



Development of a sustainable tourist destination based on the creative economy: A case study of Klong Kone Mangrove Community, Thailand

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Abstract

Klong Kone Mangrove Community in Central Thailand is a famous destination for eco-tourism. The sustainability of tourist destinations is of vital concern to the creative economy concept. Thus, participatory action research was applied to investigate the local tourist attractions, to identify this destination's problems, and to discuss potential solutions among the participants in the community. The results demonstrated that the main issue at this destination is the unequal distribution of income generated by tourism, which has caused severe conflicts among the local people. The solutions sourced from the panel discussion and questionnaires indicated that the majority of local people should be involved in the tourism industry and that tourism careers can attract younger people to return and work at home after graduation. Moreover, in order to enhance this destination's sustainability based on the creative economy concept, the results from the study were summarized and four significant identities of Klong Kone were suggested: mangrove planting, opossum shrimp paste, water sports activities, and seafood restaurants. All of these should be promoted based on four keys: 1) careful design and planning in line with creative ideas, 2) prudence in the design and planning of tourism development that corresponds to the market, 3) community involvement that is capable of thinking, planning, using resources, and sharing consequences, and 4) designing tourism that adheres to the concepts of sustainable tourism.

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Introduction

The Klong Kone Mangrove Community is located in Klong Kone sub-district, Mueang district, Samut Songkhram province, Thailand. It is one of the most popular mangrove forest destinations for tourists visiting Thailand. There are many reasons why tourists come to visit this destination, such as its location on the Gulf of Thailand and its relatively close (72 km) proximity to Bangkok, as well as

its tourist activities that consist of many recreational activities provided for tourists including mangrove reforestation, water skiing, observing coastal fisheries, and harvesting cockles. The attractiveness of these activities blends well with the natural surroundings to create an enjoyable, new, and unique experience associated with the community. For these reasons, Klong Kone sub-district has recently been focusing on the development of its tourism industry. The number of tourists has steadily increased, as have the various associated problems such as deterioration of the attractions of the destination and its environment, as well as social issues. Thus, this research aimed to determine the community's potential and then to synthesize and

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develop a sustainable tourism development model based on the creative economy and the involvement of the community. The research results can contribute to the involvement of all local people within the tourism industry. Through the creative economy, the value of the local resources and wisdom can be recovered and promoted.

Literature Review

The main aim of this study focused on the theories of sustainable tourism development and the concepts of the creative economy. These were applied to the proposed destination in order to help the community create effective strategies that can be implemented.

Sustainable Tourism Development

The concept and origin of sustainability was unofficially established in 1713 by von Carlowitz, who strongly asserted that the ongoing management of resources was the central idea of the concept of sustainable development (Waas, Hugé, Verbruggen, & Wright, 2011). This idea was redefined again as a broad political vision in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987). They operationalized the concept of sustainability as the fulfilling of the needs of the present generation while allowing future generations to receive sufficiently high levels of benefits to meet their own needs. These goals are stated in the various definitions of sustainable tourism. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) definition is the one most commonly acknowledged (Dorcheh & Mohamed, 2012), in which sustainable tourism is defined as the process that leads to the management of all resources in order to be able to meet the current demands of tourists, while simultaneously preserving the benefits for the future, especially in the economic, social and environmental dimensions, as well as the development of the local tourism industry to enhance the needs of people in the future along with the needs of present-day tourists and host communities (WTO, 1995). From the point of view of Mowforth and Munt (2009), sustainable tourism is “one among other new forms of tourism that focuses on environmental issues that have been relabeled from ‘ecotourism’, which if sustainable tourism can play a role beyond simply balancing the economic, social or environmental factors, and also solve the problem of poverty for people in the community, it will be more likely accepted”.

