# The Stakeholder Participation-Based Competency Empowerment Model of Creative Tourism Planning and Management in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya World Heritage Site

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## Abstract

Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, once the flourishing capital of Thailand, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1991. Recently, the site has seen a significant influx of visitors, propelled by the success of Thai dramas like Love Destiny Seasons 1 and 2. This popularity has intensified the challenge of managing over-tourism effectively. Addressing these challenges necessitates comprehensive planning and strategic management, including intensive training programs designed to boost the competencies, skills, and knowledge of those involved in tourism planning and management. These efforts aim not only to enhance the area's productivity but also its overall well-being. This study was driven by two primary objectives: 1) to identify and analyze the challenges and obstacles that have previously hindered effective tourism planning and management at the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site, with a particular emphasis on improving creative tourism management; and 2) to enhance the competencies, skills, and knowledge of tourism stakeholders through a creative tourism approach. Employing a mixed-methods strategy, the research involved two groups of 60 participants from six key informant categories, including representatives from central and local governments, the private sector, community sectors, civil society, and academia within Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. The research tools utilized included semi-structured interviews, pre- and post-training assessments, and satisfaction surveys. The investigation uncovered 20 sub-themes, pinpointing the incompetence of manpower and personnel, budget constraints, and ineffective space utilization as the most pressing issues. These challenges have consistently impeded effective tourism management at the site. In response, a three-day intensive training program was developed and executed, significantly bolstering the necessary competencies, skills, and knowledge. The training's impact was profound, with 93% of participants passing the post-training assessment and the majority expressing excellent overall satisfaction. Ultimately, this research lays out a replicable model for developing creative tourism planning and management competencies among tourism stakeholders. This model, adaptable to other locales with similar tourism resources, not only addresses immediate management needs but also establishes a framework for the sustainable development of heritage sites.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder Participation-Based; Competency Empowerment Model; Creative Tourism Planning and Management; Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya; World Heritage Site

## Introduction

The global tourism industry continues to evolve, with increasing emphasis on sustainability, cultural preservation, and active engagement of local communities. In this context, creative tourism has emerged as a significant trend, promoting not only the cultural and economic vitality of destinations but also fostering deeper connections between tourists and host communities (Richards, 2020; OECD, 2022). Unlike traditional forms of tourism, creative tourism emphasizes immersive experiences where tourists engage in hands-on activities that reflect the local culture, traditions, and lifestyle (Duxbury & Richards, 2019). This approach aligns with the growing demand for authentic and meaningful travel experiences, which are seen as a counterbalance to the negative impacts of mass tourism (Smith & Pappalepore, 2022).

Thailand holds significant potential as a premier global tourism destination. The 2023 World Economic Forum ranks Thailand 31st out of 140 countries in tourism industry competitiveness, an improvement from its 34th position in 2017. Within ASEAN, Thailand ranks third, following Singapore and Malaysia. Despite the global economic slowdown, Thailand has actively enhanced its tourism appeal by improving its natural resources, tourism infrastructure, and air transport capabilities, ranking 10th, 14th, and 22nd globally in these areas, respectively (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, a city steeped in history and recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, presents a unique case for the application of creative tourism strategies. Once the capital of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, the city is home to a wealth of historical monuments and cultural heritage sites that attract tourists from around the world (UNESCO, 1991). However, the pressures associated with mass tourism—including environmental degradation, overcrowding, and the commodification of culture—pose significant challenges to the preservation of Ayutthaya's heritage and the sustainability of its tourism sector (Li & Hunter, 2021; Guttentag, 2022). These issues underscore the need for innovative tourism management approaches that prioritize cultural integrity, community well-being, and long-term sustainability.

