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Community-Based Tourism, Livelihood Transformation, and Rural Sustainability: A Sustainable Livelihood Framework Analysis of Mae Kampong, Thailand

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Abstract

Community-based tourism (CBT) has been increasingly promoted as an approach to supporting sustainable rural development through livelihood diversification, community participation, and the utilization of local resources. However, much of the existing literature remains focused primarily on economic outcomes and tourism performance indicators, while paying comparatively limited attention to the structural processes through which tourism reshapes household livelihoods and influences long-term rural sustainability. This study examines these relationships through a case study of Mae Kampong. Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework and the concept of community capital transformation, it conceptualizes CBT as a process that reorganizes natural, economic, social, cultural, and human capital, and connects these transformations to changes in household livelihood strategies and rural sustainability outcomes. The study adopts a qualitative documentary approach based on an analysis of academic literature, previous studies, policy documents, and secondary sources relating to CBT and Mae Kampong. The findings indicate that CBT has substantially transformed household livelihood systems within the community. Tourism-related activities—including homestay services, local guiding, food and beverage businesses, and the sale of local products—contributed to livelihood diversification and reduced exclusive dependence on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods. The integration of tourism into household economies enhanced livelihood flexibility and strengthened adaptive capacity in response to economic and environmental uncertainty. However, the findings also reveal that tourism benefits are distributed unevenly among households, with greater advantages concentrated among those possessing stronger economic resources, favorable locations, and better access to tourism-related opportunities. These inequalities create structural tensions that challenge the community's long-term sustainability. The study further demonstrates that tourism generates multidimensional impacts on community capital. Tourism has strengthened local economic activities and reinforced certain forms of social capital through participatory management structures and collective governance mechanisms. At the same time, it has contributed to cultural commodification pressures, social differentiation, and increasing environmental stress on fragile mountain ecosystems due to growing tourist numbers and resource-use intensity. The findings suggest that CBT functions simultaneously as both a supporting force and a structural challenge for rural sustainability. Sustainable outcomes do not emerge automatically from tourism development alone; rather, they depend on effective local governance, equitable

benefit distribution, community participation, adaptive capacity, and the long-term management of relationships among the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of rural development.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism; Rural Sustainability; Sustainable Livelihoods; Community Capital Transformation; Mae Kampong

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

In recent decades, rural communities across many developing countries have experienced significant socio-economic and environmental transformations driven by globalization, market integration, climate variability, and changing patterns of resource use (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998). Rural livelihoods that depend heavily on monoculture agriculture and natural resource extraction have become increasingly vulnerable to economic instability, environmental degradation, and fluctuations in global commodity markets (Scoones, 1998; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). These conditions have contributed to labor outmigration, the decline of local human capital, and the gradual weakening of social and cultural structures within rural communities (Chambers & Conway, 1992). In response to these challenges, alternative rural development approaches that emphasize local participation, livelihood diversification, and sustainable resource management have received growing attention in both academic and policy debates. Within this context, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as an important approach to sustainable rural development. CBT is generally understood as a form of tourism in which local communities play a central role in the ownership, management, and distribution of tourism benefits (Suansri, 2003). Unlike conventional mass tourism models, CBT seeks to integrate local participation, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation with economic development objectives. Previous studies suggest that CBT can generate alternative income opportunities, strengthen community participation, revitalize local cultural identity, and encourage environmental protection when supported by effective governance and community cooperation (Scheyvens, 1999; Tosun, 2000). As a result, CBT has increasingly been promoted as a strategy for enhancing rural resilience and supporting sustainable development in marginalized rural areas. However, existing empirical evidence also demonstrates that the impacts of community-based tourism are complex and uneven. While some rural communities have successfully utilized tourism to diversify livelihoods and strengthen local adaptive capacity, others have experienced unequal benefit distribution, social conflicts, cultural commodification, and increasing environmental pressure associated with tourism expansion (Zapata et al., 2011; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012). These findings indicate that rural sustainability does not automatically emerge from tourism development itself. Rather, the outcomes of CBT depend on how local communities manage the transformation of community capital, distribute tourism benefits, and negotiate the balance among economic development, social cohesion, cultural continuity, and environmental protection. Mae Kampong Village represents a significant case for examining these dynamics. Located in a mountainous area of northern Thailand, the community has transformed from a predominantly agriculture- and forest-based economy into a diversified livelihood system in which tourism has become a major source of household income. The development of homestays, ecotourism activities, and cultural tourism has increased economic opportunities and contributed to local development. At the same time, the rapid growth of tourism has generated new challenges, including unequal access to tourism benefits, seasonal overcrowding, pressure on fragile ecological systems, and concerns regarding the commodification of local culture (Orapan, 2019; Natthida, 2021). These characteristics make Mae Kampong an important case for understanding the complex relationship between tourism, livelihoods, and rural sustainability.

