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EVALUATING BURIRAM'S SUSTAINABLE SPORTS TOURISM MANAGMENT

Peeranthorn Puacharoen[1*], Linjong Pocharee[2]

[1*]Department of tourism and hotel management, Faculty of tourism and hotel management, Mahasarakham University

[2] Department of tourism and hotel management, Faculty of tourism and hotel management, Mahasarakham University

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Abstract

This research investigates Buriram, Thailand's impressive transformation into a sustainable sports tourism destination. Analyzing its practices through the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria and the McKinsey 7S Framework, the study aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This qualitative research is conducted by literature review and focus group discussions with eleven informants to identify areas for alignment and improvement. Findings highlight Buriram's exemplary sustainable sports tourism model, which contributes positively to economic growth, environmental conservation, and community engagement. The study underscores Buriram's potential as a case study for aspiring other destinations to enhance sustainability in sports tourism, offering valuable insights for industry advancement and SDG attainment.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Sports Tourism, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), McKinsey 7S Framework, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

* Corresponding author, Ph.D. Student., Faculty of tourism and hotel management, Mahasarakham University
E-mail address: peeranthorn.p@gmail.com

Introduction

Thailand's Buriram province presents a fascinating case study in sports tourism. Once a relatively unknown agricultural region, Buriram has undergone a remarkable transformation, emerging as a premier sports tourism destination within a mere decade. This success is attributed to the seamless integration of state-of-the-art sporting infrastructure, exemplified by the Chang Arena and Buriram International Circuit, with its rich cultural heritage and unique volcanic landscapes (Thai Rath Sport, 2018; Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 2023; Buriram Municipality, 2023). Major international events like the Thailand Motorcycle Tour

MotoGP have drawn crowds of enthusiastic spectators, generated a vibrant atmosphere and contributed significantly to Buriram's economic growth.

Nevertheless, Buriram's appeal extends beyond its reputation as a "sports city." The province boasts a rich historical tapestry, which is evidence of its ancient Khmer sites and vibrant cultural traditions like silk production. This multifaceted identity attracts diverse visitors, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for Thailand's cultural heritage. Recognizing the importance of holistic well-being, Buriram actively promotes initiatives that blend physical activity with traditional Thai medicine practices, offering workshops on cannabis, herbal remedies and CBD oil massages. Furthermore, visitors can engage in immersive experiences such as fabric dyeing, candle making and community-based tourism, this fosters meaningful connections with the local population (Buriram Provincial Office, 2020; Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 2023).

The economic impact of this transformation is undeniable. Since embracing its sports tourism vision in 2011, Buriram has witnessed a remarkable surge in its Gross Provincial Product (GPP), exceeding 40,000 million baht within a decade (Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 2023). This growth, fueled by increasing of tourist arrivals and airport passenger traffic, has stimulated service and tourism sector and led to investments in retail business, real estate development and emergence of new shopping malls. Notably, hotels are consistently booked to capacity during major sporting events, highlighting the significant economic benefits generated by this strategic shift.

This remarkable turnaround is evidence of Buriram's transition began from one of Thailand's poorest provinces to a thriving tourist destination (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2018). Researchers and industrial experts alike are eager to understand the critical factors behind Buriram's success, often posing questions like "What defines the 'Buriram Model'?" and "What are the secrets behind its remarkable achievements?" (Thai Rath Sport, 2018).

Buriram (Buriram Provincial Office, 2018), 1 of 6 provinces as a sport city, is located in the northeastern region of Thailand. Its area is 6,451,178 Rai consisted of 23 districts with

population of 1,566,740 people. After the pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), number of tourists is increased 17.51% from 2,935,465 persons in 2022 up to 3,449,347 in 2023. Meanwhile, tourism incomes increased 25.66 % from THB 5,894.87 million in 2022 up to 7,407.56 in 2023 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2024). Buriram is adapted and develop exponentially. Sports tourism management and many sport events are organized that causes more tourists travel to Buriram. Supporting such large number of tourists makes some problems for sport tourist attractions in Buriram. This effects to unsustainability of environment at sport tourist attractions in Buriram (Yuvanont, 2018). Increasing of tourists makes some changes of natural resources and environments of communities in the area, it also causes changes both of positive and negative direction of those sport tourist attractions (Seedapeng, 2016). Therefore, resources of tourist attractions are important for supporting such increased tourists and creating sustainability of sport tourist attractions and related persons in sports tourism. It is very important in sports tourism management that if sports tourism management is inefficient, the tourist attractions will be unsustainable and bad result for communities and people in the area. All sectors are important parts of sports tourism (Khunla, 2018) by starting from their resources for supporting a large number of tourists.

Guided by Thailand's national emphasis on sports tourism development and acknowledging Buriram's pivotal role within this strategy (Buriram Provincial Office, 2020) this study delves into the sustainable practices employed in its sports tourism management. Leveraging the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria version 2.0 (GSTC, 2020) and the 7S McKinsey framework (Waterman et al., 1980), this research aims to analyze Buriram's current management practices against established sustainability criteria. The study seeks to contribute to Buriram's continued progress toward achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by identifying alignment and potential improvement areas. Furthermore, by categorizing these practices within the 7S McKinsey framework, the research will comprehensively understand Buriram's current tourism management model from a sustainability perspective, aligning it with the global agenda for responsible tourism development.

Reasons as mentioned above, the researcher studied from documents, textbooks or related researches and it is found that there was a study on the state of sports tourism management by using Buriram as a part of it (Yuvanont, 2018), but the context of this study was inconsistent with current situation. The researcher, therefore, is interested in analyzing of sports tourism management of Buriram that can be used as fundamental data for managing of sport tourist attractions and creating sustainability of them. Also, it can be used for creating models for sports tourism management of Buriram to establish the sustainability of sport tourist attractions. Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC), a framework of international standard, is used as a guideline for promoting the management of sustainable tourist attractions. GSTC is a leading global authority in setting and managing standards for sustainable travel and tourism that covers four dimensions as: sustainability management, social, culture and environment. This can be applied with the sports tourism of Buriram for creating complete sustainability and reducing effects that may be happened in the future. Furthermore, McKinsey 7S Framework is a working framework consisted of seven significant components as: strategy, structure, systems, shared values, skills, style, and staff. All operations of sports tourism management of Buriram can be driven efficiently on models of working structure, sports management and skill development of staffs.

