



## PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL CAPITAL TO PROMOTE CULTURAL TOURISM OF KALASIN PROVINCE: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Kalasin Province, located in northeastern Thailand, is rich in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including ancient archaeological sites, revered Buddhist temples, traditional Phu Thai and Pong Lang folk art, and longstanding community rituals. However, in recent years, the province has faced increasing challenges in preserving and managing this cultural wealth. Rapid urbanization, youth migration to urban centers, and the commodification of cultural practices for tourism have led to the dilution of traditional values and the erosion of authentic community participation in heritage activities. Additionally, local stakeholders have expressed concerns about the limited involvement of communities in tourism planning and the growing disconnect between tourism development and Buddhist ethical principles. This research explores the strategic integration of participatory cultural capital management in Kalasin Province with a particular emphasis on Buddhist perspectives. The core objectives were: To develop a sustainable model of cultural tourism rooted in Buddhist values and ethical responsibility, and to empower local communities to actively engage in decision-making processes that preserve and celebrate cultural expressions such as ceremonies, crafts, and indigenous knowledge. The study responds to the urgent need to balance economic modernization with cultural preservation by proposing an inclusive, community-led model of cultural tourism. It further addresses the threats of globalization by positioning Buddhist ethical principles and spiritual values as guiding frameworks for a more resilient and culturally grounded tourism strategy.

**Methodology:** This qualitative study followed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design and utilized participatory observation ( $n = 100$ ), semi-structured interviews ( $n = 19$ ), and a focus group discussion ( $n = 7$ ) involving local leaders, artisans, monks, tourism operators, and residents as key informants. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by principles of cultural capital theory and Buddhist ethical frameworks. The study focused on identifying participatory mechanisms that enable community engagement in managing cultural resources and evaluating such involvement's socio-cultural impacts.



**Main Results:** Findings indicate that participatory management fosters a sense of ownership, enhances cultural pride, and contributes to the preservation of both tangible assets (e.g., Heritage Sites) and intangible practices (e.g., Rituals, Storytelling, Festivals). Local stakeholders actively engaged in shaping tourism initiatives, co-designing experiences that reflect authentic community values while appealing to visitors seeking meaningful cultural interactions. The research also found that such approaches build stronger social cohesion, facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer, and promote adaptive strategies in response to globalization and modern influences. Educational programs and community forums were identified as critical tools for reinforcing cultural literacy and ensuring broad participation.

**Involvement to Buddhadhamma:** This study applied core Buddhist principles to guide the development of a participatory cultural tourism model in Kalasin Province. Grounded in Karuṇā (Compassion), Paṭiccasamuppāda (Interconnectedness), and Sotthi (Communal Well-Being), these principles were integrated to promote ethical tourism practices rooted in cultural respect and social equity. Buddhism served not only as a cultural reference but also as a practical framework for fostering inclusion, dignity, and shared benefit among stakeholders. Within this model, cultural tourism becomes an expression of Dhamma in action, supporting spiritual growth, mindful engagement, and community harmony alongside economic sustainability.

**Conclusions:** This research concludes that participatory cultural capital management, when deeply rooted in Buddhist ethical perspectives, can transform tourism into a sustainable and spiritually enriching practice. By empowering local communities to co-create tourism experiences and manage cultural resources, the proposed model strengthens social resilience, preserves cultural heritage, and enhances mutual understanding between tourists and local residents. The findings advocate for inclusive tourism strategies that are not only economically viable but also ethically aligned and culturally respectful, ensuring that Kalasin's unique identity is preserved and celebrated. This Buddhist-informed participatory model offers a transferable framework for culturally rich regions aiming to balance traditional heritage with innovative tourism strategies rooted in ethical and spiritual principles.