In this context, the role of stakeholders in the planning and management of tourism becomes crucial. Stakeholder participation is increasingly recognized as a key factor in the success of sustainable tourism initiatives (Nunkoo, 2017; Yachin, 2020). The inclusion of diverse stakeholder groups from the supply side—ranging from local communities and government agencies to businesses—ensures that tourism strategies are comprehensive and reflective of the needs and values of all involved (Lalicic & Önder, 2018). Moreover, empowering stakeholders with the necessary competencies—such as skills in heritage management, sustainable business practices, and cultural interpretation—enhances their ability to contribute meaningfully to tourism development (Zehrer & Raich, 2021). Competency empowerment not only facilitates effective stakeholder engagement but also promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility toward the destination's cultural and environmental resources (Vasquez & Chandra, 2022).

This research seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature by developing a stakeholder participation-based competency empowerment model tailored for the creative tourism sector in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. The proposed training model aims to integrate stakeholder input throughout the tourism development process, from initial planning to implementation and ongoing evaluation.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the ongoing discourse on sustainable creative tourism, particularly within the context of heritage sites. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of stakeholder collaboration in achieving sustainable creative tourism outcomes, especially in culturally sensitive environments (Bramwell & Lane, 2022; Ruhanen et al., 2021). However, there remains a paucity of research focused on the intersection of stakeholder participation, competency empowerment, and creative tourism, especially within World Heritage Sites (Hartwell, Smith, & Page, 2022). This study not only addresses this gap but also offers practical insights that can be adapted to other heritage sites facing similar challenges.

The findings are expected to inform policymakers, tourism planners, and community leaders on how to develop tourism strategies that not only enhance the visitor experience but also safeguard the cultural and historical assets of the city. Ultimately, this research aims to ensure that Ayutthaya's heritage is preserved for future generations, while also fostering a vibrant and sustainable tourism economy that benefits both residents and visitors alike.

## Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the challenges and obstacles that have previously hindered effective tourism planning and management at the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site, with a particular emphasis on improving creative tourism management

2. To enhance the competencies, skills, and knowledge of tourism stakeholders through a creative tourism approach

## Literature Reviews

### Creative Tourism: Definitions, Concepts, and Relevance

Creative tourism represents a departure from traditional cultural tourism, moving towards more interactive, immersive experiences where tourists are active participants, not just observers (Richards, 2020). This form of tourism is particularly relevant in destinations like Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, where the rich cultural heritage offers abundant opportunities for tourists to engage directly with local traditions, arts, and crafts. Not only does creative tourism enhance the tourist experience, but it also aids in the preservation of cultural heritage by promoting local crafts and practices that might otherwise be overlooked (Smith & Pappalepore, 2022).

Recent literature emphasizes creative tourism's role in advancing sustainable tourism practices. According to Duxbury and Richards (2019), it aligns with the broader goals of sustainable development by encouraging local community involvement and ensuring that economic benefits are more equitably distributed. In Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, creative tourism is instrumental in mitigating the negative impacts of mass tourism, such as environmental degradation and cultural commodification, by prioritizing quality over quantity and fostering deeper connections between visitors and the local culture (Richards & Marques, 2021).

### Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Planning and Management

Stakeholder participation is now recognized as a crucial component of sustainable tourism development (Nunkoo, 2017). In Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, involving a diverse range of stakeholders—including local communities, government agencies, businesses, and non-governmental organizations—is vital to ensure that tourism development aligns with the

cultural and environmental values of the destination (Lalicic & Önder, 2018). Effective stakeholder participation leads to more inclusive and equitable tourism planning processes, considering the needs and aspirations of all parties involved (Yachin, 2020).

The literature documents several benefits of stakeholder participation in tourism planning and management. It fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among local stakeholders, leading to more sustainable tourism practices (Zehrer & Raich, 2021). It also ensures that tourism development is culturally appropriate and reflective of local values, enhancing the authenticity of the visitor experience (Bramwell & Lane, 2022). Additionally, stakeholder participation contributes to the resilience of the tourism sector by promoting collaboration and consensus-building among diverse groups (Ruhanen et al., 2021).

However, challenges to effective stakeholder participation persist, including power imbalances, differing priorities, and a lack of resources or skills among local communities to engage effectively in the planning process (Li & Hunter, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions to build stakeholder capacity and facilitate more meaningful engagement in tourism planning and management.