1.2 Research Gap

Although a substantial body of literature has examined community-based tourism in both national and international contexts, much of the existing research focuses primarily on measurable development outcomes such as income generation, tourist satisfaction, participation levels, or destination management success. Comparatively limited attention has been paid to the underlying processes through which tourism reshapes household livelihood structures and transforms different forms of community capital across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Furthermore, many studies tend to conceptualize CBT primarily as a development tool with positive potential outcomes, while paying insufficient attention to the structural inequalities and long-term sustainability challenges embedded within tourism development processes. Issues such as unequal access to tourism opportunities, differentiated livelihood benefits among households, tensions within local governance systems, and the potential erosion of cultural and natural capital remain underexplored. In particular, limited research has examined community-based tourism as a mechanism of community capital transformation linking livelihood adaptation and broader rural sustainability processes (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012; Zapata et al., 2011). This gap highlights the need for a more process-oriented analytical approach that moves beyond descriptive evaluations of tourism impacts. Such an approach should examine how tourism transforms household livelihood strategies, how different forms of community capital are reorganized through tourism development, and how these transformations influence long-term rural sustainability. To address this gap, the present study employs the Sustainable Livelihood Framework as its primary analytical framework to investigate the relationships among community-based tourism, livelihood transformation, and rural sustainability in Mae Kampong Village. In doing so, this study contributes to the literature by integrating the Sustainable Livelihood Framework with a process-oriented analysis of tourism-led rural transformation in the context of community-based tourism development.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine how community-based tourism reshapes household livelihood strategies and to analyze how these transformations influence rural sustainability across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Using Mae Kampong Village a case study, the research applies the Sustainable Livelihood Framework to analyze the relationships between community capital transformation, livelihood diversification, and sustainable rural development.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does community-based tourism function as a mechanism for transforming community capital in Mae Kampong Village?

2. How do changes in household livelihood strategies under community-based tourism influence rural sustainability across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions?

3. Under what conditions can community-based tourism support or undermine long-term rural sustainability in rural communities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides the theoretical and conceptual foundation for examining the relationships among community-based tourism, household livelihood transformation, and rural sustainability. It critically reviews key debates surrounding Community-Based Tourism (CBT), the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), and the role of tourism in transforming community capital and rural livelihood systems. Rather than treating tourism solely as an economic activity, this review emphasizes tourism as a socio-

economic process that reshapes relationships among local resources, social structures, cultural systems, and rural development trajectories.