**Keywords:** Participatory Management, Cultural Tourism, Buddhist Perspectives, Kalasin Province

## Introduction

A comprehensive understanding of participatory management within the context of cultural tourism necessitates an examination of the underlying spiritual philosophies common to the region, particularly given the deep influences of Buddhism in Thai culture. This foundational perspective not only shapes the values and practices of local communities but also informs their approach to managing cultural capital. In Kalasin Province, the intricate relationship between Buddhism and community life provides a unique lens through which the potential of cultural tourism can be harnessed. Local traditions, rituals, and festivals often reflect Buddhist principles, emphasizing harmony, sustainability, and collective well-being. By involving communities directly in the stewardship of their cultural assets, a tourism model can be established that is both economically viable and



ethically aligned with local spiritual values (Khuenkhaew, Phromlah, Chueasakhoo, & Singhapat, 2025). Prior research related to participatory management, cultural tourism, and Buddhist ethics has highlighted that participatory approaches can significantly enhance the preservation of cultural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism practices (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Engaging local stakeholders in tourism planning empowers communities, reinforces a sense of ownership, and ensures that developments resonate with the authentic cultural identity of the area. Unlike conventional tourism models that may impose external interpretations, participatory frameworks enable a more cohesive integration of cultural capital. This is especially crucial for protecting intangible heritage elements, such as storytelling, rituals, and community knowledge, which are often vulnerable to neglect. The infusion of Buddhist teachings into participatory strategies ensures that development initiatives remain respectful of the values cherished by the community.

Cultural capital in Kalasin includes both tangible heritage—such as historical sites and religious landmarks—and intangible traditions like local craftsmanship and oral histories. These resources, when enhanced through community-driven strategies, contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to higher tourist engagement and satisfaction, leading to broader economic gains (Braun et al., 2013); (Bennett et al., 2016). When communities—especially those deeply rooted in Buddhist values of compassion and shared responsibility—are invited to co-create tourism experiences, the resulting initiatives are more inclusive and culturally resonant. This collaborative model not only supports the protection of cultural heritage but also nurtures a tourism sector that reflects and upholds the spiritual and social values of the local population. Kalasin Province, situated in northeastern Thailand, is a region rich in cultural heritage and spiritual traditions. Known for its distinctive blend of prehistoric, ethnic, and Buddhist influences, Kalasin holds significant archaeological and anthropological value. It is home to important historical sites such as Phu Kum Khao Dinosaur Excavation Site, Wat Klang, and Phra That Yakhu, as well as the renowned Phrae Wa silk weaving tradition preserved by the Phu Thai ethnic community. These tangible and intangible heritages are deeply embedded in the province's socio-cultural identity and reflect a unique confluence of Theravāda Buddhist philosophy, animist rituals, and local wisdom (Wannakit, 2023). Spiritual practices in Kalasin are closely interwoven with daily community life. Annual festivals, temple ceremonies, and merit-making rituals are not only expressions of religious devotion but also reinforce communal values such as interdependence, generational knowledge transfer, and harmony with nature—tenets strongly aligned with Buddhist ethics. Temples serve as centers for both spiritual instruction and cultural preservation, especially in rural areas where monks often assume leadership roles in local development initiatives (Prasert, 2024). Despite Kalasin's rich cultural and spiritual landscape, scholarly engagement with the province's participatory approaches to cultural tourism remains limited. While several studies have addressed Isan regional identity, Buddhist influences on local governance, and community-based tourism in northern and central Thailand, relatively few have examined how Buddhist ethical frameworks are integrated into the participatory management of cultural capital in Kalasin specifically. Moreover, existing literature often overlooks the agency of local actors,



particularly artisans, women, and monastics, in shaping tourism models rooted in socio-spiritual sustainability (Phathong et al., 2025).