Research Purpose

To evaluate sports tourism management for sustainability in Buriram Province by using Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) and McKinsey 7S Framework.

Conceptual Framework

The article assesses Buriram's management practices through sustainability lenses, utilizing the GSTC Destination Criteria version 2.0 and the 7S McKinsey framework. The GSTC framework examines tourism's environmental, social and economic aspects, while the McKinsey framework evaluates organizational effectiveness. By applying these frameworks,

therefore, the study aims to identify Buriram's sustainability strengths and weaknesses in the context of sports tourism and finally provide with some recommendations for improvement.

1. Sport Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sports tourism, encompassing participation or spectating in sporting activities during travel, offers diverse experiences tailored to individual preferences (Gibson, 2005; UNWTO, 2022). Whether competitive or purely recreational, these journeys undertaken outside personal residence (Hall et al., 1992; Jiménez-García et al., 2020) contribute significantly to sustainable development through unique characteristics (UNWTO, 2019). By promoting social, economic, and environmental action, sports tourism can accelerate growth and leave positive legacies (UNWTO, 2019). Major sporting events serve as global platforms, enhancing destination image and revenue generation (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999; Getz, 2008). Both active participation and passive engagement contribute to international tourism (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999; Weed & Bull, 2004; Gibson, 2005; Getz, 2008), potentially fostering positive emotions like fun, excitement, and camaraderie among participants (UN Tourism, 2022).

Growing awareness of environmental and social responsibility within the industry underscores the importance of sustainable development (Herbold et al., 2020; Gibson, 2005). When responsibly developed and managed, tourism can significantly contribute to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations (UNWTO, 2019). These SDGs represent a universal call to action for all nations, regardless of economic status, to strive for prosperity while safeguarding the planet (GSTC, 2022). While exploratory studies have investigated the interplay between sport tourism and sustainability (Jiménez-García et al., 2020), further research is needed to delve deeper into specific aspects of this relationship. This overview aims to highlight the potential of sport tourism in advancing the SDGs and identify key considerations for its sustainable development.

Sports tourism holds particular promise for achieving the SDGs due to its inherent strengths in promoting (UNWTO, 2019):

- Engagement in physical activities;

- Opportunities for interaction and community building; and
- High development potential across diverse locations (small events or light activities like walking in particular)

These critical features position sports tourism as a valuable tool for advancing various SDGs. However, achieving this potential requires thoughtful development and collaboration. Overlapping interests and conflicting priorities can challenge stakeholders in forming effective partnerships crucial for delivering on the SDGs (Scheyvens & Cheer, 2022).

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria offer a robust framework for aligning tourism practices with the SDGs (GSTC, 2022). By adopting best practices and staying informed about evolving research trends, destinations can leverage the full potential of sports tourism for sustainable development. Buriram's success exemplifies that implementing the GSTC Criteria can contribute significantly to achieving the UN SDGs (GSTC, 2022).

2. Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC)

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) (2020) oversees global standards for sustainable travel and tourism through its comprehensive Criteria. These Criteria encompass Destination Criteria for policymakers and managers and Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators, providing a universal language for sustainability in the tourism industry. The sustainable nature of tourism involves several components: Responsible use of natural resources, Consideration of the environmental impact of tourism activities (e.g., waste generation, impact on water, soil, and biodiversity), Use of renewable energy sources, Protection of cultural heritage, Preservation of the natural and cultural integrity of tourist destinations, Quality and sustainability of jobs created in the sector, Local economic impacts, Quality of hospitality (Zsuzsu et al., 2023). While the Criteria serve various purposes, including education, awareness-raising, policymaking, measurement, and evaluation, they primarily focus on four key areas: Sustainable Management, Socio-economic Sustainability, Cultural Sustainability, and Environmental Sustainability (GSTC, 2022).

The Criteria are adaptable to local conditions and can be supplemented with specific criteria for locations and activities. They also form the basis for accreditation of certification bodies, which certify sustainable policies and practices for hotels, accommodations, tour operators, and transport providers. Several studies have applied the GSTC to assess whether their study destinations meet sustainability standards and minimize negative impacts (Ullah et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2022; Sharpley, 2022; Branstrator et al., 2023; Papečkys, 2023; Zsuzsu et al., 2023). However, some note challenges in implementing sustainable tourism development policies (Sharpley, 2022).

The GSTC-D version 2.0, launched in late 2019, is the first revision of the GSTC Destination Criteria and includes performance indicators to guide compliance measurement. Building on prior global experience and considering various sustainable tourism guidelines, it is widely adopted in research (GSTC, 2020). Its relevance is evident in numerous publications (Jonathon & Jennifer, 2020; Wagenseil et al., 2022).

This version, formalized on December 6, 2019, offers specific guidance through performance indicators. These indicators still need to be completed but assist users in developing their compliance assessments. Essentially, they provide a checklist of factors, evidence, and actions to consider when evaluating a destination's adherence to the criteria. By applying these criteria, destinations can contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The relationship between each criterion and relevant SDGs is identified. The requirements are structured in four sections (GSTC, 2022), each with two or three sub-sections, as shown below.

Table 1 *GSTC Destination Criteria v2.0*

***SECTION A**: Sustainable management* Alignment with SDGs 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17	***SECTION C:** Cultural sustainability* Alignment with SDGs: 4, 11, 12, 16
A(a) Management structure and framework A(b) Stakeholder engagement A(c) Managing pressure and change	C(a) Protecting cultural heritage C(b) Visiting cultural sites
***SECTION B:** Socio-economic sustainability* Alignment with SDGs: 1–5, 8–12, 16	***SECTION D:** Environmental sustainability* Alignment with SDGs: 3, 6, 7, 9, 11-15
B(a) Delivering local economic benefits B(b) Social well-being and impacts	D(a) Conservation of natural heritage D(b) Resource management D(c) Management of waste and emissions

The table clearly outlines the GSTC v2 criteria alongside their corresponding SDGs. Applying these criteria is a crucial step for nature conservation sites with scattered tourism, as Zsuzsu et al. (2023) noted. By adopting the GSTC v2 framework, tourism development can align seamlessly with nature conservation objectives, empower the local community, and contribute to a more sustainable future for all. The researcher uses GSTC as questions in the group discussion for creating sustainability according to the research objective and applying the McKinsey 7S Framework, a component in organization management, for analyzing data obtained from small group discussions.