**Competency Empowerment in Tourism Management**

Competency empowerment involves equipping stakeholders with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to contribute effectively to tourism planning and management (Vasquez & Chandra, 2022). In the context of creative tourism, this includes training in areas such as cultural heritage management, sustainable business practices, and community engagement. Empowering local stakeholders not only improves the quality of the tourism experience but also promotes more sustainable and inclusive tourism development (Zehrer & Raich, 2021).

The literature highlights the critical role of competency empowerment in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes. For instance, Ruhanen et al. (2021) argue that it is essential for building the capacity of local communities to manage tourism in a manner that aligns with their cultural and environmental values. Hartwell, Smith, and Page (2022) also emphasize that competency empowerment promotes more equitable and inclusive tourism development by ensuring that local stakeholders have the skills and knowledge needed to participate actively in the tourism planning process.

In Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, competency empowerment is key to enhancing the capacity of local stakeholders to manage creative tourism effectively, preserving the city's cultural heritage while promoting economic development. Recent studies underscore the importance of training local artisans, tour guides, and community leaders in areas like cultural interpretation, sustainable business practices, and heritage management to ensure the success and sustainability of creative tourism initiatives (Chaychun & Intarakumnerd, 2022).

## Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research to comprehensively address the research objectives.

**Population and Sampling**

The research targeted two distinct groups within the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. The first group comprised sixty supply-side tourism stakeholders who were selected based on their experience of at least five years in supervisory or managerial roles, direct involvement with tourism-related issues in Ayutthaya, and willingness to participate. The second group

consisted of sixty operational administrative personnel, chosen for their minimum of one year of experience in tourism-related roles and their readiness to engage in the study.

**Research Instruments**

For the first group, semi-structured interviews were conducted using both face-to-face and online methods, with the interview format refined through insights gained from secondary data and expert feedback from five professionals in tourism and academia. The second group underwent pre- and post-training assessments to evaluate their knowledge and learning outcomes, complemented by a satisfaction survey. These assessments, consisting of 30 multiple-choice questions, were administered before and after the training sessions. Satisfaction was measured on a 5-level Likert Scale, ranging from 1.00 (lowest satisfaction) to 5.00 (highest satisfaction).
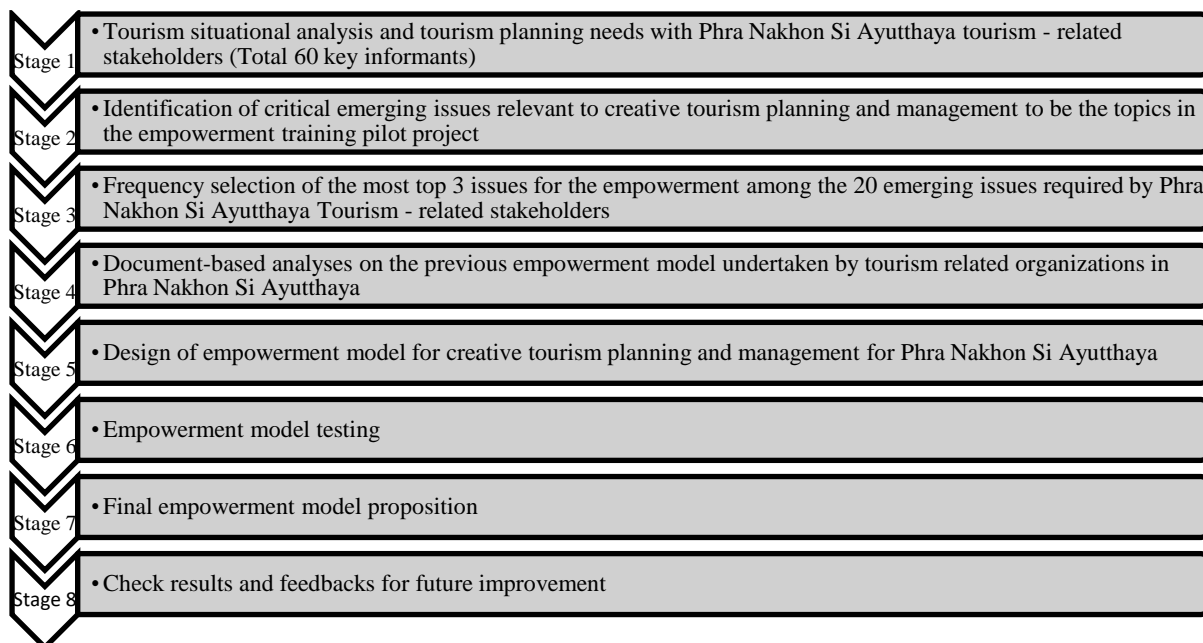
**Procedures**

