

# Sustainable Tourism: A Tool to Promote Sustainable Local Development in Thailand

Somsathid Phonwattana

Faculty of Administrative, Economic and Social Sciences, University of City Island, Cyprus

E-mail: paulwattana70@gmail.com

Krissamaporn Pungpho

Faculty of Administrative, Economic and Social Sciences, University of City Island, Cyprus

E-mail: krissamaporn.pung@gmail.com

Oytun Sozudogru

Faculty of Education, University of City Island, Cyprus

E-mail: oytun.sozudogru@adakent.edu.tr

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## Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the role of sustainable tourism in sustainable local development in Thailand. For this purpose, the relationship between sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development was examined. Primary data were collected to examine the relationship between variables. A questionnaire survey was used for data collection. Data were collected from the people involved in various business activities related to the tourism in various local areas of Thailand. Data were analyzed by using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Results of the study shows that sustainable tourism has positive role to enhance sustainable local development. Sustainable tourism in local areas of Thailand has significant potential to increase economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare. Furthermore, economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare has positive influence on sustainable local development. Hence, sustainable tourism has vital influence to promote sustainable local development in Thailand.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Tourism, Economic Activity, Cultural Promotion, Community Welfare, Sustainable Local Development

## Introduction

Local develop among the nations has vital concern. As the local develop collectively shows positive role on the economic development. The contribution of local development to nation's welfare has vital role to promote economy. However, low level of local development has negative role in economy of any country. Therefore, most of the countries are focusing on the local development (Sitek, Florek, & Sitek, 2020; Sturiale, Scuderi, Timpanaro, & Matarazzo, 2020). Due to the growing importance of local development, nations are focusing on the various strategies to enhance the sustainable local development.

Sustainable local development has several benefits for the local people. Local development has major influence on the welfare of the people. Improvement in the welfare of people has vital role to enhance the economic activities in the concerned region. Sustainable development in the region has positive role to empower the community by decreasing the poverty level as the development lead to the livelihood opportunities. Increase in livelihood opportunities has

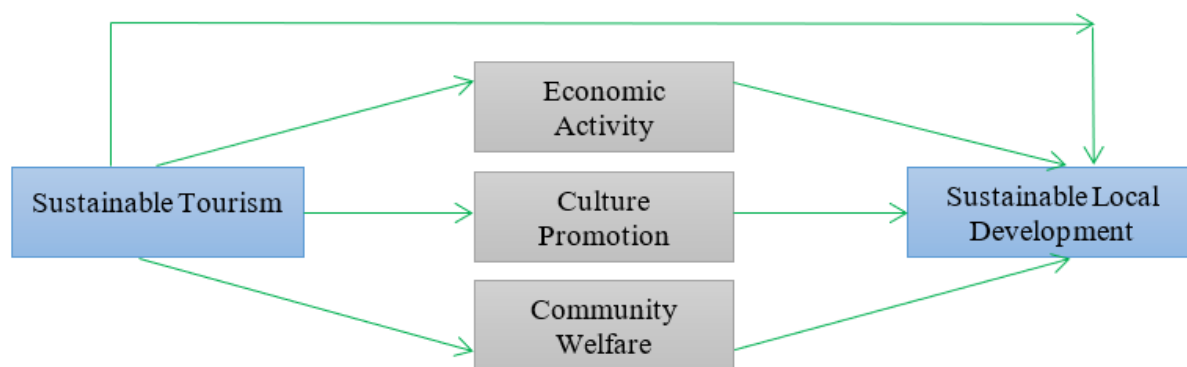
relationship with the development of the local community. Therefore, sustainable local development has vital importance for every community (Berrueta, Serrano-Medrano, García-Bustamante, Astier, & Masera, 2017; Sitek et al., 2020) in terms of people welfare through income generating opportunities.

However, sustainable local development is one of the important issues in Thailand. In most of local areas of Thailand, the local development is at initial level. Due to not having significant level of development, people are living in vulnerable condition. The low level of local development has negative role in life of local people. Particularly, it decreases the income generating opportunities among the people. Low income generating activities shows negative influence on the welfare of people. As number of studies highlighted that local development in Thailand has several benefits (Wang, Liu, Dou, Li, & Zeng, 2020). Additionally, Thailand has a considerable population living in poverty among local areas, therefore, to facilitate these people, local development is quite important.