3. McKinsey 7S Framework

The McKinsey 7S Framework, developed by four consultants at McKinsey & Company (Waterman et al., 1980), has established itself as a prominent tool for organizational analysis. Emerging alongside concepts like change management and corporate development strategies, it offers a value-driven perspective for the holistic and practical study of organizations and their personnel (Suwanda & Nugroho, 2022).

Formally introduced in 1980 through the article "Structure Is Not Organization," the model presents a theoretical framework for examining organizational elements and achieving

desired outcomes. This framework comprises seven critical components: Strategy, Structure, Systems, Skills, Staff, Style, and Shared Values.

One key advantage of the 7S Model is its utilization of internal variables to assess organizational performance and strategy. Applicable across diverse sectors, both public and private, the model further categorizes these elements into "Hard S" and "Soft S." Hard elements like Strategy, Structure, and Systems are readily identifiable through corporate plans, organizational charts, and strategic statements (Waterman et al., 1980; Lee, 2021; Suwanda & Nugroho, 2022) while soft elements are fuzzier, more intangible, and influenced by corporate culture. As Punnakitikashem et al. (2021) demonstrated, even during periods of significant challenge, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the 7S Model can be effectively employed to enhance organizational performance and implement strategic initiatives.

Hard Elements It is a tangible factor that can be changed or adjusted directly and after that these factors will be completely changed i.e. operational schedules, plans of organization structure, overall operation reports and work procedures. It can be said that the hard element is a determination of business direction that can indicate how that business is and it can drive practicality towards success. It is regarded as a very important to determine the business direction with possibility that consisted of 3 main components as follows: -

Strategy: Strategic planning is significance to drive forward businesses that shall be flexible for coping with all situations. It is regarded as the best thing that can assist businesses for having more competitiveness than rivals.

Structure: Determination of organization structure, assigning works to work team and reporting work according to the chain of command can make no confusion of working and also reducing duplication.

System: Laying out work system provides operators with smoothness and more efficiency of works i.e. budget system, product stock control system, procurement system, personnel management system and etc.

Soft Elements This factor is a component related to feeling, intangible or in some case usually be a factor caused from environmental, cultural and traditional effects of people

in the community. Factor in this part is far differed from another factor, but has the same significance in aspect of organization management because soft elements are compared as an instrument for strengthening hard elements. There is the factor directly related to “Personnel Management” regarded as the most important and difficult part of management that consisted of 4 components as follows:

Staff: Recruiting of employees for participating in organization is the most significant thing. Staff shall have the same attitude as existing in the organization for working in the same direction. However, staff shall be recruited from persons who have their abilities in aspect that the organization still short or new fields for its development.

Skill: Skill development in all fields shall be provided for staff can do their own duties and developing according to staffs’ proficiency for having new skills that can apply to their works in the future.

Style: Working style of the executive is significant for organization management because it can assist working teams for achieving the organization goals and influencing staffs’ feeling.

Shared Values: Values of norms of the organization are an important thing that everyone must hold together, it is the foundation of management that generates “Organization Culture”. Neglecting of values will make staffs not have connection with their own duties and decrease working efficiency.

Within the context of sports tourism, the "Hard/Soft" distinction translates to "tangible" elements like planning and structure impacting operations and "intangible" elements like culture and staff influencing values and behaviors. While Hu et al. (2018) highlighted the model's relevance to the tourism industry by emphasizing the economic system's role in competitiveness, the model's actual value lies in its ability to analyze and align diverse facets of sport tourism, ultimately ensuring effective management and sustainable development (Hu et al., 2018). Beyond traditional economic assessments, the 7S Model possesses untapped potential in driving regional economic growth while upholding sustainability goals within the framework of sustainable tourism. By analyzing existing practices through the lens of the 7S

Model, researchers and practitioners can identify areas for improvement and develop strategies for fostering a more sustainable sport tourism industry. The following describes the seven elements of McKinsey's 7-S Framework demonstrated in Figure 1.

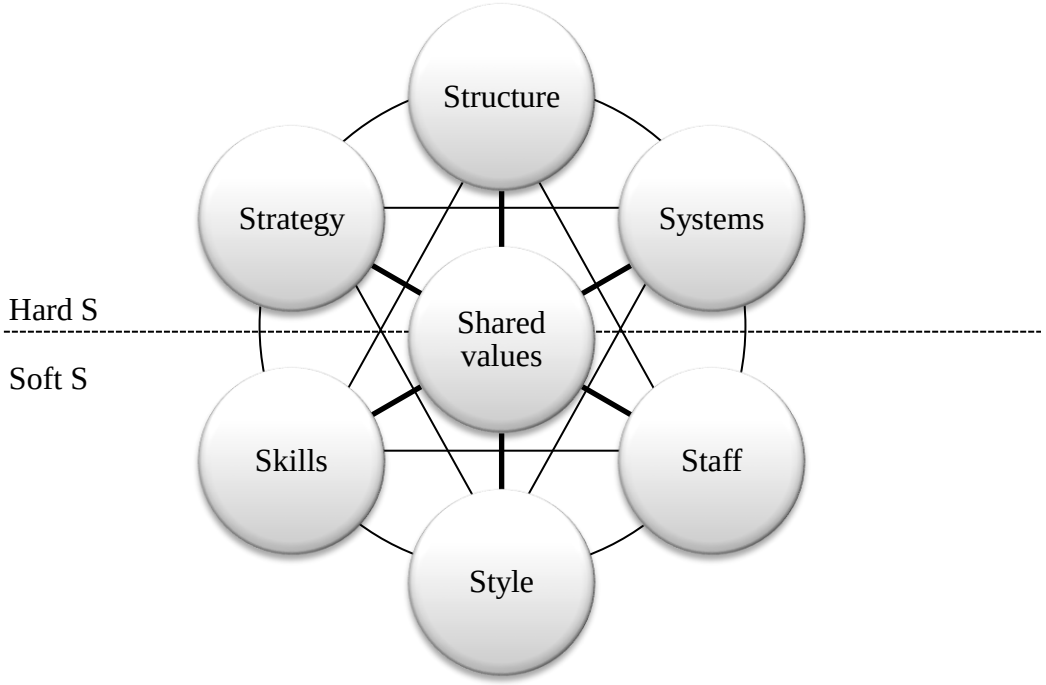


Figure 1 McKinsey's 7-S Framework

Source: Waterman et al. (1980)