Subsequently, this idea has been accepted in almost every country around the world. The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1995) provided more details on the process leading to sustainability, which divided sustainability into three dimensions: 1) ecological sustainability is a type of development with a specific focus on the preservation of the indispensable ecology and biodiversity; 2) social and cultural sustainability is the protection of unique cultures and values, and maintains and strengthens the community identity in order to guide the community's development; and 3) economic sustainability ensures that the development is effective enough to reduce the poverty of the local population, and is compatible with the

conservation of the local resources. Furthermore, Dredge, Cox, and Fisher (2009) described five achievements of a sustainable tourism destination, which adds two more criteria: first, responding to market changes now and in the future in order to encourage the flexible development of an appropriate business model; and second, increasing the destination's attractiveness in order to increase the number of repeat visitors. Moreover, all that is mentioned above is compatible with the concepts of Mowforth and Munt (2009), who recommended seven key aspects that are useful for the sustainable development of tourism: 1) ecological sustainability, 2) social sustainability, 3) cultural sustainability, 4) economic sustainability, 5) the educational element, 6) local participation; and 7) the conservation element. Therefore, based on the World Tourism Organization (1995), Dredge et al. (2009), and Mowforth and Munt (2009), although there are varying numbers of sustainable tourism components, they are all concerned with the same broad areas of the ‘environment’, ‘economics’, and ‘society’. These are the three dimensions that Howie (2003) applied to construct the form of the ‘Triple Bottom Line’ (TBL) as a key development factor of sustainability, where the three dimensions are composed of terms that are similar in meaning to the ethical, economic, and ecological aspects of the destination.

Creative Tourism

As the creative economy has evolved and gained importance over the past two decades, the boundaries between the creative sectors have softened and creative knowledge and skills are being deployed in the wider economy (OECD, 2014). Such changes are also reflected in the developing relationship between the areas of tourism and the creative economy. Early creative tourism concepts were based on learning experiences related to traditional areas of culture and creativity. More recent models have been based on the integration of the tourism and creative industries as a whole, engaging not only consumers but also producers, policy makers, and knowledge institutions as well as related industries (Choibamroong, 2012).

Creative sectors such as design, fashion, gaming, and animation are now providing access to new markets and diversifying demand. They are also offering new possibilities to engage interactively with audiences and to facilitate co-creation with consumers, increasing engagement and developing new knowledge about customer needs. The real potential for value creation from this emerging relationship lies in the integration of tourist experiences with other creative content and concepts that can reach new target groups, help to improve the image and competitiveness of destinations, and support the growth of the creative industries and creative exports (Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2003).

The creative tourism model has the potential to influence many areas of tourism development and marketing because it implies a more innovative approach to tourism, with a shift from “hard” to “soft” infrastructure and the development of new business models. Conventional models of experience production, and consumption, such as tourism, will be supplemented by new models based on

the distribution of intangible creative content, as well as audio recordings for visitations. New technologies create opportunities for innovative crossovers between tourism and creative industries. These technologies can facilitate new tourist experiences, as well as offer new ways to develop and disseminate these experiences through social networks. Creative input can also add value and increase the accessibility of technology by providing effective consumer interfaces and attractive designs for tourism experiences. Technology has enabled new creative intermediaries, such as bloggers and creative content producers, to become involved in the creation and distribution of creative tourism experiences. These new intermediaries largely operate outside conventional tourism distribution systems and are likely to have a growing influence on the tourism choices of consumers in the future (Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2003).

Tourism organizations will therefore need to employ new marketing strategies, such as involving the networks and clusters that characterize the creative industries, because developing such linkages has the potential to generate significant benefits. The realization of these benefits is largely based on collaboration between the tourism and creative industries, as well as between the public and private sectors. As noted in a recent UNESCO report, enhancing the creative industries requires integrating all actors in a structured policy framework. This should take place at the governmental level and in the context of inter-ministerial policies, actions, and funding mechanisms, as well as at a local level through cultural entrepreneurship, and finally at a partnership level with experienced international consultants and capacity builders (Office of the Prime Minister, 2010). In order to gain more added value from linking tourism and the creative industries, a number of countries are developing integrated policy approaches that recognize the convergence of these areas and the wide range of synergies that can result. The need to integrate and stimulate convergence between the creative sectors and between tourism and the creative industries is explicitly recognized in Korea's approach to creative tourism (Intarakumnerd, 2010).

Methods

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was applied in this study based on the idea that “people would be more motivated about their work if they were involved in the

decision-making about how the workplace was run”, as mentioned by Kurt Lewin, the founder of the action research approach, in 1944 (MacDonald, 2012). This study aimed to increase the tourism opportunities available to the Klong Kone Mangrove Community; therefore, members of the community were focused on as participants throughout this study from the first action to the end of the process. There were three main actions in this study, comprising problem identification, a problem solving study, and identification of potential local community-based opportunities for creative sustainable tourism.