## **Literature Review**

Tourism has central importance in various countries through significant contribution to various sectors. In number of countries, the potential in tourism sector is major influence on the nation. Tourism industry is the continues source of revenue generation for the countries. Economic impact of tourism activities in the world cannot be neglected as it has key contribution to the world's economy (Ren, Can, Paramati, Fang, & Wu, 2019). By examining the growing importance of tourism industry, the trend of tourism is increasing among countries. Most of the countries are making the strategies to enhance tourism activities including Thailand.

Especially, tourism has vital importance for Thailand. As Thailand is one of the countries having several areas for tourism. Several types of tourism exist in Thailand such as environmental tourism, supports tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, adventure tourism, religious tourism, ethnic tourism etc. All these tourism types have major contribution to the tourism industry of Thailand. These types of tourism have vital importance for the economic development of Chain. For the economic development, sustainable local development is most important which require tourism promotion. Sustainable local development is key to the Chain in various local areas. As Thailand has big population, therefore, to facilitate the whole population, sustainable local development is important which is possible through tourism. As tourism activities and local development has major relationship with each other (Naghiu, Vázquez, & Georgiev, 2005). Therefore, sustainable tourism is most important which causes to increase the economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare. Moreover, economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare has positive role in local development. Figure 1 shows the relationship between sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development in Thailand.



**Figure 1** Theoretical framework of the study showing the relationship between sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development

### **Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Local Development**

Sustainable tourism is the idea of visiting somewhere as a tourist along with trying to make a positive influence on the environment, society, as well as economy. Tourism can include primary transportation to the general location, local transportation, accommodations, entertainment, recreation, nourishment, and shopping. Sustainable tourism is now one of the most important concepts among the tourism industry. The concept of sustainable tourism is now growing among the research scholars (Cai et al., 2020). Sustainable tourism has significant importance in the society as it has vital relationship with sustainable local development.

Local development is a comparatively latest theory in social sciences grounded on the identification and utilization of various resources as well as endogenous potentialities of a community, neighborhood, different cities, municipality or equivalent. The local development method considers the endogenous potentialities of territories. Therefore, sustainable local development is the process of local community development in sustainable manners. It has significant relationship with tourism activities. As the local development requires sufficient resources which required economic resources. Tourism activities are the most important activities which causes to increase the income generation which has positive influence on sustainable local development. Increase in the tourism activities in the specific areas causes to increase the various business opportunities. Increase in the tourism practices also increases the business performance for the local people. Finally, increase in the development activities finally lead to the local development. Therefore, sustainable tourism has vital connection with the local development (Cunha & Cunha, 2005) which has potential to increase the sustainability in development. Therefore, in the context of Thailand, the local developmental issues can be resolved with the help of tourism. Efforts to increase the tourism sustainability in various local areas of the Thailand has the potential to increase the local development sustainability. Hence, this discussion lead to the following hypothesis;

**Hypothesis 1** Sustainable Tourism has positive influence on Sustainable Local Development.

### **Sustainable Tourism, Economic Activity and Sustainable Local Development**

Sustainable tourism has significantly linked with economic activities. There is positive relationship expected between sustainable tourism and economic activity. Economic activity is connected with the livelihood opportunities by the individuals. Economic activity is one of the activities of creating, providing, buying, or selling various goods as well as services. Moreover, any action that comprises producing, allocating, or consuming various products as well as services is an economic activity. Economic activities are those activities which exist at all levels within a society. These activities have vital importance for the country. As all the economic activities collectively makes the gross-domestic product (GDP) of any country. These activities have vital relationship to enhance the GDP and economic growth. As highlighted in number of

studies that economic activities has vital importance in the economic development (Udemba, Güngör, & Bekun, 2019).