While the McKinsey 7S Model's focus solely on internal factors presents limitations, it nonetheless offers a valuable framework for analyzing and aligning various facets of sports tourism. With its emphasis on "hard" and "soft" elements, the model can play a critical role in ensuring effective management and promoting sustainable development within the industry. By utilizing the 7S Model to analyze existing practices, researchers and practitioners can identify areas for improvement and develop strategies for fostering a more sustainable sports tourism industry that contributes to regional economic growth while upholding environmental and social responsibility.

As mentioned above, it is found that the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria or GSTC are in version 2.0 (v2.0) designed and developed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council

(GSTC). Such criteria are consistent with 17 items of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development GOALS (SDGs) and it is a fundamental guideline for agencies to create all kinds of tourism activities for tourist attractions' sustainability. These criteria are used to manage the area of tourist attractions with expectation that agencies will utilize them for managing of sustainable tourist attractions. It can be divided into 4 aspects: 1) Sustainable management, 2) Socioeconomical sustainability, 3) Cultural sustainability and 4) Environmental sustainability.

Meanwhile, McKinsey 7 S Framework is used as a concept for analyzing sport tourism management of Buriram and an instrument used for inspecting the management and operations of agencies to know how they manage each aspect of the concept of McKinsey 7S Framework. Then, each aspect is analyzed and results are improved to develop the management for creating efficiency of agencies' operations that can be divided into 7 aspects as: 1) Strategy, 2) Structure, 3) System, 4) Staff, 5) Skills, 6) Style and 7) Share.

For establishing of efficient operations and sustainability of sport tourist attractions, the researcher uses the McKinsey 7S Framework and GSTC to set as the conceptual framework of evaluating Buriram's sustainable sports tourism management. Therefore, McKinsey 7 S Framework is utilized as an instrument for studying the management of sports tourism activities in each aspect operations of Buriram's sports tourism and utilizing Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) as instrument for evaluating the management of sports tourist attractions according to the concept of sustainability together with McKinsey 7 S Framework will reflects the sustainability of sports tourist attractions that have efficient sports tourism management.

Research Methodology

Research pattern: This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate the sustainable practices employed in Buriram's sports tourism management.

Population and Sample: Purposive sampling is used in this study by the researcher to select samples from 11 persons of tourism network partners in Buriram consisted of the executives or managers of sports competitions from public sector, private sector and community sector details as follows: -

Table 2 *Sample size: Key Informants*

Sample size	Key Informant
Public Sector	Tourism and sports representative. Provincial Administration Organization Head. Cultural representative. Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (Buriram Office).
Private Sector	Football field manager. Motorsports and motorbike racing venue manager. President of Buriram Tourism Business Association. President of the Provincial Tourism Industry Association. Chamber of Commerce President (Buriram Province).
Academic Department	The dean of Faculty of Management Science (Buriram Rajabhat University).
Community sector	Community development representative.

Research tools: This research uses focus group discussion to collect data by allowing the participants in sub-groups to express their opinions on issues related to sustainable sport tourism management by using the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) version 2.0 criteria, which are consistent with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals 2030 as questions in the sub-group meetings. The questions in those meetings can be divided into 4 aspects as mentioned above.

The researcher creates a form of focus group discussion from the small group discussion and send to 3 experts for inspection the consistency of question and conformation

with the research objectives by using IOC (Item-Objective Congruence Index). Items with IOC value between 0.50-1.00 mean having accuracy that can be used as questions, whereas those with IOC value lower than 0.50 mean they shall be improved again (Kanjanawasee, 2013) and the result of IOC value of this research is 0.97.

Data collection: Secondary data collection involved an extensive literature review of academic articles, theses, reports, and relevant documents to establish a comprehensive research foundation. Primary data was gathered through focus group discussions lasting 3-4 hours, targeting diverse stakeholders within Buriram's tourism and sports industry. Qualitative research methods were chosen to capture the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of Buriram's sports tourism industry stakeholders. Focus group discussions allowed in-depth exploration of these perspectives, promoting rich data collection and insightful findings. The content analysis and the 7S framework enabled a comprehensive and systematic study of sustainable practices within Buriram's sports tourism management.

Data Analysis: Collected data is analyzed by using a two-fold approach. Content analysis and coding is also performed to classify data (open coding), axial coding and development of a logic paradigm (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Data is thematically analyzed to identify key themes and practices related to sustainable management within Buriram's sports tourism sector. This analysis is guided by the GSTC Destination Criteria version 2.0 (GSTC-D v2) and its alignment with the SDGs. This can help to identify specific contributions of Buriram's practices to relevant SDGs. Practices are identified through a content analysis and categorized within the McKinsey 7S Framework (Strategy, Structure, Systems, Skills, Staff, Style, and Shared Values). This creates understanding how these practices contribute to Buriram's overall tourism management model from a sustainability perspective.

Research Result

This analysis, informed by the McKinsey 7S Framework and GSTC Criteria, reveals a comprehensive approach integrating economic, social, and environmental sustainability across various dimensions. Buriram's Sustainable Sports Tourism by analyzing with the 7S Framework are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 *Buriram's Sustainable Sports Tourism: 7S Framework Analysis*

7S Model Component	**Theme**	**Aligned SDGs**	**Description**
Soft Levers			
Skills	Capacity Building	4.4, 8.1	Training programs will assist staffs and people in the area for having more skill on sport tourism management and management of sport tourism resources. It will increase opportunity of employment, creating of vocational security and managing of sport tourism activities by participation of people in the community and adhering to guidelines of sustainable sport tourism.
	Knowledge Sharing	17.16	Buriram shares best practices and inspires other places to adopt sustainable sports tourism models as fostering global collaboration, cultural preservation, advocacy, and knowledge transfer.