Initially, a semi-structured interview form was meticulously developed from an extensive literature review and further refined with expert feedback to ensure effective data collection. Before beginning data collection, the project and its instruments were approved by the Institutional Review Board to adhere to ethical standards. Key informants were identified based on set criteria, with interview request letters sent out via fax and email, followed by phone calls to schedule the interviews. Data were collected through personal interviews with 60 stakeholders responsible for tourism management in Ayutthaya.

After data collection, an intensive three-day training session tailored to participants' needs was conducted. The second group, consisting of 60 participants who met the specified criteria, was recruited to attend by tourism-related agencies. The effectiveness of this training was evaluated through a post-test and satisfaction surveys, which facilitated the development of a stakeholder participation-based competency empowerment model. This model is proposed as a pilot initiative to enhance tourism management practices in similar heritage sites.

**Data Analysis**

Data from the first group's semi-structured interviews underwent thematic analysis; responses were categorized into themes, and word counts were reviewed to finalize the data. Content analysis was employed to examine the meanings and relationships among words, themes, and concepts. For the second group, data from the pre- and post-training evaluations were analyzed using frequency distributions to track variations in responses over time. Statistical measures such as percentages and mean values were utilized to summarize the findings. These results were presented in various formats, including lists, tables, and graphical representations, to effectively illustrate the distribution of the data.

## Research Conceptual Framework

**Stage 1** • Tourism situational analysis and tourism planning needs with Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya tourism - related stakeholders (Total 60 key informants)

**Stage 2** • Identification of critical emerging issues relevant to creative tourism planning and management to be the topics in the empowerment training pilot project

**Stage 3** • Frequency selection of the most top 3 issues for the empowerment among the 20 emerging issues required by Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Tourism - related stakeholders

**Stage 4** • Document-based analyses on the previous empowerment model undertaken by tourism related organizations in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya

**Stage 5** • Design of empowerment model for creative tourism planning and management for Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya

**Stage 6** • Empowerment model testing

**Stage 7** • Final empowerment model proposition

**Stage 8** • Check results and feedbacks for future improvement

**Figure 1.** Research Conceptual Framework
Source: Own illustration

## Research Results

**Objective 1: To identify and analyze the challenges and obstacles that have previously hindered effective tourism planning and management at the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site, with a particular emphasis on improving creative tourism management**

**Secondary Data Results**

The World Heritage Site of the Historical City of Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, renowned for its preservation of Thai arts and culture, drew a significant number of tourists in 2023, with a total of 8,292,809 visitors, including 2,109,632 international and 6,183,177 domestic tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2024). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Ayutthaya had already seen a considerable influx of both domestic and international tourists, attracted by its rich historical and archaeological heritage. This surge underscored the urgent need for effective management strategies to balance the positive impacts of tourism with its potential drawbacks.

The primary challenges identified in managing Ayutthaya's tourism include urban expansion, high visitor volumes, deterioration of ancient sites, and the incompatibility of certain tourism activities with heritage preservation. Legal challenges such as managing surrounding habitats, dealing with encroachment, ineffective law enforcement, overlapping land use, and a lack of local engagement in understanding the value of heritage have also emerged as significant threats.