Sustainable tourism has vital influence on economic activities and increase the local development. As increase in the sustainable tourism activities has the ability to increase income generating ways for the people. As this study is limited to the local development, therefore, the economic activities of local people are concerned in this study. The increase in number of tourists provide several opportunities for the people to generate income. Because the tourism and economic activity has positive relationship (Qureshi, Hassan, Hishan, Rasli, & Zaman, 2017). Furthermore, economic activity has relationship with sustainable local development. Development of a specific area is also based on the economic activities of the people. Better level of businesses in the concerned areas has positive role to enhance sustainable local development. As the economic activities has relationship with sustainable development which is mentioned by Sturiale et al. (2020) and Santiago (2017) which lead to the following hypotheses;

**Hypothesis 2** Sustainable Tourism has positive influence on Economic Activity.

**Hypothesis 3** Economic Activity has positive influence on Sustainable Local Development.

### **Sustainable Tourism, Cultural Promotion and Sustainable Local Development**

Sustainable Tourism are normal style of Culture and relating to the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a society. Each society has its own culture. There is a difference between one country to another country's concern for the culture. It vital importance for the nations as it provides unique recognition (Gross & Kelley, 2010). Cultural promotion is one of the factors which stimulates the work of various people in the field of culture with the help of scholarships, declarations, awards, technological platforms, and socio-educational procedures that lead to the recognition as well as the promotion of varied cultural expressions.

Here, tourism has a vital role to spread the culture of one specific area. An increase in the number of tourists also increases the popularity of the culture. As the tourist comes from the whole world which causes to the spread the cultural values when going back to their own countries and it is one of the means of tourism attraction. Therefore, sustainable tourism is significantly connected with cultural promotion (Zheng et al., 2017) among various countries. Furthermore, an increase in cultural promotion increases local development. Sustainability in local development increases with cultural promotion. As the increase in the culture increases the visitors in the specific area to visit the cultural places as well as cultural events. Hence, there is an important connection between cultural promotion and local development (Bonfe, 2018) which lead to the following hypotheses;

**Hypothesis 4** Sustainable Tourism has positive influence on Cultural Promotion.

**Hypothesis 5** Cultural Promotion has positive influence on Sustainable Local Development.

### **Sustainable Tourism, Community Welfare and Sustainable Local Development**

Community welfare also known as social welfare denotes to a minimum level of income level of people, service as well as other assistance for disadvantaged people including the poor, old, disabled, students, unpaid workers such as mothers as well as other caregivers, and underprivileged groups. Community welfare has significant importance in the countries. In most of the countries, there are poor community living in various areas. The welfare of this community is most important for the government of any country. Among other countries, Thailand is also one of the countries having a number of people living in various parts of Thailand having low income. Therefore, the welfare of low-income community is most important among the countries (Berrone, Gelabert, Massa-Saluzzo, & Rousseau, 2016).

Welfare of community is influenced by the tourism activities. Sustainable tourism activities have positive role in the welfare of community. As the significant tourism activities increase the income generating activities for the poor people which causes to increase the community welfare. People come from various countries spend money for the residence as well as food

and visit various places which provides several income generating opportunities for the local people. Therefore, tourism and community welfare has strong relationship with each other (Putri, Sri, Suyana, & Murjana, 2019). Furthermore, increase in community welfare increases the sustainable local development. Positive effect of sustainable tourism on community welfare cause to increase the local development. As the community welfare has relationship with local development (Boy, Djinar, Urmila, & Marhaeni, 2019) which lead to following hypotheses;

**Hypothesis 6** Sustainable Tourism has positive influence on Community Welfare.

**Hypothesis 7** Community Welfare has positive influence on Sustainable Local Development.

#### **Indirect Effect of Economic Activity, Cultural Promotion and Community Welfare**

Indirect effect of economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare between sustainable tourism and sustainable local development is justified by following the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986). Aforementioned discussion shows that sustainable tourism has significant relationship with economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare. Furthermore, economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare has significant relationship with sustainable local development. Finally, the sustainable tourism has significant relationship with sustainable local development. Therefore, all the paths are significant to justify the indirect effect of economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare between sustainable tourism and sustainable local development. Thus, following indirect hypotheses are proposed;

**Hypothesis 8** Economic Activity mediates the relationship between Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Local Development.

**Hypothesis 9** Cultural Promotion mediates the relationship between Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Local Development.

**Hypothesis 10** Community Welfare mediates the relationship between Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Local Development.

### **Research Methodology**

A survey questionnaire was designed to examine the relationship between sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development. Survey questionnaires is the most appropriate tool to collect data from the individual people (Zhang, Kuchinke, Woud, Velten, & Margraf, 2017). Development of questionnaire was based on the previous studies. The measures for variables were used from previous studies. The current study measured five variables, namely; sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development. All these variables were measured by using various scale items used in the previous studies.