7S Model Component	Theme	Aligned SDGs	Description
Soft Levers			
Style	Cultural Respect	4.4, 11.4, 16.6	Participation with local culture through language use, responsible behavior and appreciation of traditions with respectfulness can increase cultural understanding and reduce negative impacts.
	Community Immersion	11.4	Encouraging sports visitors to explore communities, savor local cuisine and learn local language can support good understanding in local culture and can make economic benefits for the community.
Staff	Inclusive Employment	8.5, 10.2	Diverse recruitment practices can promote equality and generate proper job opportunities, reduce unequal incomes and contribute social well-being as well as can recruit persons who have suitable knowledge and ability for their responsible works.

7S Model Component	Theme	Aligned SDGs	Description
Hard Levers			
Shared Values	Commitment to sustainability	Various, aligned with specific themes in hard and soft levers	The guiding principles for all stakeholders in sports tourism drive actions forward to achieve environmental, social and economic goals across the model for sustainability.
	Respect for local culture	4.4, 11.4, 16.6	Emphasizes on respectful participation with traditions, customs, and beliefs can foster social harmony and cultural understanding as well as connecting sustainable sports tourism.
	Collaborative approach	9.2, 11.1, 16.6, 17.17	Encourages teamwork and joint decision-making among stakeholders can ensure inclusivity and effective management of sports tourism resources for creating sustainability.

7S Model Component	Theme	Aligned SDGs	Description
Hard Levers			
Structure	Collaborative Management	9.2, 11.1, 16.6, 17.17	Government, businesses and communities shall work together for inclusive planning, decision-making, resource management and knowledge sharing that can lead to outcomes of sustainable sports tourism.
	Responsible Procurement	12.5, 12.7	Procurement shall be prioritized on local products and vendors, promoting responsible consumption, supporting local businesses, minimizing supply chain impact and reducing waste.
	Infrastructure for Sustainability	9.4, 11.7	It can be conducted by creating accessible and safe event infrastructure with minimal environmental impacts (e.g. designated racing areas, shuttle buses, water recycling, renewable energy) to optimize resource use, enhance accessibility and reduce emissions.

7S Model Component	Theme	Aligned SDGs	Description
Hard Levers			
Systems	Collaborative Management	9.2, 11.1, 16.6, 17.17	The government, businesses and communities shall work together to support inclusive planning, decision-making, resource management and knowledge sharing (e.g. data-driven decision-making) that can lead towards more sustainable outcomes.
	Responsible Procurement	12.5, 12.7	Procurement shall be prioritized on local products and vendors, promoting responsible consumption, supporting local businesses, minimizing supply chain impacts and environmental systems as reduces water, energy, and waste.
	Infrastructure for Sustainability	9.4, 11.7	Creating accessible, safe event infrastructure with minimal environmental impacts (e.g., designated racing areas, shuttle buses, water recycling, renewable energy) to optimizes resource use, enhances accessibility, and reduces emissions. Integrating cultural authenticity systems (language/food) also enhances the experience.

7S Model Component	Theme	Aligned SDGs	Description
Hard Levers			
Strategy	Collaborative, sustainable, SDGs-aligned	Shared vision guides decision-making and resource allocation towards achieving sustainability goals like resource efficiency, community well-being and environmental protection, contributing to multiple SDGs. It can be conducted by relocation of resources related to sports tourism.	

These results were adapted to the McKinsey 7S Framework, which analyses Buriram's success as a sustainable sports tourism destination based on seven interconnected elements: Strategy, Structure, Systems, Shared Values, Skills, Staff, and Style. This framework allows to assess and improve its practices across various dimensions by providing a comprehensive structure for analysis. (See Figure 2)

