investigation into the model for human capital competency development through community-based tourism in Suphan Buri Province under the New Normal paradigm reveals a comprehensive and high-level approach encompassing various critical aspects. Notably, these aspects include leadership, partnership/connection/network, resource mobilization, and skills and knowledge. The findings resonate with those presented by Poonswan and Tantivirun (2022), who explored the development of human capital capabilities within sustainable tourism economies. Their research emphasized the imperative of nurturing personnel as the cornerstone of tourism human capital and advocating for rigorous training programs aimed at maximizing potential. Such training encompasses enhancing multilingual communication abilities, service-oriented soft skills, and ensuring the provision of convenient and safe travel experiences.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of community-based tourism in facilitating economic opportunities through the promotion of natural areas and traditional lifestyles, which not only generate income but also help in preserving local cultures and promoting the sale of local handicrafts. The comprehensive development of human capital in this context is seen across three key dimensions: environmental sustainability, economic development for improving quality of life, and social dimensions that foster community cohesion and cultural preservation. Echoing these insights, Nadler (1990) conceptualized human resources development as structured learning experiences designed within a specific timeframe to enhance work capabilities. This definition stresses the significance of systematic training, learning, and development initiatives as pivotal elements in fostering a skilled and capable workforce within the tourism sector.

This model's success in Suphan Buri Province accentuates the effectiveness of integrating environmental, economic, and social strategies to enhance human capital in tourism, reflecting a holistic approach that not only enhances tourism competencies but also contributes to sustainable community development. The integration of these strategies ensures that tourism development is not only economically beneficial but also socially responsible and environmentally sustainable, aligning with broader global trends towards sustainable development in the tourism industry.

### **5.3. Guidelines for Human Capital Competency Development in Community-Based Tourism in Suphan Buri Province**

In response to the evolving dynamics of tourism under the New Normal, the development of human capital in community-based tourism in Suphan Buri Province focuses on enhancing the local economy through innovative business models and the creative economy. The guidelines center on the critical identification and enhancement of human capital within the community, highlighting the fundamental role of "people" in driving development across economic, social, and cultural dimensions. This development strategy is essential for fostering a holistic growth that benefits all community members.

The local human capital is categorized into four primary groups: Tourism businesses and manpower, the local populace, seniors, and youth forces. Each group plays a pivotal role within the tourism framework, necessitating targeted competency enhancements to fully leverage their potential. The essential areas of focus for development include:

- 1) Tourism Service Skills: Improving service skills is crucial for maintaining competitiveness and ensuring visitor satisfaction.
- 2) Knowledge and Understanding of Tourist Attractions: This involves equipping all stakeholders with comprehensive information about local attractions to enhance promotion and engagement.

3) English Communication Skills: Building English language proficiency is vital to cater to international tourists and improve overall service delivery.

4) Community-Based Tourism Management: Developing effective management skills that align with sustainable community tourism practices.

5) Hygiene and Safety: Emphasizing standards of cleanliness and safety to protect both tourists and local communities.

These developmental imperatives align with broader studies in the field. For instance, research by Mulmit et al. (2019) on health tourism in Western Thailand highlighted similar competencies, underscoring the importance of service skills, knowledge about attractions, and hygiene standards to elevate tourism quality. Additionally, Pankaew et al. (2020) explored human capital needs in Mook Island, Trang Province, identifying crucial areas such as professional, personal relationship, cognitive, and business skills development. These findings indicate the importance of a comprehensive approach to human capital development that enhances both professional and personal competencies, ensuring that community members are well-equipped to meet international standards in tourism service delivery.

## **Suggestions**

### **Policy Suggestion for Ong Phra Subdistrict Administrative Organization**

The fieldwork conducted in the Ong Phra Subdistrict, Dan Chang District, Suphan Buri Province, has equipped the Ong Phra Subdistrict Administrative Organization (SAO) with valuable insights, enabling the formulation of strategic policies to enhance community-based tourism and human capital development. The SAO is advised to develop targeted policies that focus on enhancing local residents' skills through specific training programs in language proficiency, customer service, tourism management, and safety practices, thereby boosting service quality and empowering the workforce. Additionally, strategic plans should promote sustainable tourism that leverages local resources while preserving environmental and cultural integrity, incorporating infrastructure development and sustainable resource management, and supporting local arts to generate additional community income. To ensure inclusivity and efficacy in these initiatives, the SAO should foster partnerships with local businesses, NGOs, and stakeholders, facilitating a collaborative approach to tourism development. These policies and plans should be dynamic, with mechanisms for periodic evaluation and adaptation to ensure long-term sustainability and community benefit, setting a robust model for effective community-based tourism development.

### **Management Suggestion**

The research findings indicate a concerning low level of community engagement in the management and operations of community-based tourism, necessitating targeted interventions by government agencies and tourism stakeholders. To address this issue, it is vital to develop and implement educational activities that enhance community members' understanding of the objectives and potential societal benefits of tourism initiatives, particularly targeting those currently disengaged from operations. Furthermore, promoting and supporting active citizenship and community participation in the conservation and development of local tourist attractions is essential. This approach should foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among residents towards their cultural and natural heritage, encouraging community-led initiatives and providing platforms for community voices in planning and decision-making processes to ensure sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

### **Academic Suggestion**

The findings from this research suggest a strategic collaboration between government agencies and educational institutions to foster the development and training of various human capital groups engaged in tourism, such as business owners, workers, residents of working age, elderly individuals, and youth groups. This partnership should focus on equipping these groups with essential skills in community-based tourism management, enhancing their knowledge of tourist destinations, and improving basic English communication abilities. Additionally, there should be a concerted effort to train these individuals in delivering quality tourist services and ensuring health and safety at tourist destinations. Such educational initiatives would not only enhance the professional capabilities of those directly involved in the tourism sector but also ensure a sustainable and inclusive growth in the tourism industry, thereby enhancing the overall visitor experience and promoting long-term economic and social benefits for the community.

### **Future Research Suggestions**

Future research in the field of community-based tourism should prioritize two key areas to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of tourism practices. Firstly, there is a need to explore the service design within Thai hospitality brands, specifically how they can be aligned with community-based tourism principles to enhance both guest satisfaction and community benefit. This would include examining how traditional Thai hospitality elements can be integrated with modern tourism demands to create unique, culturally rich experiences that support local economies. Secondly, future studies should aim to develop a model curriculum for human capital competency development specifically tailored to the needs of community-based tourism. This curriculum could focus on equipping individuals involved in

tourism with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively contribute to and benefit from tourism activities. The curriculum should cover areas such as sustainable tourism practices, local culture and heritage preservation, modern hospitality skills, and environmental management. This would not only improve the quality of tourism services offered but also ensure that these enhancements contribute to the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector and its positive integration into local communities.

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