2.1 Community-Based Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emerged as an alternative tourism development approach in response to criticisms of mass tourism and its associated social, cultural, and environmental impacts. CBT is generally characterized by community participation, local ownership, and the distribution of tourism benefits among local residents (Suansri, 2003). Within rural development discourse, CBT has frequently been promoted as a strategy for generating alternative livelihoods, strengthening local economies, and supporting the conservation of natural and cultural resources. A considerable body of literature argues that CBT can contribute to sustainable rural development by diversifying household income sources, creating local employment opportunities, and reducing dependence on vulnerable agricultural economies (Scheyvens, 1999; Zapata et al., 2011). In addition, CBT has been associated with the revitalization of local cultural practices and increased community participation in local governance processes (Scheyvens, 1999; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012). From this perspective, tourism is viewed not only as an economic sector but also as a mechanism that potentially strengthens local adaptive capacity and community resilience. However, contemporary scholarship increasingly challenges the assumption that CBT inherently produces sustainable and equitable outcomes. Several studies suggest that tourism benefits are often distributed unevenly among households, particularly where access to tourism opportunities is shaped by differences in land ownership, financial resources, social networks, or political influence (Tosun, 2000; Zapata et al., 2011). In some contexts, tourism development has generated new forms of social inequality, intensified local conflicts, and increased pressure on ecological systems due to the expansion of tourism infrastructure and visitor activities (Tosun, 2000). Furthermore, critics argue that many CBT initiatives remain highly dependent on external institutions, state agencies, or tourism markets, thereby limiting genuine community autonomy. This has led scholars to emphasize that the sustainability outcomes of CBT are highly context-dependent and shaped by local governance structures, participation mechanisms, and the capacity of communities to regulate tourism development (Suntikul & Dorji, 2016). Consequently, CBT should not be understood as a universally successful rural development model, but rather as a complex and negotiated process that may simultaneously generate both opportunities and structural challenges for rural communities.

2.2The Sustainable Livelihood Framework

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) was developed as an analytical framework for understanding how households construct and sustain livelihoods under changing economic, social, and environmental conditions (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998). The framework emphasizes that livelihood security depends not only on income generation but also on access to and management of multiple forms of capital, including natural capital, human capital, social capital, financial capital, and physical or cultural capital. These forms of capital collectively shape the ability of households to adapt to risks, diversify livelihood strategies, and maintain long-term resilience. A central principle of the SLF is that livelihoods are dynamic and continuously shaped by external pressures, institutional arrangements, and access to resources. The framework therefore provides an important lens for understanding how rural households respond to structural transformations such as market integration, environmental change, and tourism development. In this context, livelihood diversification is often considered a key strategy for reducing vulnerability and increasing adaptive capacity in rural communities (Scoones, 1998). Within tourism studies, several scholars have applied the SLF to examine how tourism creates alternative income opportunities for rural households, particularly in areas where agricultural livelihoods are increasingly unstable. Existing studies suggest that tourism can strengthen household resilience by diversifying sources of income and reducing dependence on agriculture (Zapata et al., 2011). However, much of the existing

research has focused primarily on the economic dimensions of livelihood change, particularly increases in household income and employment opportunities. Comparatively less attention has been paid to how tourism reshapes other forms of capital that are essential to long-term rural sustainability. Changes in social relationships, community cooperation, cultural identity, and environmental resource management are often discussed separately rather than as interconnected dimensions of livelihood transformation. As a result, there remains limited understanding of how tourism-driven livelihood change affects the broader sustainability of rural communities over time.

2.3 Tourism as a Mechanism of Community Capital Transformation

Recent literature has increasingly conceptualized tourism as a mechanism of community capital transformation rather than merely an income-generating activity. From this perspective, tourism enables various forms of locally embedded capital—including landscapes, traditional knowledge, cultural practices, social relationships, and local identity—to be transformed into economic and symbolic value through tourism-related activities. This process of capital transformation allows rural communities to connect local resources with external tourism markets while simultaneously reshaping the meaning and function of those resources within community life. Natural landscapes may become ecotourism attractions, cultural traditions may be incorporated into tourism experiences, and social networks may become institutionalized through tourism management systems and community organizations. Tourism therefore restructures relationships among different forms of capital and influences how communities organize their livelihoods and development strategies. Nevertheless, scholars also emphasize that capital transformation through tourism is uneven and potentially contradictory. While tourism may strengthen economic capital and generate new livelihood opportunities, it may simultaneously weaken social cohesion, commodify cultural practices, or increase environmental degradation if development is poorly managed (MacCannell, 1973; Tosun, 2000). Unequal access to tourism opportunities may also intensify social differentiation within communities, particularly when tourism benefits become concentrated among specific households or local elites (Zapata et al., 2011). These debates suggest that tourism should be analyzed as a dynamic process that simultaneously produces opportunities, tensions, and trade-offs across multiple dimensions of rural life. Understanding tourism as a mechanism of community capital transformation therefore provides a more comprehensive analytical perspective for examining the relationship between tourism development and rural sustainability.