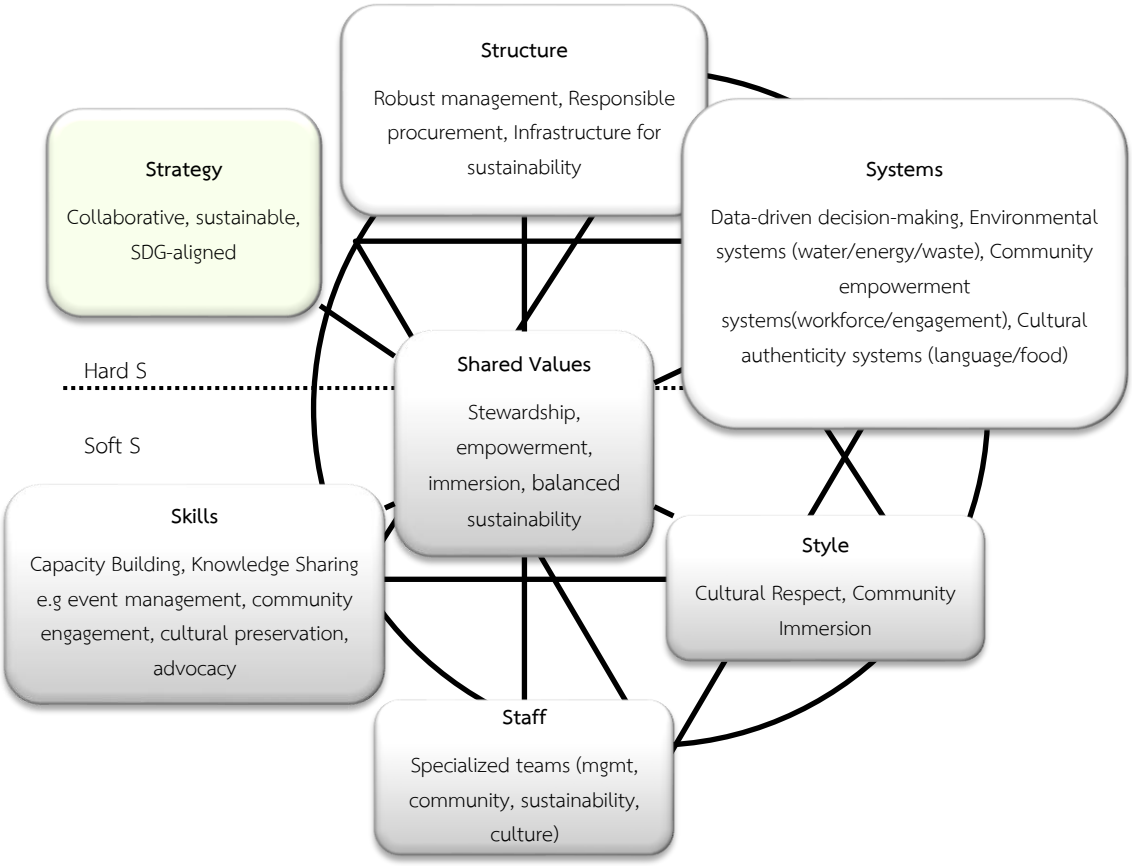


Figure 2 Sustainable Sports Tourism Practices in Buriram, Thailand

Source: Adapted from McKinsey 7S

Figure 2 showcases Buriram's comprehensive model for sustainable sports tourism. Buriram's success as a sustainable sports tourism leader exemplifies the potential of the adapted McKinsey 7S Framework. This model guides their comprehensive approach, from collaborative management and responsible procurement to data-driven decision-making and cultural preservation (Jiménez et al., 2020). Dedicated infrastructure showcases commitment while empowering programs and meticulous preservation efforts to ensure lasting benefits for visitors and the community (UNWTO, 2019). Shared values permeate every decision, fueled by a skilled workforce and unwavering dedication to cultural respect and community engagement. This holistic approach creates win-win situations for destinations, communities, and the environment while acknowledging the need for broader societal changes for long-term sustainability (Jorgensen, 2008).

While unchecked growth can burden destinations (Wilson, 2006; Jiménez-García et al., 2020), Buriram's commitment to long-term sustainability paves the way for responsible development. Their model serves as a valuable case study for other destinations seeking to balance economic benefits with environmental and social well-being, ultimately inspiring a future where sports tourism thrives in harmony with people and the planet.

Discuss the results

Building upon earlier methodologies, the GSTC Criteria is implemented aligns well with UN SDGs (GSTC, 2022) and based on the four dimensions of GSTC-D v.2, detailed findings and their alignment with the SDGs are presented as below.

1. Sustainable Management (Aligned with SDGs 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17)

Buriram's dedication to sustainable sports tourism, evident in its management practices, is commendable (Buriram Provincial Office, 2020; Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 2023; Buriram Municipality, 2023). The province promotes inclusive development by fostering partnerships between government, businesses, and communities (SDG 9.2) It is in accordance with the research of Theerasatskul (2020) stated that participation among government and private sector as well as community with promotion of sport tourism activities that will generate sustainability of competitions and sports tourism in the area. It leverages innovative event planning and resource management to advance technology (SDG 9.5), as outlined in the development goals of Buriram Province for 20 years (2013-2042) (Buriram Provincial Office, 2020). As UNWTO (2019) suggested, technology can enhance sports events and museums for visitors. This approach has contributed to efficient infrastructure, generating quality jobs and fueling sustainable economic growth (SDGs 9.2, 9.4). However, as Jorgensen (2008) suggests, expanding their focus beyond immediate operations and embracing deeper stakeholder collaboration could further elevate their sustainability efforts, leading to more robust management systems. Controlling, assigning roles and duties on providing activities of stakeholders will be strengthened those activities. This is in accordance with the research of Theppong (2020) stated that controlling by having operations meeting,

opinions survey and evaluation of tourists opinions every year to improve sports tourism for sustainability.

Buriram effectively empowers local communities, by involving them in event planning and execution, to ensure inclusivity and responsiveness for local needs (SDGs 11.1, 11.6). Responsible tourism practices are implemented by Buriram to protect cultural and natural heritage (SDG 11.4), while sustainable infrastructure development improves safety and accessibility for all (SDG 11.7). This aligns with the spirit of nature-based tourism that offers direct appreciation for the environment (UNWTO, 2019). Buriram's commitment extends further for promoting responsible consumption and production through waste minimization, recycling initiatives and support for local businesses (SDGs 12.5, 12.2, 12.7). In aspect of sustainability of management, Theerasatskul (2020) stated the success according to objective of economic or social organization shall be considered to protect cultural, natural and environmental heritages. Additionally, their efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of events contribute to climate action (SDG 13.2). Their promotion of responsible tourism alongside natural heritage protection fosters climate resilience (SDG 13.1). While Jorgensen (2008) highlights potential sustainability concerns throughout the product chain, Buriram's collaborative approach enables responsible decision-making (SDG 16.6) and contributes to peaceful societies (SDG 16.1). These strong partnerships exemplify the importance of collaboration for achieving the SDGs (SDG 17.17). Buriram's knowledge-sharing inspires others to adopt similar practices, contributing to global partnerships for sustainable development (SDG 17.16).

Overall, Buriram's approach to sports tourism serves as a valuable model, aligning event management with broader sustainable development goals and demonstrating a solid commitment to various SDGs. Exploring ways to expand their focus and deepen stakeholder collaboration across the entire product chain holds the potential for enhanced results. Moreover, Inpongpan (2019) stated that sports tourists will be touched with feeling of activity participation, connection with activity management model and participation among

government, private and public sectors that reflects the efficiency of sports competition and worthiness of money they spent.

2. Socio-economic Sustainability (Aligned with SDGs 1-5, 8-12, 16)

Buriram's commitment to sports tourism extends beyond mere economic gains, showcasing a multi-faceted approach to sustainability aligned with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By implementing inclusive employment practices, promoting community products, and offering capacity-building programs, Buriram combats poverty within communities (SDG 1.4), empowers families to generate income (SDG 1.2), and fosters sustainable economic development (SDG 8.1). This focus on local involvement minimizes economic leakage, maximizes local benefits, and leverages unique local knowledge for business success (Gibson, 2005). It is in accordance with the research of Kumsri et al. (2021) stated that proper components of sports tourism model are as: creation of community values, products promotion by the community participates in creating on a sense of homeland love and social responsibility.