Furthermore, a number of tools were created and their use was planned to guide the community's actions through each step. Foremost, in every step, the researcher surveyed the community to identify the tourism resources inside the community. After that, progressing through the first PAR step, problem identification was the main part of the study, which required opinions from the stakeholders in order to reflect their viewpoints. In this part, there were three target groups: community members, community leaders, and tourists. There were 4,334 community members from seven villages; thus, 357 participants of the target population were sampled to meet the 95% confidence level using stratified sampling, which gave equal opportunity to every village by using proportionate stratified random sampling. The seven villages were divided into subgroups by sex (males 49.5% or 177 people, females 50.5% or 180 people). Then, the different population numbers from each village were used to further segment using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique into the two groups of male and female, as shown in Table 1.

The second group was composed of the community leaders or each community's headman from the seven villages (*mooban*) in Klong Kone sub-district, with two representatives from each village combined with one representative from the Sub-district Administration Organization. This group was the main group of the study which had the authority to set the community's plan, so they were included in all three steps of the study. The last group was made up of tourists who visited this province (estimated at 85,405 visitors in 2010), as recorded by the provincial office. Therefore, 400 tourists were sampled during their travels as a sample group with a 95% confidence level.

The next phase was the action to research ideas that can assist with solving the problems that were identified in the first phase. This involved participatory intervention action, in which the same 15 community leaders were the main

Table 1
Community member stratified table

7 villages (4,334 pax)	Male			Female			Total in each village
	Total 2,148	49.5%	Confidence level at 95% = 177	Total 2,186	51%	Confidence level at 95% = 180	
1	213	9.5	17	209	9.5	17	34
2	410	19	34	412	18.5	34	68
3	307	14	25	257	11.5	21	46
4	256	11.5	21	291	13.5	24	45
5	432	20.5	36	470	21.5	39	75
6	239	12	21	222	10.5	18	39
7	291	13.5	23	325	15	27	50
Total	2,148	100	177	2,186	100	180	357

group who were trained, and then taken to visit the two best practice communities of Ban Jumrung in Rayong province and Ban Nam Chiao in Trat province, which have successfully applied tourism management in Thailand.

Lastly, the community leaders were involved in a panel discussion to select and design an appropriate plan as an opportunity to develop tourism in the Klong Kone Mangrove Community. However, before initiating this critical process, all contributors had to verify the accuracy of the acquired information that was presented using the PowerPoint software package. This process was very important to help all participants to become familiar with all community issues and to adjust their attitude before setting any plans. The schedule of all actions is presented in Table 2.

Analytical methods varied depended on the collection technique. Data collected using questionnaires were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Science program (SPSS) and described using descriptive statistics while textual data from focus group discussion were subjected to identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes.

Results

The results contained various implications, including direct implications for the development of the tourism potential of the Klong Kone area, through summarizing the opinions and needs of the people in the community, the village leaders, and the tourists. However, before presenting all the result collected, the basic physical information is required to provide a clear and detailed picture of the destination. Basic physical information was concluded from secondary data searching and onsite survey which found that there were many attractions and activities that could encourage tourists to visit, including planting mangrove trees to encourage reforestation, observing sea creatures, and feeding long-tail monkeys, as well as water activities such as water skiing, collecting cockles, and observing the local fishermen. Visitors were also given a view of the typical fisherman's *kra-teng*, a roofed house without walls that is built in the sea and allows for rest and respite when fishing. In terms of amenities, it was found that there has been major and continuous expansion of the tourist

accommodation business in this area. There are now many resorts and homestay businesses that have been established in the vicinity near the central area. Most of these establishments provide simple accommodation lacking luxurious amenities. Other activities available to tourists include boat tours, restaurants, and souvenir shops that serve visitors.

As mentioned earlier, this research used PAR as the main technique to allow the local people to be involved with the tourism development in their community. The results of the study will be described for each of the three sequential stages of actions mentioned above.

Problem Identification

The problem identification was scrutinized by the three groups of informants—community members, community leaders, and tourists—as they are the best source of information regarding local tourism development.