Furthermore, most tourism research in Thailand prioritizes economic indicators and visitor satisfaction, underexploring the moral, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions that underpin cultural preservation and community empowerment. This gap becomes especially evident in the context of global tourism trends, which increasingly call for ethical, equitable, and ecologically conscious frameworks. This study addresses these gaps by examining Kalasin Province not merely as a site of cultural consumption but as a living ecosystem of Buddhist-informed participatory governance, where spirituality, identity, and tourism development are harmonized through community engagement. By situating cultural tourism within a Buddhist ethical paradigm, this research offers a needed shift from utilitarian tourism models toward a more inclusive and spiritually grounded perspective.

Culturally rich provinces like Kalasin present an ideal context for reimagining sustainable tourism through the integration of spiritual and cultural dimensions. In particular, Buddhist perspectives offer a compelling ethical and philosophical framework for guiding cultural tourism strategies that are not only economically viable but also spiritually enriching and socially inclusive. Understanding the local social fabric and deeply rooted spiritual beliefs is essential for designing tourism initiatives that align with community values and foster long-term resilience (Daniel et al., 2012); (Burkhard et al., 2009). In the face of increasing pressures from modernization and globalization, such as commodification and cultural dilution, sustainable tourism in Kalasin must draw upon community participation, traditional wisdom, and Buddhist ethical teachings—including mindfulness (Sati), interconnectedness (Paṭṭiccasamuppāda), and compassion (Karunā)—to cultivate ethical engagement among both residents and visitors. This integrated approach resonates with global discourses on spiritual ecology and cultural sustainability, which emphasize the preservation of intangible heritage and the promotion of meaningful cultural interactions. By embedding local insights, spiritual values, and community aspirations into the heart of tourism strategies, Kalasin can build a tourism system that is resilient, inclusive, and ethically grounded. Such a model promotes stewardship, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and equitable benefit-sharing, thereby preserving the province's unique identity while contributing to the well-being of its people (Jamal et al., 2009); (Okazaki, 2008); (R-Ting et al., 2021). In doing so, Kalasin emerges as a national exemplar of holistic, culturally sensitive, and spiritually informed tourism development, reflecting a harmonious coexistence between heritage preservation and economic transformation (Li et al., 2020); (Scheidel et al., 2020); (Verschuuren et al., 2021).

### Objectives

This research aimed to develop a sustainable model of cultural tourism in Kalasin Province by promoting participatory management rooted in Buddhist values and to empower local communities to actively engage in decision-making processes that preserve and celebrate cultural expressions such as ceremonies, crafts, and local wisdom. The study emphasizes ethical and spiritual considerations in tourism, aligning management strategies with the Buddhist principles that guide community life. Additionally, it addresses the challenges of modernization and globalization by proposing innovative



frameworks that support both cultural integrity and economic development. Ultimately, the objective is to strengthen community identity, ensure social justice, and position cultural capital as a driver for resilient and inclusive regional growth.

## Methodology

This qualitative research employed participatory observation involving 100 participants, semi-structured interviews with 19 key informants, and focus group discussions comprising 7 participants. Key stakeholders included local leaders, artisans, monks, tourism operators, and residents. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by principles of cultural capital theory and Buddhist ethical frameworks. The study focused on identifying participatory mechanisms that enable community engagement in managing cultural resources and on evaluating the socio-cultural impacts of such involvement.

To ensure alignment with its objectives, this qualitative study strategically employed multiple data collection methods, each contributing uniquely to the research aims. Participatory observation involving 100 participants allowed researchers to witness firsthand the dynamic processes of cultural expression and community engagement, thus revealing how participatory mechanisms function in practice. Semi-structured interviews with 19 key informants—including monks, artisans, and local leaders—provided in-depth insights into the socio-cultural impacts of tourism and the integration of Buddhist ethical principles such as compassion (*Karuṇā*) and interdependence (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*). Focus group discussions comprising seven participants served as platforms for collective reflection, validating emerging themes and enabling stakeholders to co-develop sustainable strategies for cultural tourism management. These qualitative methods were analyzed using thematic analysis, grounded in cultural capital theory and Buddhist ethical frameworks, ensuring that findings were both contextually rich and philosophically coherent. Each method thus contributed directly to the study's aims: Identifying participatory mechanisms, evaluating socio-cultural impacts, and embedding Buddhist values into a model of sustainable tourism.