2.4 Household Livelihoods as an Intermediate Linkage

Studies in rural development increasingly suggest that household livelihoods function as an intermediate linkage between broader structural transformations at the community level and long-term sustainability outcomes (Scoones, 1998). Livelihood strategies influence how households allocate labor, manage risks, utilize local resources, and respond to changing economic opportunities. Consequently, transformations in household livelihoods often reflect deeper changes occurring within community economic systems, social structures, and resource management practices. When community-based tourism becomes integrated into rural livelihood systems, its impacts extend beyond income generation to influence patterns of labor organization, gender roles, social relationships, cultural values, and environmental resource use. Tourism-related livelihood diversification may strengthen household resilience by creating multiple income sources; however, it may also increase dependence on volatile tourism markets and alter traditional systems of social cooperation and resource management (Zapata et al., 2011). Despite the importance of household livelihoods within rural transformation processes, much of the existing literature continues to examine tourism impacts in fragmented ways by separating economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions from one another. This fragmented approach limits the ability to understand how tourism-related livelihood changes collectively influence broader rural sustainability outcomes. A more integrated

analytical approach is therefore necessary to examine how tourism-driven livelihood transformations shape long-term sustainability across interconnected dimensions of rural life.

2.5 Research Positioning

Based on the literature reviewed above, it is evident that although extensive research has examined community-based tourism and sustainable livelihoods, relatively limited attention has been paid to systematically integrating these perspectives within a single analytical framework. In particular, insufficient research has examined how tourism functions as a mechanism of community capital transformation and how changes in household livelihood strategies mediate the relationship between tourism development and rural sustainability outcomes. To address this gap, this study employs Mae Kampong Village as a case study to investigate the relationships among community-based tourism, household livelihood transformation, and rural sustainability. Using the Sustainable Livelihood Framework as the primary analytical lens, the study examines how tourism reshapes different forms of community capital and how these transformations influence the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of rural sustainability. By adopting a process-oriented approach, this study aims to contribute to broader theoretical discussions concerning tourism-led rural transformation and sustainable development in developing country contexts. It also seeks to provide a more integrated understanding of how tourism may simultaneously enhance and constrain long-term rural sustainability within community-based tourism systems.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach using documentary research as the primary method of investigation. It aims to examine how community-based tourism reshapes household livelihood strategies and to analyze how these transformations influence rural sustainability across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. A qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to explore structural relationships, social processes, and contextual dynamics rather than to measure statistical relationships or quantify tourism impacts. The research adopts a case study approach focusing on Mae Kampong Village as a representative example of community-based tourism development in a highland rural context. The case study approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth analysis of the interactions among tourism development, livelihood transformation, and rural sustainability within a specific socio-cultural and environmental setting. This study applies the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) as the primary analytical framework. Within this framework, community-based tourism is conceptualized as a mechanism of community capital transformation through which natural, social, cultural, human, and economic capital are reorganized and connected to tourism-related livelihood activities. The framework is used to analyze how transformations in different forms of community capital influence household livelihood strategies and broader rural sustainability outcomes.

3.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does community-based tourism function as a mechanism of community capital transformation in Mae Kampong Village?
2. How do transformations in community capital influence household livelihood strategies under community-based tourism development?
3. How are changes in household livelihood strategies linked to rural sustainability across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions?

3.3 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to Mae Kampong Village. The village is selected as the unit of analysis due to its recognition as a prominent example of community-based tourism development in Thailand and

its transition from an agriculture-based economy toward a tourism-oriented livelihood system. The study focuses specifically on the relationships among community-based tourism, transformations in household livelihoods, and rural sustainability. Rather than producing statistical measurements of tourism impacts, the research aims to explain the structural and process-oriented dynamics through which tourism influences rural livelihoods and community sustainability.