Therefore, this study employed quantitative research technique in which a questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were collected from one point of time, thus, this study followed correctional research design. First part of the questionnaire was based on the various questionnaires related to the respondent's general information. The second part of the questionnaire was based on the scale items related to the key variables; sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development. Finally, after the development of survey questionnaire, data were collected from the people involved in various business activities related to the tourism in various local areas of Thailand. Only those people were selected as respondents which were involved in various business activities related to the tourism activities in local areas of Thailand. Moreover, this study distributed 500 questionnaires by using the area cluster sampling (Ul-Hameed, Mohammad, & Shahar, 2018). After making the clusters, simple random sampling was used for data collection from selected clusters (Kaur, Patil, Shirk, & Taillie, 1996). Finally, 280 questionnaires were returned and used for data analysis.

## Research Findings

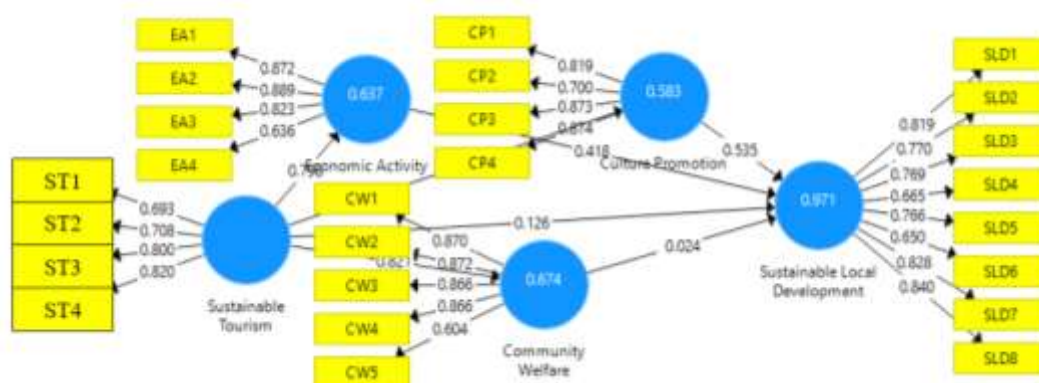
Analysis of the study was started by using the preliminary data analysis to avoid errors in the data. Therefore, preliminary data analysis was carried out to fix the errors in the data. Errors in the data, for instance, missing value and outlier was removed. It is given in Table 1 that data has no missing value and outlier (Aydin & ŞENOĞLU, 2018).

**Table 1** Data Statistics

	No.	Missing	Mean	Median	Min	Max	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness
ST1	1	0	3.271	4	1	5	1.413	-0.322	-0.226
ST2	2	0	3.202	3	1	5	0.943	-1.139	-1.239
ST3	3	0	2.9	4	1	5	1.281	-0.755	-0.546
ST4	4	0	3.357	4	1	5	1.293	-0.871	-0.43
EA1	5	0	3.357	4	1	5	1.299	-1.057	-1.324
EA2	6	0	3.388	4	1	5	1.302	-1.867	-0.475
EA3	7	0	3.473	4	1	5	0.988	-0.509	-0.538
EA4	8	0	3.581	4	1	5	1.105	-0.715	-0.401
CP1	9	0	2.988	4	1	5	1.323	-0.808	-1.622
CP2	10	0	3.643	4	1	5	1.18	-1.69	-0.564
CP3	11	0	3.496	4	1	6	1.246	-0.761	-0.356
CP4	12	0	3.481	4	1	6	1.188	-0.68	-0.416
CW1	13	0	3.457	4	1	5	0.997	-0.992	-0.542
CW2	14	0	3.395	4	1	5	1.383	-1.122	-1.384
CW3	15	0	3.519	4	1	5	1.252	-1.672	-0.56
CW4	16	0	2.9	4	1	5	1.252	-0.672	-0.56
CW5	17	0	3.488	4	1	5	1.252	-0.574	-0.633
SLD1	18	0	3.442	4	1	5	1.269	-0.746	-0.513
SLD2	19	0	3.364	4	1	5	1.282	-1.979	-0.353
SLD3	20	0	3.504	4	1	5	1.202	-0.523	-0.565
SLD4	21	0	3.605	4	1	5	1.11	-0.715	-0.406
SLD5	22	0	3.628	4	1	5	1.318	-0.797	-1.62
SLD6	23	0	3.628	4	1	5	1.188	-1.635	-0.589
SLD7	24	0	3.504	4	1	6	1.24	-0.722	-0.392
SLD8	25	0	3.512	4	1	6	1.169	-0.53	-0.47