1) Community members

The results of this section came from collecting the questionnaires completed by the local people. The demographic data from the survey of the community members showed that 177 were males and 180 were females who were mostly aged between 35 and 44 years (35%) followed by 18–24 years (15%) and 25–34 and 55–64 years (each 14%). In total, 74.5 percent of those surveyed were married. The highest educational level completed by most respondents was primary education (59.6%), followed by secondary school (29.2%), and baccalaureate education (5.2%). Most of the respondents were day laborers (35.3%), followed by fishermen (17.6%) and aquaculture farmers (16.7%). Significantly, only 2.1 percent of respondents were opossum shrimp paste manufacturers and 1.5 percent were boat service providers (Figure 1). The monthly incomes of the respondents were: USD 147–294 per month (45.3%), less than USD 147 per month (25.5%), and USD 295–441 per month (17.9%) where USD 1 = THB 34 (see Figure 2).

When asked about the defining products and characteristics of their village, respondents identified the mangrove forest, shrimp paste, coconut sugar, fireflies, fishing, cockle aquaculture, the pious nature of the community, and most importantly, their proprietary canal fish paste recipe. It was found that tourism is an important economic contributor to the community, but it has also produced a schism between once friendly neighbors (Table 3).

From Table 3, it can be seen that local people agreed tourism had increased income but had not yet provided job opportunities, resulted in unequal income distribution, and had not reduced hometown abandonment nor really improved the quality of life of local people. In terms of the environment, the local people disagreed tourism that could help to improve the environment dimension and moreover, tourism was the main cause of waste and pollution. Likewise, social dimension tourism still did not play a crucial role in the community; therefore the local people could not recognize its benefit.

Some additional relevant issues faced by the community included difficulties communicating with tourists, and

Table 2
Participatory action research method

PAR	Target group	Method	Date of action
Problem identification	Community members	Questionnaire	6–30 Jun 2013
	Community leaders	Focus group discussion	11 Jul 2013
	Tourists	Questionnaire	15–22 Aug 2013
Problem solving study	Community leaders	Training	25 Sep 2013
	Community leaders	Visiting best practice communities	6–9 Oct 2013
Selecting and designing local development opportunities	Community leaders	Panel discussion	20 Oct 2013