3.4 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

This study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained through documentary research. The collected materials include:

· Peer-reviewed academic journal articles

· Books and academic publications related to community-based tourism and rural development

· Previous studies concerning Mae Kampong Village

· Government and institutional reports related to tourism and community development

· Policy documents and tourism development reports

· Credible public documents and research reports relevant to the study objectives

Documents were selected based on three primary criteria:

1. relevance to community-based tourism, rural livelihoods, or rural sustainability

2. relevance to Mae Kampong Village or comparable rural tourism contexts

3. credibility and academic reliability of the source materials

Priority was given to peer-reviewed academic sources and official reports in order to strengthen the reliability and validity of the analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study employs qualitative content analysis as the primary analytical method. The collected documents were systematically reviewed and interpreted through repeated reading and thematic categorization. Data were organized according to key analytical themes derived from the Sustainable Livelihood Framework and the study objectives.

The analysis focused on three major analytical dimensions:

1. forms of community capital transformation (natural, social, cultural, human, and economic capital)

2. changes in household livelihood strategies and livelihood diversification

3. implications for rural sustainability across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions

Through this process, the study identifies patterns, relationships, and tensions associated with tourism-led livelihood transformation and examines how these processes contribute to or undermine long-term rural sustainability.

3.6 Analytical Framework

To operationalize the Sustainable Livelihood Framework within the study, each form of community capital was linked to specific analytical dimensions as follows:

Community Capital	Analytical Focus
Natural Capital	Environmental resources, ecological pressure, resource conservation
Economic Capital	Income diversification, tourism-related income, economic resilience
Social Capital	Community participation, cooperation, governance structures
Cultural Capital	Cultural identity, cultural preservation, commodification of culture
Human Capital	Local knowledge, skills adaptation, livelihood capabilities

This analytical structure enables the study to systematically examine how community-based tourism reshapes different forms of capital and how these transformations influence household livelihoods and rural sustainability outcomes.

3.7 Trustworthiness and Methodological Transparency

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, data triangulation was applied through the comparison of multiple types of documentary sources, including academic studies, institutional reports, and policy documents. Cross-referencing these sources helped improve the consistency and reliability of interpretations. In addition, the study explicitly outlines its analytical framework, document selection criteria, and thematic analysis procedures in order to ensure methodological transparency. This approach allows the analytical process to be clearly understood and potentially applied to similar rural tourism contexts in future research.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings concerning the relationships among community-based tourism, household livelihood transformation, and rural sustainability in Mae Kampong Village. Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), the analysis demonstrates that community-based tourism functions as a process of community capital transformation that reshapes household livelihood strategies and generates both opportunities and structural tensions across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions.

4.1 Economic Capital Transformation and Livelihood Diversification

The findings indicate that community-based tourism has substantially transformed household livelihood structures in Mae Kampong Village. Prior to tourism development, household livelihoods depended primarily on agriculture, small-scale farming, and the direct use of forest resources. However, the expansion of tourism-related activities gradually introduced a more diversified livelihood system in which tourism became an important component of household economic strategies. Previous studies on Mae Kampong Village indicate that tourism-related activities—including homestay operations, local guiding services, food and beverage businesses, ecotourism activities, and the sale of local products—created additional income opportunities for local households (Natthida, 2021; Orapan, 2019; Yodsuwan, 2022). This transformation contributed to the diversification of household income sources and reduced dependence on agriculture as the sole basis of rural livelihoods. Rather than completely replacing agricultural production, tourism income often functioned as a supplementary source integrated into existing livelihood systems. Many households combined agricultural activities with tourism services, particularly during peak tourism seasons, while labor