Currently, eight critical issues require immediate attention to preserve the integrity of Ayutthaya Historical City:

1. Enhancing tourist services
2. Beautifying landscapes and organizing commercial and parking spaces around key areas like Khum Khun Phaen and Phra Mongkhon Bophit Temple
3. Upgrading Somdej Phra Sri Nakhon Tra Boromarajonani Park and other historical sites.
4. Managing Rojanachikun Road and other areas to address traffic and pedestrian encroachments
5. Restoring the surroundings of historical sites such as Wat Worapho, Wat Chettharam, and Wat Phra Non Lokayasutha.
6. Addressing cultural destruction, such as filling in ancient canals and encroaching on historical park areas
7. Strengthening law enforcement to restrict inappropriate constructions within the city island area
8. Forming committees at governmental and local levels to manage and maintain the World Heritage Site

Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from all stakeholders, led by the Ministry of Culture, in partnership with the Governor of Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya and the Director-General of the Fine Arts Department. A comprehensive approach should include renovating buildings, revising the master plan for the historical park, educating city officials on site development, reconstructing ancient sites with international expertise, and engaging historical experts to ensure the authenticity and integrity of historical narratives. Local network partners are also crucial in addressing these issues, ensuring sustainable management and promoting tourism that respects the city's unique heritage.

The proposed high-speed rail project, which may impact cultural heritage sites such as Wat Sam Pluem Chedi, highlights the complex challenge of balancing development with preservation. It is imperative that the community and stakeholders prioritize the conservation of Ayutthaya's ancient remains, many of which are still unexcavated, to safeguard the city's historical legacy for future generations.

In the context of creative tourism, Ayutthaya has successfully integrated traditional crafts and cultural experiences into its tourism offerings. Activities such as traditional weaving and pottery have become central to the province's creative tourism initiatives, providing tourists with immersive cultural experiences while also preserving traditional skills and boosting the local economy (Akkarapatkamchai et al., 2023). These successes are largely attributed to the involvement of local communities and their willingness to share their cultural practices with tourists, enhancing the authenticity of the experience.

Furthermore, Ayutthaya has developed creative tourism routes that emphasize the historical and cultural significance of its old city. These routes offer tourists a comprehensive understanding of Ayutthaya's rich history while allowing them to engage in activities reflective of the city's heritage (Akkarapatkamchai et al., 2023). The development of these routes has been particularly successful in attracting domestic tourists interested in cultural and historical tourism.

Despite these successes, Ayutthaya's creative tourism sector faces several challenges that have hindered its full potential. A significant issue is the lack of understanding and appreciation of the creative tourism concept among both tourists and local stakeholders. Many

visitors still prioritize conventional sightseeing over immersive cultural experiences, limiting participation in creative tourism activities. This gap in understanding is a major barrier to the expansion of creative tourism (Wisudthiluck et al., 2015).

Additionally, marketing and infrastructure deficiencies have also posed significant challenges. The limited promotion of creative tourism initiatives, particularly to international audiences, has resulted in lower-than-expected tourist engagement. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure, such as insufficient signage, transportation options, and visitor facilities, has made it difficult for tourists to fully engage in the available creative tourism activities (Wisudthiluck et al., 2015).

**Qualitative Data Results**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with tourism personnel who possess extensive experience in managing the site. Interviewees were selected based on predefined criteria and organized into six groups. The interview content was structured to elicit detailed accounts of the problems and obstacles encountered in past tourism planning and management efforts by supply-sided stakeholders at the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. This was supplemented by secondary information to establish a foundational base of ideas, enriched with insights from the interviewees.

The interviews underwent meticulous thematic and content analyses to interpret the observed phenomena. This process involved evaluating the data to determine what it indicated, conveyed, or meant, based on established academic principles, concepts, theories, and previous research related to culture, traditions, customs, and values. This data was then integrated with secondary information and insights from the literature review. The meanings of phenomena, symbols, images, objects, messages, and sounds encountered during the research were carefully considered and analyzed. Codes were assigned to the main informants, and the data was methodically examined through sequential content analysis to extract deeper insights and implications. (Table 1).