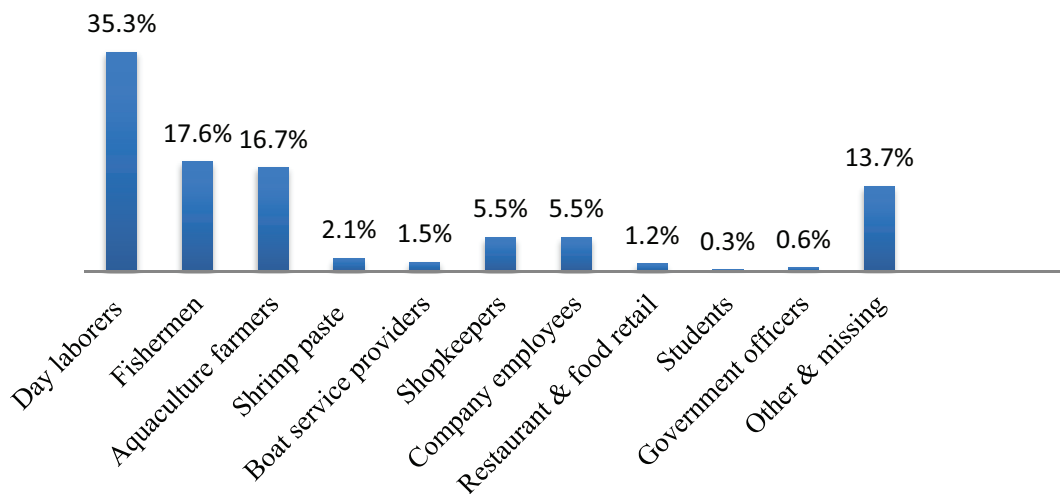


Figure 1 Current occupations of local people

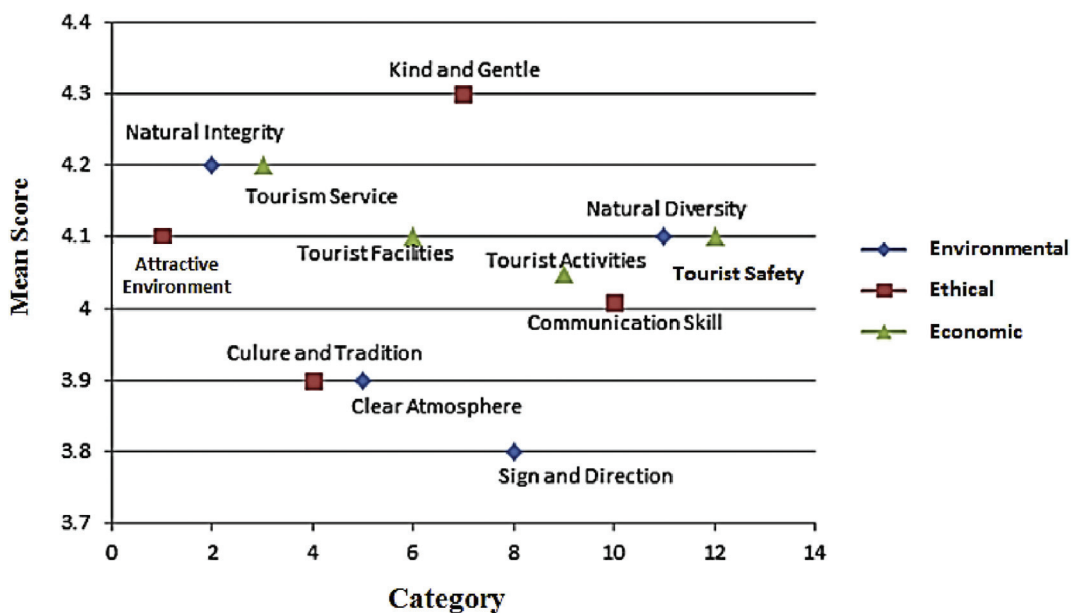


Figure 2 Tourist opinions for Klong Kone tourism

environmental and social deterioration. International tourists communicate primarily in English, and many of the villagers have not studied English sufficiently to be able to communicate with them. The presence of tourists also has already changed the village's traditional way of life, including the abundant generosity and sense of community. The environment may also rapidly deteriorate as a consequence of increased numbers of tourists.

2) Community leaders

In addition, the needs and opinions of community leaders were collected from the focus group discussion on 11 July 2013 with 15 informants. The results indicated that in the Klong Kone community, there are many resources for

tourism. However, respondents also voiced a number of complaints. Most tourists traveled under time constraints and usually opted to stay in the community for only a limited amount of time, which resulted in their being minimal spending distribution. In light of the brevity of their stay, the income contributed by tourists primarily benefited the tourism operators. Thus, those who are not involved in a tourism enterprise complained that the income generated by tourism was skewed, or uneven. Additionally, the support for tourism from the government, both monetary and informational, was limited. Categorically, the villagers lacked appropriate knowledge regarding tourism promotion, and this knowledge deficit has led to the community's slow growth in the tourism industry. Furthermore, there are signs of a lack of sustainability, as

Table 3

Tourism issues identified by community members

Issue	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1. Increased income.	52.9	47.1
2. Increased job opportunity.	35.3	64.1
3. Generated income and equal distribution.	39.5	60.5
4. Reduced hometown abandonment.	24.3	75.4
5. Improved quality of life.	18.2	81.5
6. Recovered mangrove forest ecosystem.	31.6	68.1
7. Increased land used from mangrove forest planting.	24.5	75.5
8. Supported fisheries.	9.8	90.2
9. Increased waste and pollution.	56.5	43.5
10. Destroyed tourist attractions.	10	90
11. Restored local wisdom and culture.	33.4	66.3
12. Restored respectful places of the community.	19.5	80.5
13. Created love and help to each other.	15.2	84.5
14. Increased theft and drug problem.	1.2	98.8
15. Increased conflict among local people.	16.7	83.3

evidenced by multiple conflicts. In terms of infrastructure, the roads, canals, and entrances are narrow and cannot accommodate large numbers of tourists, while the community's access to tap water is insufficient to handle the increased demand resulting from additional visitors.