## Results and Discussion

### **The development of a sustainable model of cultural tourism rooted in Buddhist values and ethical responsibility (Objective 1)**

The research found that grounding cultural tourism in Buddhist ethics provided a compelling framework for sustainable development in Kalasin Province. Buddhist principles such as *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Interdependence), and *Sotthi* (Communal Well-Being) were not merely abstract values but active components of tourism strategy. Informants emphasized that tourism became a form of merit-making and mindfulness when rooted in Dhamma. One local monk remarked, "Tourism here is not for Entertainment but for Enlightenment. We Offer Stories, not Shows." This ethical positioning not only elevated the spiritual depth of tourist experiences but also strengthened local pride and dignity in cultural expression. These findings echo Burkhard et al. (2009), who argue that culturally grounded tourism systems enhance both authenticity and sustainability.



Unlike conventional models that commodify culture, Kalasin's approach used Buddhist teachings to guide participatory governance, ensuring that tourism remained respectful and harmonious with community life (Jamal & Stronza, 2009); (Prasert, 2024).

The participatory framework also fostered new forms of collaboration and co-creation between local communities and external stakeholders. The model emphasized inclusive dialogues in temples, ethical training for tourism operators, and educational programs that integrated local wisdom with Buddhist philosophy. As illustrated in Figure 1, stakeholders-such as monks, artisans, and village leaders-were depicted as interconnected agents forming a holistic ecosystem. These structural elements allowed community members to voice concerns and shape tourism activities in line with their spiritual values. Compared to top-down tourism policies observed in other provinces, this model cultivated a sense of collective ownership and moral obligation. Previous studies (Bennett et al., 2016) note the importance of community empowerment in preserving intangible heritage, but this study advances the discourse by operationalizing Buddhist ethics in the planning and execution stages. The result is a spiritually sustainable model that not only supports local economies but also embodies the moral worldview of Kalasin's residents.



**Figure 1** A Sustainable Model of Cultural Tourism



As can be seen in the figure titled "A Sustainable Model of Cultural Tourism", it presents four interrelated pillars-Economic, Ethical, Spiritual, and Communal-surrounding a central Buddha image, symbolizing the guiding influence of Buddhist principles in shaping tourism practices in Kalasin Province. Each segment reflects a key domain emphasized by informants during participatory action research. The Economic aspect highlights how tourism has generated income for local artisans and small businesses, with one shop owner noting, "When Tourists Come for the Silk Festival, My Sales Triple." However, economic development was consciously tied to cultural preservation, as locals were encouraged to share traditional knowledge with visitors. The Ethical domain, represented by the scales of justice, underscores moral responsibility in tourism practices. Monks and community leaders emphasized *Sīla* (Moral Conduct) and right intention as essential values, ensuring that tourism respects cultural norms and avoids exploitation. A monk stated, "If Tourism Brings Only Profit but no Wisdom, then it will Damage our Roots," pointing to the need for ethically guided partnerships and respectful tourist behavior.

The Spiritual and Communal dimensions reinforce the socio-cultural depth of the model. The lotus flower in the Spiritual quadrant reflects the integration of meditation, merit-making, and mindfulness into tourism experiences. Programs such as temple stays and Dhamma tours were not only income-generating but spiritually transformative, as one guide shared, "Tourists Come Curious, but they Leave Peaceful." The Communal segment, depicted by group icons, represents active community participation in decision-making. Informants noted that youth and women now lead cultural events, reversing prior patterns of marginalization. One elder shared, "Now our Young People are not Running Away-they are Leading Festivals and Telling our Stories." At the core of the model, the Buddha figure ties all elements together through the Buddhist concept of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Interdependence), emphasizing that sustainable tourism emerges from the balance of economic, ethical, spiritual, and communal forces. This model aligns with findings by Jamal and Stronza (2009); Verschuuren et al. (2021), who advocate for spiritually informed, participatory approaches to cultural heritage management.