Previously, poverty led to unemployment and subsequent migration (Sawangdee, 2011). However, the migration rate to larger cities has decreased with increased job opportunities within the province and economic activity circulating locally (Bank of Thailand, 2021). More people are choosing to return home, embracing their communities (Thai Public Broadcasting Association, 2022). Pattanachai Limthongsang, owner of the "Tokayai" brand is the example of this trend. He states, "I feel like I am part of helping the community. Our community has resources: rice, forests, water. Food security is paramount. We believe in creating a community food base and raising fish and cattle as livelihoods for the younger generation. When we return home, we are a network, a source of strength for each other." This sentiment is echoed by Supassara Thiangphadung, who highlights the importance of family when working away and returning home (Thai Public Broadcasting Association, 2022). While, Theerasatskul (2020) stated in his study that people in the community participates in area management of their own communities, expresses their opinions and dare to decide will

make an opportunity for developing quality of life, causing circular economic system as well as creating jobs and careers for their own community.

Training programs equip residents with skills to improve food security and nutrition (SDG 2.1), enhance employability (SDG 4.4), and manage tourism sustainably (SDG 11.7). Inclusive recruitment creates decent jobs and reduces income inequality (SDG 8.5, 10.2) while promoting local products is aligned with responsible consumption patterns (SDG 12.5). The collaborative approach fosters transparent decision-making (SDG 16.6), and the emphasis on safety and security contributes to peaceful societies (SDG 16.1). UN Tourism (2022) highlighted that sporting opportunities can positively impact residents and tourists for promoting healthy and active lifestyles. He, Theerasatskul (2020) also said that development of knowledge and competency of people in the community will increase more employment in the area and better living.

However, as Katriina and Inger (2014) emphasize, achieving environmental goals increasingly requires vital social and institutional aspects. Buriram demonstrates its strength with effective centralized leadership and committed figures across the government and private sectors (Thai Rath Sport, 2018). This collaborative spirit drives vigorous cooperation and propels the province's sustainable development. This study demonstrates the significant socio-economic impact of Buriram's model, highlighting the participation of leaders, communities, and domestic and international connections, which is along with renowned individuals like Lisa Blackpink, contribute to the province's growing recognition. Theerasatskul (2020) also stated that management of existing human capital who participates in developing their own areas as players, coaches, referees and team managers will establishing of more acceptance in management of sport competitions. It will induce sports tourists for making their decision to visit the area and cause good impacts to circular socioeconomic system.

Buriram's model surpasses traditional economic gains and positive impacts to communities, as well as strengthens local economy and promotes responsible resource management. By aligning with various SDGs, Buriram is an inspiring example for other destinations for adopting sustainable tourism and event management practices.

3. Cultural sustainability (Aligned with SDGs 4, 11, 12, 16)

Buriram's strong commitment to cultural preservation in sports tourism is aligned with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Comprehensive guidelines and responsible behavior at events (SDG 16.6) can ensure respectful engagement with local culture. This extends to utilizing local languages in communication and showcasing the region's culinary heritage (SDG 11.4), promoting responsible consumption of local resources (SDG 12.5). As Soini and Birkeland (2014) aptly stated that this "cultural turn" emphasizes the critical role of language and representation in cultural preservation. Notably, UNWTO (2022) highlights on adding unique cultural elements to differentiate events, such as combining sports activities with local culture and gastronomy and fostering interaction with communities. While official datasets exist in Thailand (Axelsson et al., 2013) said that their active use for local sustainability monitoring still needs to be improved. Nonetheless, Buriram's efforts are evident in promoting local pride and encouraging residents to preserve their cultural heritage through traditional customs and continuous development. As Heetae et al. (2019) highlighted that sustainable development encompasses ecological, economic and social dimensions. Katriina and Inger (2014) analyzed sustainability through a cultural economy lens, assessing its alignment with general sustainability principles.

Immersion and Education. Educating tourists and locals about environmental protection is crucial and can be achieved through signage, leaflets, workshops, and school programs (Folke et al., 2005; Axelsson et al., 2013). UNWTO (2019) that emphasize on sharing this message globally with tourists and locals. Visitors should be encouraged to explore communities, savor local cuisine (e.g., Northeastern Thai specialties) and even learn local language for fostering cultural immersion (SDG 11.4). These experiences transcend tourism contributed to understand and appreciate local traditions (SDG 4.4). Educational resources and promotional materials featuring unique fabric patterns can enhance this learning process. However, as UNWTO (2019) points out, sports tourism inherently fosters interaction among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Jorgensen (2008) emphasized that more sustainable development requires a broader focus beyond internal management systems,

encompassing integration, learning, products, product chain and stakeholders. Similarly, Axelsson et al. (2013) stressed that policies on resource use must considered on social and cultural values. Katriina and Inger (2014) suggested that globalization and localization have driven a newfound appreciation for cultural diversity, making culture a "condition and premise for action, meaning, and communication." Vajsawan (2021) emphasized in her study that sport tourists are interested on community-based-tourism, agricultural tourism, historical and cultural tourism. They study tourism information through both of online and offline media.

Furthermore, some aspects of Suphasara's return to her community, not only for herself and her family but also for the benefit of the younger generation, it demonstrates the positive impact of cultural preservation (Thai Public Broadcasting Association, 2022). It is in accordance with the research of Cherdrussamee (2018) had an opinion that people in the community can pay back by conserving way of life, cultural way and identity of the community for remaining the community and sustainability in the future.

In conclusion, Buriram's model surpasses economic benefits, promoting cultural sustainability through respectful engagement, immersion, and education. This alignment with SDGs 4, 11, 12, and 16 showcases a responsible approach to tourism that benefits both visitors and the community. Buriram sets an inspiring example for sustainable tourism development by fostering cultural understanding and appreciation. Cherdrussamee (2018) also stated that hearing opinions of co-workers with respect to each other can be created working inspiration as a social culture that will establish unity of the community that good for sport tourists and the community as well as real sustainability of the society.