allocation increasingly shifted between agricultural and service-related sectors. This mixed livelihood strategy enhanced household economic flexibility and reduced vulnerability to fluctuations in agricultural markets and environmental uncertainty. These findings support previous research suggesting that livelihood diversification can strengthen rural adaptive capacity and resilience under changing socio-economic conditions (Scoones, 1998; Zapata et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that the economic benefits generated through tourism development were distributed unevenly across households. Households possessing stronger initial economic and physical capital—such as favorable geographic locations, larger houses suitable for homestay adaptation, or greater financial resources for tourism investment—were generally better positioned to access tourism opportunities directly. In contrast, households with limited financial resources, limited tourism-related skills, or less advantageous locations often participated indirectly through wage labor or supporting service activities with comparatively lower and less stable returns. This uneven distribution of tourism benefits suggests that while community-based tourism enhanced livelihood resilience at the community level, it simultaneously reproduced structural inequalities among households. These findings reinforce critiques within the literature arguing that tourism development may generate differentiated access to opportunities and uneven patterns of economic gain if benefit distribution mechanisms are insufficiently inclusive (Tosun, 2000; Zapata et al., 2011).

4.2 Social Capital, Community Governance, and Social Tensions

The expansion of community-based tourism also reshaped social capital and local governance structures within the community. Tourism development encouraged the establishment of collective management mechanisms, including tourism committees, community regulations, and participatory decision-making systems intended to coordinate tourism activities and regulate resource use. These governance mechanisms strengthened collective organization and reinforced community cooperation in tourism management processes. Previous studies indicate that community participation and collective management structures played an important role in supporting tourism development in Mae Kampong Village (Jittima, 2018; Natthida, 2021). In addition, tourism-related activities increased interaction and cooperation among households through shared responsibilities associated with tourism services, environmental management, and cultural activities. Community funds and collective tourism management systems contributed to the redistribution of certain tourism revenues toward community projects and public infrastructure development. Such mechanisms enhanced the role of social capital in supporting local governance and collective decision-making. However, the findings also demonstrate that tourism development generated new forms of social tension within the community. Unequal access to tourism opportunities contributed to differences in economic benefits among households, which in turn affected perceptions of fairness and inclusion. Households with stronger connections to tourism management structures or greater access to tourism-related resources often possessed greater influence over tourism development decisions. These conditions created tensions concerning benefit allocation, participation opportunities, and the future direction of tourism development within the community. The findings therefore suggest that social capital within tourism communities is simultaneously strengthened and challenged through tourism development processes. While tourism can reinforce cooperation and collective organization, it may also intensify internal differentiation and social fragmentation if governance systems fail to maintain equitable participation and transparent decision-making processes (Tosun, 2000).

4.3 Cultural Capital Transformation and Cultural Commodification

Tourism development in Mae Kampong Village also contributed to the transformation of cultural capital. Local traditions, lifestyles, cultural practices, and vernacular architecture increasingly became integrated into tourism experiences and tourism-related economic activities. Traditional cultural elements—such as local ceremonies, traditional houses, local food production, and cultural performances—became important components of the tourism economy and contributed to the revitalization of local cultural identity (Orapan,

2019). The incorporation of cultural practices into tourism activities strengthened community awareness of local identity and increased the visibility of local culture to external audiences. In some cases, tourism encouraged the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge and traditional practices that may otherwise have declined under broader processes of modernization and rural transformation. At the same time, the findings reveal concerns regarding cultural commodification. As cultural practices became increasingly integrated into tourism markets, some cultural expressions were gradually adapted to align with tourist expectations and commercial demands. This process risked transforming cultural practices from community-centered meanings into market-oriented performances designed primarily for visitor consumption (MacCannell, 1973). These findings suggest that tourism-related cultural transformation is characterized by an ongoing negotiation between cultural preservation and economic adaptation. Tourism may contribute to the revitalization of cultural capital while simultaneously creating pressures that reshape the meaning and authenticity of local cultural practices.