**Table 1** Groups of Key Informants and Codes

| Key Informants | Total | Codes |
|---|---|---|
| **Group 1 Central Government Representatives** | 10 | F1-10 |
| **Group 2 Local Government Representatives** | 10 | F11-20 |
| **Group 3 Private Sector Representatives** | 10 | F21-30 |
| **Group 4 Community Sector Representatives** | 10 | F31-40 |
| **Group 5 Civil Society Group Representatives** | 10 | F41-50 |
| **Group 6 Academic Sector Representatives** | 10 | F51-60 |

**Source:** Research Findings

The qualitative data analysis of the problems, obstacles, and outcomes from previous planning and management efforts at the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site is succinctly summarized in Table 2. This table organizes the findings into three primary columns: factors, codes of key informants, and total word repetitions. By structuring the data in this manner, the table provides a clear overview of the key elements that impact the planning and management

of the site. This format is crucial for identifying specific factors essential for designing training programs tailored to the needs of supply-side tourism stakeholders, thereby facilitating more targeted and effective management strategies.

**Table 2** Qualitative data analysis of problems and obstacles obtained from past tourism planning and management at Ayutthaya World Heritage Site

| Problems and Obstacles | Key informants | Total |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Incompetence of Manpower and Personnel** | F1 F3 F5 F7 F20 F26 F38 F51 F55 F57 F58 F60 | 12 |
| **2. Budget Constraints** | F1 F4 F5 F6 F22 F24 F36 F37 F49 F52 F60 | 11 |
| **3. Ineffectiveness of Space Utilization** | F1 F5 F6 F7 F16 F17 F30 F33 F39 F50 | 10 |
| **4. Absence of Government Support** | F1 F3 F5 F14 F21 F47 F55 F56 | 9 |
| **5. Inefficiency of Landscape Management** | F3 F4 F10 F12 F34 F42 F44 F59 F60 | |
| **6. Discontinuity of Management** | F2 F3 F4 F5 F20 F35 F40 F60 | 8 |
| **7. Lack of Transportation and Traffic Management** | F2 F4 F5 F6 F31 F48 F57 F58 | 8 |
| **8. Unavailability of Technology and Innovation** | F3 F4 F5 F13 F29 F46 F54 F60 | 8 |
| **9. Imbalance of Tourism Activities** | F1 F2 F3 F5 F25 F51 F52 | 7 |
| **10. Unavailability of System Management** | F1 F2 F5 F6 F28 F45 F52 | 7 |
| **11. Overlapping Roles of Tourism Agencies** | F2 F3 F4 F5 F22 F32 F45 | 7 |
| **12. Unsuitability of Climate** | F1 F2 F3 F6 F32 F49 F53 | 7 |
| **13. Lack of Modern Knowledge** | F1 F3 F4 F15 F24 F53 | 6 |
| **14. Inefficiency of Cross Collaboration** | F1 F4 F5 F11 F27 F20 | 6 |
| **15. Abruption of Change in Tourist Behaviour** | F3 F4 F7 F8 F23 F53 | 6 |
| **16. Insufficiency of Investment and Capital** | F1 F4 F5 F8 F30 F41 | 6 |
| **17. Inadequateness of Transportation Capacity** | F1 F2 F3 F7 F30 F42 | 6 |
| **18. Ineffectiveness of Tourism Zoning** | F3 F5 F8 F9 F19 F43 | 6 |
| **19. Rapidness of Urban Expansion** | F4 F5 F6 F14 F18 | 5 |
| **20. Deterioration of Nature and Environment** | F1 F2 F5 F7 F33 | 5 |

**Source:** Research Findings

The content analysis of intensive interviews on past planning and management challenges at the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site identified 20 key factors, which are detailed in Table 2. This table offers an in-depth view of the primary challenges historically affecting the site. Below are examples illustrating specific issues:

1. **Budget and Personnel Limitations**: "Issues in planning and managing the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site include limited budgets and unskilled personnel, compounded by many officials lacking modern knowledge. Efficient tourism management aligned with the agency's goals is needed, yet current tourism activities are challenging to manage," consistent with findings from several informants (F22, F4, F5, F6, F24, F36, F37, F49, F52, F60).

2. **Spatial Management**: "There is a need for effective spatial management that minimally impacts all involved, seen as a significant challenge by local people and administrative organizations," supported by multiple sources (F6, F1, F5, F7, F16, F17, F30, F33, F39, F50).