**To empower local communities to actively engage in decision-making processes that preserve and celebrate cultural expressions such as ceremonies, crafts, and indigenous knowledge (Objective 2)**

The study revealed that community empowerment in Kalasin was achieved by actively involving diverse groups-women, youth, monks, and artisans-in decision-making regarding cultural tourism. Unlike earlier practices where locals were treated as performers or passive beneficiaries, this model positioned them as cultural curators. For instance, a female artisan shared, "Now We decide which Crafts to Present and How We Want them to be Explained. It's no Longer Outsiders Telling our Story." Through participatory action research, villagers contributed to event planning, cultural site interpretation, and the integration of rituals such as Bun Bang Fai into tourism calendars. These findings align with Okazaki's (2008) community-based tourism model but go further by foregrounding ethical agency and cultural sovereignty. Interventions such as temple-based forums and local heritage committees enhanced cultural literacy and encouraged dialogue between generations-allowing



the youth to inherit both craft knowledge and a sense of civic responsibility (Canedoli et al., 2017); (Li et al., 2020).

Moreover, the study emphasized the role of Buddhist ethical education in reinforcing community participation. Local monks frequently led workshops on mindful consumption, the meaning of merit-making, and the spiritual relevance of traditional ceremonies. These engagements helped participants view tourism not as exploitation but as cultural exchange. One youth participant said, "I Used to See Weaving as Old-fashioned. Now I Teach it to Tourists and Feel Proud Doing So." This shift in mindset reflects a deeper transformation in the perception of cultural identity. Ethical tourism also countered the risks of commercialization, as villagers were empowered to reject exploitative partnerships and instead form cooperatives based on trust, transparency, and shared values (Braun et al., 2013); (Bennett et al., 2016). The result is a model where cultural expressions such as Phrae Wa weaving and Buddhist rituals are not commodified but celebrated as living traditions. By aligning Buddhist ethics with participatory governance, Kalasin created a resilient and inclusive tourism strategy that honors both the past and the agency of present communities (Verschuur et al., 2021); (Mayer, 2018).