4.4 Natural Capital and Environmental Sustainability

The findings further indicate that tourism development significantly affected natural capital and environmental sustainability within the community. Because natural landscapes and environmental quality constitute central tourism attractions in Mae Kampong Village, tourism development created incentives for environmental conservation and resource protection. Community regulations concerning forest conservation, waste management, and environmental protection were strengthened in response to the growing importance of environmental quality for tourism development (Orapan, 2019). However, increasing tourist numbers and tourism infrastructure expansion also generated environmental pressures on the local ecosystem. Tourism growth contributed to increased waste generation, water consumption, traffic congestion, and pressure on fragile mountain ecosystems. Seasonal overcrowding and intensified resource use raised concerns regarding ecological carrying capacity and the long-term sustainability of local environmental systems. These findings demonstrate that tourism simultaneously functions as both a motivation for environmental conservation and a source of environmental pressure. The sustainability of tourism development therefore depends heavily on the effectiveness of local environmental governance mechanisms and the community's capacity to regulate tourism expansion within ecological limits (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

4.5 Human Capital and Skills Adaptation

Community-based tourism development in Mae Kampong Village has also contributed to the transformation of human capital within the community. The expansion of tourism-related activities encouraged local households to develop new skills and adaptive capacities associated with hospitality services, communication, tourism management, and small-business operations. Participation in homestay management, local guiding, and tourism-related enterprises enabled community members to acquire practical knowledge and service-oriented competencies that differed from traditional agriculture-based livelihood skills (Scoones, 1998; Ellis, 2000). In addition, tourism development promoted learning processes within the community through cooperation with external organizations, tourism networks, and government agencies. These interactions contributed to increased awareness of tourism management, environmental conservation, and community organization. Such forms of human capital development strengthened households' ability to adapt to changing economic conditions and diversified livelihood opportunities (Chambers & Conway, 1992). However, unequal access to tourism-related training, education, and learning opportunities also created differences in households' capacity to participate effectively in tourism activities. Households possessing stronger educational backgrounds, communication skills, or external networks were generally better positioned to benefit from tourism-related opportunities. These findings suggest that human capital plays an important role in shaping adaptive capacity and influencing the uneven distribution of tourism benefits within community-based tourism systems.

4.6 Community-Based Tourism and Rural Sustainability

Taken together, the findings suggest that community-based tourism in Mae Kampong Village functions simultaneously as both a supporting and a constraining force for rural sustainability. Tourism development contributed to livelihood diversification, enhanced economic flexibility, and strengthened certain forms of community capital, particularly economic and organizational capacity. These transformations improved household adaptive capacity and reduced exclusive dependence on agriculture-based livelihoods. At the same time, tourism development generated new vulnerabilities associated with unequal benefit distribution, social differentiation, cultural commodification, and environmental pressure. These contradictions demonstrate that the relationship between tourism and rural sustainability is neither linear nor automatically positive. The findings therefore support the argument that the sustainability outcomes of community-based tourism depend largely on how communities manage the transformation of community capital and regulate tourism development processes. Long-term rural sustainability requires governance systems capable of maintaining equitable participation, balancing economic benefits with cultural and environmental protection, and strengthening community adaptive capacity under changing tourism conditions (Suntikul & Dorji, 2016). From the perspective of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, the case of Mae Kampong Village demonstrates that sustainable rural development cannot be understood solely through economic growth indicators. Instead, sustainability depends on the dynamic relationships among livelihood diversification, social equity, cultural continuity, environmental management, and the capacity of communities to negotiate trade-offs arising from tourism-led transformation processes (Scoones, 1998; Chambers & Conway, 1992).