3. **Inter-Agency Cooperation**: "Current issues stem from a lack of prompt cooperation between agencies and systematic management, with many government agencies in Thailand having overlapping roles and responsibilities, which complicates the planning and management of the Ayutthaya site," echoed by several informants (F17, F1, F5, F6, F7, F16, F30, F33, F39, F50).

4. **Adapting to Tourist Behavior**: "Rapid changes in tourist behavior present problems as officials and agencies struggle to adapt, missing opportunities for tourism development in the area," as noted by multiple stakeholders (F53, F4, F7, F8, F23).

5. **Technological Advancements**: "The rapid growth of technology and innovation poses planning challenges if administrative stakeholders lack the necessary knowledge," corroborated by several informants (F46, F4, F5, F13, F29, F54, F60).

6. **Urban Expansion**: "The rapid urban expansion driven by investment and venture capital necessitates enhanced transportation capabilities. If not well-prepared, this expansion can create significant issues, requiring effective spatial management beyond the current scope of local administrative organizations," supported by observations from various sources (F5, F1, F3, F14, F21, F47, F55, F56).

7. **Environmental Concerns**: "Addressing climate change is challenging, but preventing environmental degradation is achievable," agreed upon by multiple stakeholders (F33, F2, F3, F6, F32, F49, F53).

8. **Zoning and Management**: "Zoning, landscape management, and cleanliness remain significant issues. The importance of rotating executives through local government elections is critical," as noted by several participants (F41, F2, F3, F4, F5, F20, F35, F40, F60).

These insights underscore the crucial role of data analysis in helping local entrepreneurs and community members understand and navigate the complexities of their environment. Such understanding is imperative for devising strategies that address immediate issues while fostering long-term community sustainability. By applying these findings, community members can customize development efforts to meet their specific environmental and cultural needs, thereby improving resource management, adopting sustainable practices, and enhancing community involvement. This approach promotes stronger community cohesion and resilience, which are essential for thriving in a dynamic setting.

The observations highlight the importance of analyzing data concerning problems, obstacles, and outcomes to deepen local entrepreneurs' and villagers' comprehension of the challenges and opportunities within their communities. This understanding is pivotal in developing strategies that not only tackle immediate problems but also contribute to building robust, sustainable communities over time. By integrating insights from this analysis, community members can align their development initiatives more closely with the unique needs and characteristics of their local environment. This strategy improves their capacity to manage resources effectively, engage in sustainable practices, and foster a sense of ownership and involvement among residents, leading to enhanced community cohesion and resilience, which are vital for prospering in an ever-evolving landscape.

**Objective 2: To enhance the competencies, skills, and knowledge of tourism stakeholders through a creative tourism approach**

A three-day intensive training session was held to boost the competencies, skills, and knowledge of tourism stakeholders involved in the planning and management of the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. Focused on creative destination management and the effective use of tourism space, particularly under budget constraints, the training attracted sixty qualified participants. Their demographic details are detailed in Table 3. This targeted training was designed to equip participants with the necessary tools and insights to address the site's unique challenges, promoting more innovative and sustainable management practices.

**Table 3** Demographic characteristics of the participants

| Demographic Characteristics | Total | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Gender** | | |
| Male | 25 | 41.7 |
| Female | 35 | 58.3 |
| **2. Age** | | |
| 21-30 | 18 | 30.0 |
| 31-40 | 23 | 38.3 |
| 41-50 | 14 | 23.3 |
| 51-60 | 4 | 6.6 |
| Over 60 | 1 | 1.6 |
| **3. Educational Level** | | |
| Undergraduate or below | 2 | 3.3 |
| Bachelor's degree | 46 | 76.6 |
| Master's degree | 10 | 16.6 |
| Doctoral degree | 2 | 3.3 |

| Demographic Characteristics | Total | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **4. Job Position** | | |
| General Positions | 29 | 48.3 |
| Knowledge Worker Positions | 17 | 28.3 |
| Managerial Positions | 7 | 4.2 |
| Executive Positions | 5 | 3.0 |

**Source:** Research findings

The participant demographic for the three-day intensive training at the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site was diverse, comprising 25 males (41.7%) and 35 females (58.3%). The age group of 31-40 years was the most represented, with 23 participants (38.3%). The majority of participants had a high level of education, with 46 (76.6%) holding a bachelor's degree. Professionally, 29 participants (48.3%) occupied general job positions within their organizations.