3) Tourists

The opinions and needs of tourists were surveyed based on 400 respondents (163 male and 237 female). The most popular means of transportation to the destination was by private car. For most of those surveyed, this was their first trip to visit the community (78.5%). The most common visitation patterns to the community were for a single day (57.3%), two days and one night (22.8%), and half a day (10.8%). Most of the visitors learned about the destination from friends, the Internet, or television. The cost for tourists to visit Klong Kone was between USD 29–58 (USD 1 = THB 34) per time.

There were many aspects collected from tourists and the most important reflection from tourists was their opinion of Klong Kone tourism based on three dimensions. It was found that the economic trend related to tourism business in the community had a mean score of 4–4.2 (agreed), while the environment trend had a score of 3.8–4.2 (moderate agreed) and the ethic trend had 3.9–4.3 (moderate agreed) which were wider.

Problem-Solving Study

The group of the community leaders received training during this project. They were trained in community development using the creative economy, tourism destination branding, and sustainable development. Following this training, they visited Ban Jumrung village in Rayong province and Ban Nam Chiao village in Trat province, as the best examples of rural tourism practices where the management is conducted by community leaders. Visiting Ban Jumrung village demonstrated that a strong commitment to the local people is the best way to succeed. Moreover, implementation of the management on

an ongoing and unchanged basis can help to convince people to participate in the activities. Additionally, at Ban Nam Chiao village, it was seen that the mangrove swamp was very fertile, the villagers were united, and many benefits were enjoyed by the community. These benefits had been achieved without sacrificing the conditions of their traditional society. The Islamic way of life may be a key variable for the water houses that anchor and link the people in the community. Therefore, these two best practices can help Klong Kone community leaders find solutions for their community.

Selecting and Designing Local Development Opportunities

The community leaders then attended the focus group discussion in order to analyze various community development approaches based on awareness of balancing the economic, environmental, and ethical dimensions together with understanding their tourism resources and creative ideas that could increase the destination value. However, before the debate began, everybody checked the validity of the information that had been collected in order to lay the foundation for mutual understanding and to adjust their attitudes toward tourism. As a result, during the discussion, community leaders agreed that tourism should be further developed. Klong Kone lacked a strong partnership team regarding tourism when compared to the two best-practice communities that had been visited and everyone agreed economics was a main issue because only some local people earned income from tourism. Moreover, the tourists also pointed out that when they traveled to a destination, the proficiency of local people needed improvement for tourism promotion summarized in five initiatives: 1) training people in the community to manage the community's attractions in order to make the community strong and self-sufficient; 2) training local guides on how to properly serve tourists; 3) training local guides to develop proficient English language skills; 4) promoting the annual Shrimp Paste and Seafood Festival, held during February and March; and 5) encouraging tourists to travel in groups by focusing on the mangrove ecosystem, water activities, and the unique lifestyle of the villages.

Discussion

The creative economy concept of economic propulsion is based on the use of knowledge for the creation and utilization of intellectual property for maximum benefit (Office of the Prime Minister, 2010). This concept entails linking culture with accumulated social knowledge, technology, and innovation, with examples of the successful application of this concept including value-added products, as seen in Korea and Japan. If Thailand were to fully implement this idea, it would likely bring success, particularly for the Klong Kone destination because this community has been identified as having potential in terms of human capital, cultural capital, social capital, and institutional capital, which were mentioned by UNCTAD as being required in the development process. The most prominent capital features of Klong Kone include reforestation activities, shrimp paste products, water sports, and seafood