## Originality and Body of Knowledge

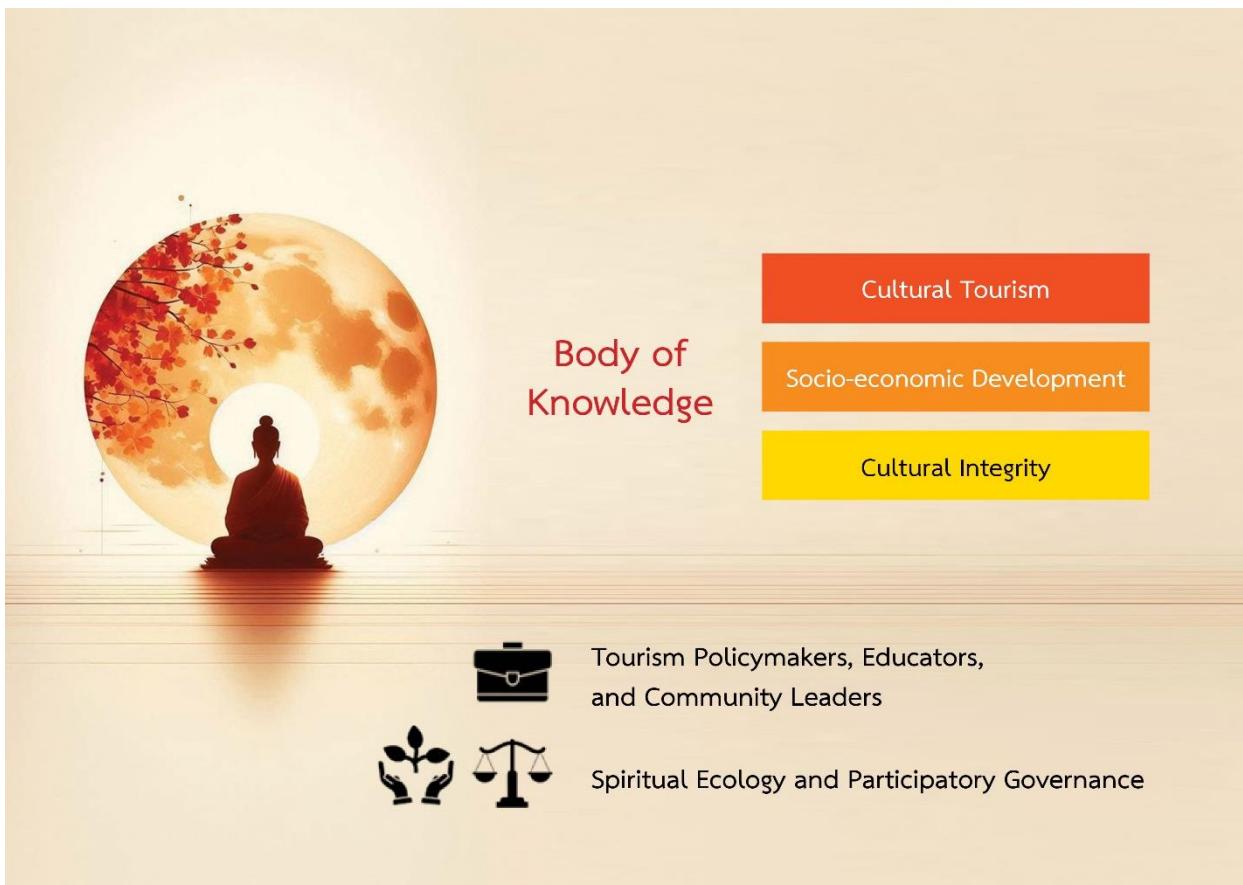
What differentiates this study from previous research is its explicit integration of Buddhist ethical principles into the participatory management of cultural tourism-a dimension largely overlooked in existing literature. While prior studies have examined community-based tourism and cultural heritage preservation, they often emphasize economic development or stakeholder collaboration without deeply engaging with the spiritual and moral frameworks that shape local practices. This research fills that gap by grounding its model in core Buddhist values such as Karuṇā (Compassion), Sati (Mindfulness), and Paṭṭiccasamuppāda (Interconnectedness), offering a culturally congruent and ethically guided approach to tourism governance. In doing so, the study not only advances theoretical discourse on ethical tourism and cultural capital management but also provides a replicable model rooted in spiritual sustainability-positioning Kalasin Province as a case study in how Buddhist ethics can serve as a foundation for inclusive, resilient, and culturally respectful tourism development.

This research presents a novel integration of participatory cultural capital management and Buddhist ethical frameworks to promote sustainable cultural tourism in Kalasin Province, Thailand. Its originality lies in reframing tourism development not only as an economic enterprise but as a spiritually grounded, community-led endeavor that respects both tangible and intangible heritage. Unlike conventional studies that often treat local traditions as marketable assets, this study positions cultural expressions-such as rituals, festivals, and local craftsmanship-as intrinsic elements of identity and collective memory, safeguarded through community engagement and Buddhist principles such as particularly compassion (Karuṇā), interconnectedness (Paṭṭiccasamuppāda), and Communal Well-Being (Sotthi).