Note: ST = Sustainable Tourism; EA = Economic Activity; CP = Cultural Promotion; CW = Community Welfare; SLD = Sustainable Local Development

After the preliminary data analysis, data were analyzed by using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) which is most recommended (Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013; Hair, Sarstedt, Pieper, & Ringle, 2012; Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). It is given in Figure 2 that; sustainable tourism is measured through four items. Economic activity was measured by using four items. Cultural promotion was examined through four scale items. Moreover, the community welfare was measured through five scale items and finally, sustainable local development is measured by using eight items. All the scale items given in Table 2 have factor loadings above 0.5 which is minimum threshold level.



**Figure 2** Measurement Model

**Table 2** Factor Loadings

	Community Welfare	Culture Promotion	Economic Activity	Sustainable Local Development	Sustainable Tourism
CP1	0.819				
CP2	0.700				
CP3	0.873				
CP4	0.874				
CW1		0.870			
CW2		0.872			
CW3		0.866			
CW4		0.866			
CW5		0.604			
EA1			0.872		
EA2			0.889		
EA3			0.823		
EA4			0.636		
SLD1				0.819	
SLD2				0.770	
SLD3				0.769	
SLD4				0.665	
SLD5				0.766	
SLD6				0.650	
SLD7				0.828	
SLD8				0.840	
ST 1					0.693
ST 2					0.708
ST 3					0.800
ST 4					0.820

Note: ST = Sustainable Tourism; EA = Economic Activity; CP = Cultural Promotion; CW = Community Welfare; SLD = Sustainable Local Development

Furthermore, according to Hair, Hollingsworth, Randolph, and Chong (2017), composite reliability (CR) must be above 0.7 and average variance extracted (AVE) must be above 0.7. Results in the Table 3 shows that sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development have CR above 0.7. Nevertheless, sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable

local development also have AVE above 0.5. Finally, this study examined discriminant validity with the help of cross-loadings as shown in Table 4 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

**Table 3** Reliability and Convergent Validity

	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>rho_A</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
Community Welfare	0.877	0.876	0.911	0.676
Culture Promotion	0.834	0.848	0.89	0.671
Economic Activity	0.82	0.834	0.884	0.658
Sustainable Local Development	0.898	0.904	0.919	0.587
Sustainable Tourism	0.761	0.783	0.843	0.574

Note: ST = Sustainable Tourism; EA = Economic Activity; CP = Cultural Promotion; CW = Community Welfare; SLD = Sustainable Local Development