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among community-based tourism, household livelihood transformation, and rural sustainability through a qualitative documentary analysis of Mae Kampong Village, Thailand. Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) as the primary analytical lens, the study conceptualized community-based tourism as a mechanism of community capital transformation that reshapes economic, social, cultural, and natural capital within rural communities. The findings demonstrate that tourism development in Mae Kampong Village extends beyond income generation and functions as a broader socio-economic process that restructures household livelihood systems and influences long-term rural sustainability across multiple dimensions. The study found that community-based tourism contributed substantially to livelihood diversification within the community. Tourism-related activities—including homestay services, local guiding, food and beverage businesses, and the production of local products—created additional income opportunities and reduced exclusive dependence on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods (Natthida, 2021; Orapan, 2019). Rather than replacing agriculture entirely, tourism became integrated into mixed livelihood systems in which households combined farming activities with tourism-related work. This diversification strengthened household flexibility, increased adaptive capacity, and reduced vulnerability to fluctuations in agricultural markets and environmental uncertainty. These findings support previous studies suggesting that livelihood diversification can enhance household resilience and adaptive capacity in rural communities (Scoones, 1998; Zapata et al., 2011). However, the findings also revealed that the benefits of tourism development were distributed unevenly among households. Access to tourism opportunities was strongly influenced by differences in economic resources, physical assets, social connections, and participation within tourism management structures. As a result, some households benefited more directly and consistently from tourism development than others. These inequalities generated new forms of social differentiation and highlighted structural challenges that may undermine the long-term sustainability of community-based tourism if not addressed through inclusive governance mechanisms and equitable benefit-sharing arrangements (Tosun, 2000). The study further demonstrated that tourism development transformed multiple forms of community capital simultaneously.

Tourism strengthened certain aspects of economic and social capital through increased income circulation, collective management systems, and community participation in tourism governance. At the same time, it created tensions associated with cultural commodification, unequal participation, and environmental pressure on fragile mountain ecosystems. These findings indicate that tourism-led development involves ongoing negotiations and trade-offs among economic growth, social equity, cultural continuity, and environmental protection (MacCannell, 1973; Suntikul & Dorji, 2016). From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by extending existing discussions of community-based tourism beyond outcome-oriented evaluations focused primarily on economic impacts or tourism performance indicators. By integrating the Sustainable Livelihood Framework with the concept of community capital transformation, the study provides a process-oriented understanding of how tourism reshapes livelihood systems and influences broader rural sustainability outcomes. The findings also underscore the importance of household livelihoods as an intermediate analytical linkage connecting tourism development processes with long-term sustainability dynamics at the community level (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998). In practical terms, the findings suggest that rural sustainability under community-based tourism cannot be achieved solely through tourism growth or increased tourist arrivals. Sustainable outcomes depend on the capacity of communities to manage tourism development through effective local governance, equitable participation, transparent decision-making, and the protection of cultural and environmental resources. For policymakers and development practitioners, the case of Mae Kampong Village demonstrates the importance of approaching community-based tourism as part of an integrated rural development system rather than as an isolated economic strategy. This study also acknowledges several limitations. As the research relied exclusively on documentary analysis and secondary data sources, the findings are constrained by the availability and scope of existing documents and previous studies. The study therefore may not fully capture recent changes, local perceptions, or internal community dynamics that could be explored through field-based qualitative research. In addition, because the study did not involve direct field observation, interviews, or participatory research methods, it was unable to examine informal power relations, lived experiences, and real-time community responses to tourism development processes in full depth. Future research could extend this analysis through interviews, ethnographic methods, or participatory approaches to better understand household experiences, local perceptions, power relations, and long-term adaptation processes within tourism-dependent rural communities. The findings directly address the research questions by demonstrating that community-based tourism functions as a mechanism of community capital transformation that reshapes household livelihood strategies and influences rural sustainability across multiple dimensions. The study shows that tourism contributes simultaneously to livelihood diversification, community adaptation, and local economic development, while also generating structural challenges related to inequality, cultural commodification, and environmental pressure. These findings reinforce the importance of analyzing tourism as a dynamic rural transformation process rather than as an exclusively positive development strategy. In conclusion, community-based tourism should be understood not only as a strategy for rural economic development but also as a complex process that tests a community's capacity to manage changing relationships among livelihoods, community capital, and sustainability. The long-term sustainability of tourism-based rural development ultimately depends on the ability of local communities to maintain a balance among economic opportunities, social equity, cultural integrity, and environmental limits while continuously adapting to changing external conditions.

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