Methodologically, the study contributes to academic advancement by employing a mixed-methods approach anchored in Participatory Action Research (PAR), which positions local stakeholders—not as passive respondents, but as active co-researchers—in the design, implementation, and evaluation of tourism strategies. This approach enhances the validity, relevance, and contextual sensitivity of the research, as it captures lived experiences, indigenous knowledge systems, and culturally specific forms of agency. By integrating qualitative tools such as participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, the study ensures a multidimensional understanding of how cultural tourism operates within the socio-religious fabric of Kalasin Province. The participatory model not only reinforces local ownership and fosters social learning, but it also aligns with contemporary discourses on decolonizing research, ethical tourism, inclusive governance, and bottom-up development. Most notably, the study's incorporation of Buddhist ethical considerations—such as *Sīla* (Moral Conduct), *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Sati* (Mindfulness), and *Sammā-Diṭṭhi* (Right View) into tourism management practices represent a novel methodological innovation. This spiritual-ethical integration fills a significant void in tourism and heritage studies, where moral and philosophical frameworks are often marginalized in favor of economic or policy-centric perspectives. By embedding Buddhist ethics into both the research design and the resulting tourism model, this study not only enhances its cultural resonance but also contributes a unique perspective to the broader field of sustainable and community-led tourism scholarship.

In terms of the body of knowledge, this study significantly expands the theoretical understanding of how cultural tourism can function as a vehicle for socio-economic development while simultaneously preserving cultural integrity amid the forces of modernization and globalization. By grounding its framework in Buddhist ethical principles and community-driven governance, the study responds directly to global calls for more ethically grounded and culturally sensitive models of sustainable tourism. It contributes to the evolving discourse on spiritual ecology, emphasizing that tourism must not only be environmentally and economically sustainable but also spiritually and morally attuned to the values of host communities. This is particularly relevant in the context of ongoing international debates on the commodification of culture and the search for alternative development paradigms that prioritize well-being over profit. Furthermore, the study aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for The Goals), by presenting a replicable, community-empowering model that values inclusive participation, cultural continuity, and ethical partnerships. The findings offer an actionable framework for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors in other culturally rich regions, contributing to broader discussions on participatory governance, spiritual sustainability, and resilient cultural economies. Ultimately, this study illustrates that integrating local wisdom and religious worldviews into tourism planning not only safeguards heritage but also fosters empowered, cohesive communities capable of navigating global change on their own terms. As illustrated in Figure 2



**Figure 2** Body of Knowledge

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This research concludes that the participatory management of cultural capital, when guided by Buddhist perspectives, offers a powerful and adaptable model for sustainable cultural tourism development in Kalasin Province. By integrating local wisdom and Buddhist ethical principles—such as compassion, interconnectedness, and collective responsibility—tourism initiatives are aligned with community values and spiritual heritage. Active engagement of local stakeholders in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes enhances cultural preservation, strengthens social cohesion, and promotes inclusive economic benefits. The study confirms that both tangible heritage (e.g., Historical Landmarks) and intangible heritage (e.g., Rituals and Crafts) are more effectively maintained when communities possess ownership and agency. The inclusion of Buddhist teachings fosters respectful, mindful, and socially responsible tourism practices, positioning Kalasin Province as a cultural destination and a replicable model for spiritually informed, community-led tourism development in Thailand and beyond. The study recommends several actions to further advance this approach: 1) Institutionalizing participatory management through government policies; 2) Building community capacity with targeted training for artisans, youth, and women; 3) Integrating Buddhist ethics into tourism codes of conduct and educational materials; 4) Designing immersive educational tourism programs such as temple stays and craft workshops; 5) Establishing community-led systems for monitoring tourism's social, economic, and environmental impacts; 6) Fostering Ethical



partnerships among community groups, private sectors, and academia based on transparency and mutual benefit; 7) Encouraging replication of this model in other culturally rich provinces, particularly within the Mekong region; and 8) Launching public awareness campaigns to promote cultural preservation and ethical engagement among both locals and tourists. In summary, the participatory and Buddhist-informed approach demonstrated in Kalasin provides a valuable national and regional benchmark, illustrating how tradition, spirituality, and economic development can harmoniously coexist in advancing sustainable and culturally respectful tourism.

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