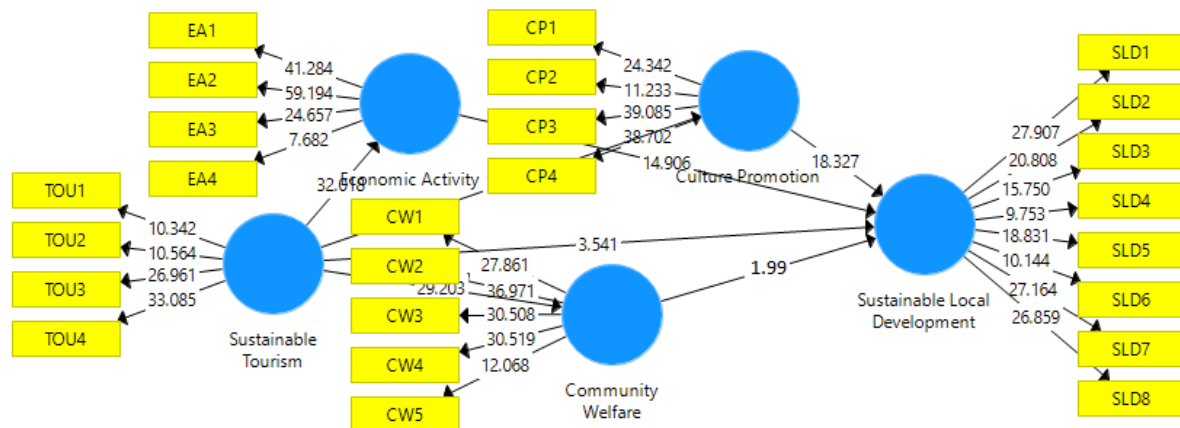
**Table 4** Cross-Loadings

	<b>Community Welfare</b>	<b>Culture Promotion</b>	<b>Economic Activity</b>	<b>Sustainable Local Development</b>	<b>Sustainable Tourism</b>
CP1	0.838	0.819	0.586	0.752	0.627
CP2	0.737	0.7	0.511	0.648	0.494
CP3	0.866	0.773	0.644	0.811	0.662
CP4	0.853	0.774	0.731	0.835	0.699
CW1	0.57	0.792	0.416	0.491	0.647
CW2	0.52	0.71	0.421	0.506	0.61
CW3	0.466	0.777	0.396	0.414	0.589
CW4	0.466	0.759	0.392	0.41	0.581
CW5	0.604	0.79	0.702	0.708	0.703
EA1	0.531	0.598	0.872	0.766	0.684
EA2	0.544	0.666	0.889	0.764	0.708
EA3	0.563	0.614	0.823	0.761	0.677
EA4	0.411	0.589	0.696	0.657	0.499
SLD1	0.583	0.665	0.739	0.819	0.796
SLD2	0.536	0.607	0.676	0.77	0.688
SLD3	0.562	0.62	0.617	0.769	0.672
SLD4	0.427	0.594	0.627	0.665	0.494
SLD5	0.537	0.61	0.603	0.766	0.646
SLD6	0.435	0.686	0.511	0.75	0.493
SLD7	0.574	0.765	0.659	0.828	0.666
SLD8	0.526	0.852	0.726	0.89	0.708
ST1	0.688	0.426	0.326	0.403	0.693
ST2	0.724	0.432	0.341	0.427	0.758
ST3	0.576	0.694	0.609	0.779	0.8
ST4	0.581	0.682	0.781	0.832	0.862

Note: ST = Sustainable Tourism; EA = Economic Activity; CP = Cultural Promotion; CW = Community Welfare; SLD = Sustainable Local Development

The next step of data analysis is based on the hypotheses testing which is carried out with the help of structural model through PLS (Hameed, Basheer, Iqbal, Anwar, & Ahmad, 2018; Henseler & Chin, 2010; Henseler et al., 2014; Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The direct effect of sustainable tourism is examined on sustainable local development. Moreover, the direct effect of sustainable tourism is examined on economic activity, cultural promotion and

community welfare. Furthermore, the direct effect of economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare was examined on sustainable local development. Results of the study shows that sustainable tourism has positive effect on sustainable local development. Sustainable tourism also has positive effect on economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare. Finally, economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare has positive effect on sustainable local development. Results are given in Table 5 and PLS structural model is given in Figure 3. Finally, all the direct hypotheses are supported.



**Figure 3** Structural Model

**Table 5** Direct Effect Results

	$\beta$	M	SD	T Statistics	P Values
Community Welfare -> Sustainable Local Development	0.024	0.026	0.024	1.99	0.044
Culture Promotion -> Sustainable Local Development	0.535	0.537	0.029	18.327	0
Economic Activity -> Sustainable Local Development	0.418	0.417	0.028	14.906	0
Sustainable Tourism -> Community Welfare	0.821	0.822	0.028	29.203	0
Sustainable Tourism -> Culture Promotion	0.763	0.765	0.044	17.428	0
Sustainable Tourism -> Economic Activity	0.798	0.802	0.025	32.018	0
Sustainable Tourism -> Sustainable Local Development	0.126	0.126	0.036	3.541	0