4. Environmental sustainability (Aligned with SDGs 3, 6, 7, 9, 11-15)

Buriram's commitment to sustainable sports tourism transcends mere economic gains, aligning with many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the UNWTO (2019). Their vision extends beyond promoting responsible event participation and chemical-free farming, encompassing renewable energy and wildlife protection. This holistic approach prioritizes environmental and social well-being, exemplifying the responsible approach UNWTO (2019) advocated for sports tourism operators.

At Chang Arena, clear guidelines and designated racing areas minimize accidents and promote responsible behavior, contributing to SDG 3.6 (UNWTO, 2019). Organic rice farming safeguards public health by minimizing exposure to harmful chemicals (SDG 3.3) (Axelsson et al., 2013), while proper waste disposal at event venues mitigates risks (SDG 3.9) (Folke et al., 2005). Chang Arena's water recycling system and solar panels showcase their commitment to sustainability, ensuring efficient water usage (SDG 6.4) and reducing reliance on fossil fuels (SDG 7.2), respectively, while Jorgensen's (2008) emphasized on integrated management. It is in accordance with the research of Theppong (2020) (2020) stated that organization should divided working duties clearly and properly with proficiency of workers, it is saving of personnel resources that is regarded as a valuable resource.

Buriram empowers communities with nurturing sustainable development through support for local crafts and products (SDG 9.2) (UNWTO, 2022). Capacity-building programs further this commitment by equipping communities with skills and fostering sustainable infrastructure (SDG 9.4) (Thai Public Broadcasting Association, 2022). Designated racing areas and shuttle buses contribute to clean air, addressing noise pollution (SDG 11.6) (UNWTO, 2019). Cultural heritage is found to be respected by promoting local languages, cuisine, and traditions and strengthening community spirit (SDG 11.4) (Katriina and Inger, 2014). Responsible waste management, implemented within events and communities, further contributes to clean cities (SDG 11.6) (Axelsson et al., 2013). Theppong (2020) also emphasized that when the community knows and understands identities of the area, tourist attractions can be presented well by focusing on natural and environmental resources as well as cultures and traditions in the area. Conservation will be established for sustainability.

Organic farming practices not only promote sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12.2) (UNWTO, 2022) but also minimize waste generation through sorting and recycling (SDG 12.5) (Heetae et al., 2019). Embracing solar power and organic farming, Buriram tackles greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to SDG 13.2 (UNWTO, 2022). Their commitment extends beyond immediate operations, encompassing the protection of the Dong Yai Wildlife Sanctuary, a critical ecosystem safeguard that mitigates climate change

effects (SDG 13.1) (UNWTO, 2022). Buriram's dedication to biodiversity conservation extends to protecting endangered species like the Thai crane (SDG 15.5) (UNWTO, 2022) while their forest protection program ensures the well-being of diverse plant and animal life (SDG 15.1) (UNWTO, 2022). Moreover, Inpongpan (2019) said organic agriculture is also an important thing for tourists to make decision making because they pay the most attention to environment by thinking over clean air without chemicals and foods processed by free-chemical raw materials or natural organic agriculture.

By aligning its sports tourism strategy with numerous SDGs, Buriram creates a harmonious interplay for generating economic benefits while promoting public health, environmental sustainability, and community well-being at the same time. This comprehensive approach is an inspiring example for destinations seeking to develop responsible and sustainable tourism models, echoing Jorgensen's (2008) call for integrated management systems. Buriram's story transcends individual actions, weaving a symphony of sustainability that resonates with the world. It is in accordance with the research of Cherdrussamee (2018) stated that guidelines for developing community-based-tourism must do management planning for not causing social, environmental and cultural problems in tourist attractions as well as having long-term planning and management.

Body of knowledge

This study delves into Buriram's groundbreaking model for sustainable sports tourism practice, demonstrating remarkable alignment with the GSTC-D v2 and McKinsey 7S Framework. Its success hinges on a shared vision translated into concrete actions across all facets of the model. This vision guides decision-making towards goals like resource efficiency, community well-being, and environmental protection, demonstrably contributing to multiple SDGs.

The true magic lies in the synergy created by the interconnectedness of the 7S components. Each element, from collaborative management to inclusive employment, reinforces and amplifies the others, resulting in a holistic and sustainable approach. Buriram's model is a beacon of inspiration, showcasing how the 7S Framework can be leveraged to

create win-win situations for destinations, communities, and the environment. Navigating the smart power transition requires constant adjustments to balance hard and soft power (Joseph, 2023).

Beyond mere analysis, Buriram exemplifies unwavering dedication to sustainability. Its model exhibits robust management practices, empowered communities, cultural immersion, and environmental stewardship. This success, encompassing social, economic, cultural, and ecological dimensions, offers a valuable blueprint for the industry. However, not all tourism impacts are positive. While sports tourism has experienced tremendous growth, it often outpaced planning, leaving some destinations needing help to cope with its effects.

Overall, Buriram is an inspiring model for destinations seeking to develop responsible and sustainable tourism practices. By aligning with the SDGs and implementing the GSTC Criteria, they demonstrate that economic success can coexist with social responsibility and environmental stewardship. Buriram's example ignites a vision for the future of sports tourism, where harmony with people, the planet, and prosperity thrives.

Results reveal that for sustainable management of tourist attractions, the organizers of sport competition or sports tourism activities should clearly prescribe roles and duties of stakeholders who work together for being able to create efficient sustainability of tourist attractions. In addition, determination of responsible measures on natural and environmental protection can strengthen sustainability efficiently. In aspect of economic sustainability, having management by community participation will increase incomes for the community and create circular economy within the province. Moreover, participation with community can establish resources management in the area by responsibility of people in the community in accordance with sustainable development. For cultural sustainability, local culture should be applied together with tourism activities whether foods, language or dress culture including the community’s way of life mixed with sports tourism can create sustainability for tourism and conservation of local culture. In aspect of environment, activities should be provided for promoting on using of renewable energy in the area, organic

farming and chemical-free vegetables. Activities by community participation can make people have love and responsibility their community as well as be a force and sustainability for the community.

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