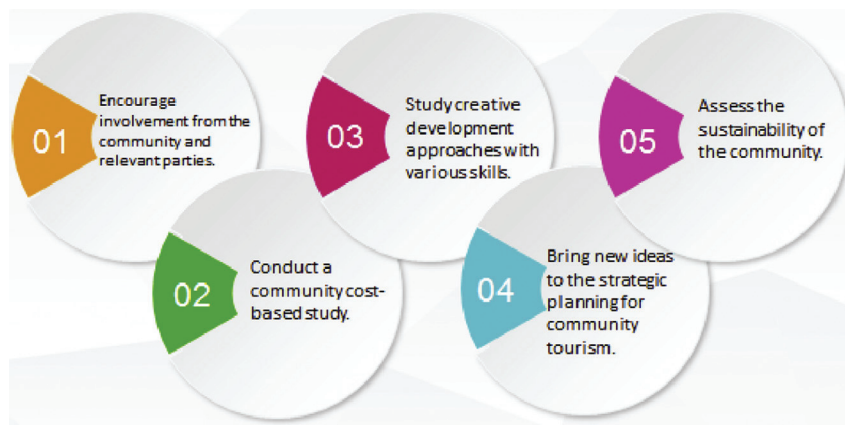


Figure 3 Guidelines for Klong Kone development

restaurants. In order to improve these as part of a sustainable creative economy, all forms of capital need to be blended with the skills of science and technology as well as innovation skills, entrepreneurial skills, and creative thinking skills.

The sustainable approach proposed by [Howie \(2003\)](#) consists of three key variables: the environment, the economy, and society. By examining these three variables at Klong Kone, information about the status of these dimensions can support informed decision making to produce a sustainable tourism community. The contemporary tourism situation of Klong Kone is characterized by a lack of balance between demand and supply. However, this may be advantageous because so far there has been little to no damage as a result of the limited visitation. However, the villagers currently suffer from underdevelopment and their quality of life and well-being are low. Furthermore, the revenue obtained from tourism is unevenly distributed. In light of these observations, it is necessary to improve the promotion of tourism in Klong Kone. The main guidelines to shape the tourism industry in Klong Kone are based upon the concepts of the creative economy and sustainable tourism development. Thus, from the study, it can be concluded that the success factors are: 1) raising the activities provided by Klong Kone to international standards; 2) creating value for tourism products; 3) organizing tourism on the basis of learning resources; 4) ensuring that tourism activities reflect the reality of the community; and 5) basing tourism on the concepts of sustainable tourism.

Community participation in sustainable tourism development is another point that is necessary for this destination. The 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007–2011) identified sustainable development for Thai tourism, and placed importance on the involvement of all levels. Organizations at the local level are key partners in areas that involve the public in the development of local tourism. The central government, public and private sectors, local organizations, and communities should be involved in a mutually beneficial and collaborative situation in order to develop sustainable tourism ([Choibamroong, 2012](#)). The most common problems of the community are the discontinuity of operations for the community and the lack of cooperation due to unequal

distribution of income from tourism, as stated by [Puang-ngam \(2009\)](#). This uneven income distribution has been mentioned by a number of residents as a significant source of conflict. Strategies designed to increase income and improve income distribution include community participation and the application of creative economy tenets. It is necessary to address this issue before more sinister manifestations of dissatisfaction, such as bullying or anti-tourism behavior, appear. Therefore, the guidelines to develop this community can be summarized from the results of the study that show that the development of the Klong Kone community can occur through implementation of the following approaches ([Figure 3](#)).

In [Figure 3](#) it can be seen that, first, all parties should be permitted to make joint decisions and form goals after gaining an adequate understanding of their problems and rights, and developing economic knowledge of the community. Second, the community should focus on their identity, encourage sustainable practices, and focus more on what the village can supply rather than the perceived demands of tourists, as practiced in supply-based tourism. Third, based on the concepts of the creative economy, the community should utilize their human capital, social capital, material capital, and cultural capital to develop creative tourism products that are unique and distinguishable. Following this, the creative development of tourism products must be used in the planning of tourism development for the community. Finally, after the planning and community development have been completed, it is important to evaluate the results in order to measure the success of the operations. The ultimate goal for this community is to become sustainable, as defined by [Howie's \(2003\)](#) Triple Bottom Line, which consists of an ecological dimension, and economic dimension, and a social and ethical dimension. Simultaneously strengthening each of these areas will improve the sustainability of the community ([Gale, 2005](#)).

Conclusions and Recommendations

After identifying the problems and continuing the self-improvement approach, community leaders can then develop their own ways of promoting tourism according to the concept of sustainable tourism and a creative economy.

In summary, the recommendations for the development of tourist activities in the Klong Kone community should follow four key points: 1) careful design and planning in line with creative ideas; 2) prudence in the design and planning of tourism development that corresponds to the market; 3) community involvement during these two phases that produces a community that is capable of thinking, planning, using resources, and sharing consequences; and 4) designing tourism for the community that adheres to the concepts of sustainable tourism in order to beneficially impact the community and its environment.

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest of any type.

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