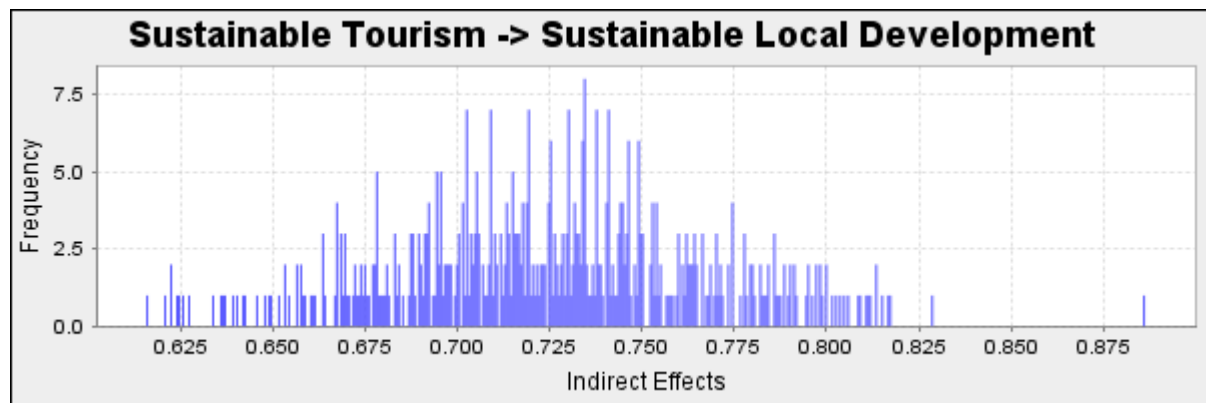
Note: ST = Sustainable Tourism; EA = Economic Activity; CP = Cultural Promotion; CW = Community Welfare; SLD = Sustainable Local Development

After the assessment of direct effect, the current study examined the indirect effect of economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare between sustainable tourism and sustainable local development. Results are given in Table 6 which indicates that cultural promotion is a mediating variable between sustainable tourism and sustainable local development as the t-value is 12.894. The indirect effect of economic activity is also significant with t-value 12.203. However, the indirect effect of community welfare between sustainable tourism and sustainable local development is not significant with t-value 0.828. Indirect effect between sustainable tourism and sustainable local development is also given through histogram in Figure 4.

**Table 6** Indirect Effect Results

	$\beta$	M	SD	T Statistics	P Values
Sustainable Tourism -> Community Welfare -> Sustainable Local Development	0.02	0.021	0.024	0.828	0.408
Sustainable Tourism -> Culture Promotion -> Sustainable Local Development	0.409	0.411	0.032	12.894	0
Sustainable Tourism -> Economic Activity -> Sustainable Local Development	0.334	0.335	0.027	12.203	0

Note: ST = Sustainable Tourism; EA = Economic Activity; CP = Cultural Promotion; CW = Community Welfare; SLD = Sustainable Local Development

**Figure 4** Indirect Effect Histogram

## Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development. The objective of this study was to examine the role of sustainable tourism in sustainable local development in Thailand. Furthermore, the mediation effect of economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare was examined between sustainable tourism and sustainable local development. To achieve the study objective; 10 hypotheses were proposed and examined with the help of statistical software. Results of the study shows that sustainable tourism has positive role to enhance sustainable local development. Increase in tourism sustainability increase the sustainability in local development. Sustainable tourism is proved to be a significant tool to promote sustainable local development in Thailand. It is proved that sustainable tourism has positive influence on economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare. As increase in the sustainable tourism increases the economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare. Furthermore, it is revealed that economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare has positive influence to enhance sustainable local development. Therefore, tourism sustainability has direct and indirect effect through economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare on sustainable local development.

## Implications of the Study

The current study has several theoretical and practical implications. The relationship between sustainable tourism, economic activity, cultural promotion, community welfare and sustainable local development has valuable importance for the literature. As the effect of sustainable tourism on sustainable local development in relation to the economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare was not examined by the previous studies. Therefore, this is the vital contribution to the literature. The other major contribution of the current study is that; the mediation effect of economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare

between sustainable tourism and sustainable local development was first time examined by the current study. In practical prospective, the current study has several implications for the local development authorities. This study suggested that local development authorities should promote sustainable tourism to promote sustainable local development. Local development authorities should enhance sustainable local development through economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare by promoting sustainable tourism.

### **Limitations of the Study and Future Directions**

Although the current study has significant contribution to the literature and practice, however, this study also has few limitations which could be the future directions. First, this study is limited to the local development of Thailand through tourism. However, the tourism practices are different in each country which may be one of the causes to vary the original results. Hence, future study should be carried out in the other countries separately. Second, the current study used three key elements for local development; economic activity, cultural promotion and community welfare. Future study should include other indicators of local development. Third, this study is based on the quantitative approach in which a questionnaire was used, on the other hand interviews along the survey questionnaire could be more beneficial to confirm the results obtained through survey which should be considered in the future studies.

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