The effectiveness of the training program and participant satisfaction were comprehensively documented in Table 4. This table provides a detailed evaluation of how well the training met the participants' needs and expectations, offering specific feedback on aspects such as the relevance of the content, the effectiveness of the delivery methods, and the overall impact on their professional skills and knowledge. This thorough evaluation was vital for assessing the success of the training and identifying areas for further improvement, ensuring that the program continues to effectively enhance the capabilities of tourism stakeholders in managing the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site.

**Table 4** Levels of participant satisfaction in various issues after training

| Evaluating training and developing competencies, skills, and knowledge | Satisfaction levels | | | | | Mean ($\bar{X}$) | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly agree (5) | Agree (4) | Neutral (3) | Disagree (2) | Strongly disagree (1) | | |
| | Total (%) | Total (%) | Total (%) | Total (%) | Total (%) | | |
| 1. The training topics are interesting, up-to-date, and can be applied in the future. | 25 (41.67) | 25 (41.67) | 10 (16.66) | - | - | 4.25 | Excellent |
| 2. The scope of the training content is complete as specified. | 20 (33.34) | 29 (48.33) | 11 (18.33) | - | - | 4.15 | Good |
| 3. The content and curriculum in the training | 26 (43.33) | 27 (45.00) | 7 (11.67) | - | - | 4.32 | Excellent |

| Evaluating training and developing competencies, skills, and knowledge | Satisfaction levels | | | | | Mean ($\bar{X}$) | Results |
| | Strongly agree (5) | Agree (4) | Neutral (3) | Disagree (2) | Strongly disagree (1) | | |
| | Total (%) | Total (%) | Total (%) | Total (%) | Total (%) | | |
| are useful and worthwhile. | | | | | | | |
| 4. The sequencing of the content is appropriate. | 19 (31.67) | 33 (55.00) | 8 (13.33) | - | - | 4.18 | Good |
| 5. The duration of the training is appropriate. | 19 (31.67) | 30 (50.00) | 11 (18.33) | - | - | 4.13 | Good |
| 6. Understanding the content and being able to transfer the knowledge gained from training. | 41 (68.33) | 14 (8.40) | 5 (3.00) | - | - | 4.60 | Excellent |
| Overall training satisfaction | | | | | | 4.27 | Excellent |

**Source:** Research findings

The results presented in Table 4 show high levels of satisfaction among participants after the training, with items (3) and (6) receiving an "Excellent" rating, indicating exceptional satisfaction in these areas. Conversely, items (2), (4), and (5) were rated as "Good," reflecting positive feedback but also highlighting areas that could benefit from further improvement.

Further insights are offered in Table 5, which assesses the impact of the training on developing the competencies, skills, and knowledge essential for planning and managing the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. This table contrasts the scores of participants before and after the training, effectively demonstrating the enhancement in reskilling, upskilling, and the acquisition of new skills facilitated by the training. These results are crucial for evaluating the tangible benefits of the training program and for guiding future enhancements to ensure the continuous development of local administrative capabilities in managing and promoting creative tourism at the heritage site.

**Table 5** Evaluation results before and after the training

| Evaluation results | Scores | Before training | | After training | | Differences after training and before training |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total | (%) | Total | (%) | |
| Disqualified (less than 50%) | 0-14 | 22 | 41.0 | 4 | 6.6 | -18 |
| Moderate (50%-60%) | 15-18 | 29 | 48.3 | 10 | 16.6 | -19 |
| Good (61%-80%) | 19-24 | 6 | 10.0 | 21 | 35.0 | +15 |
| Excellent (81%-100%) | 25-30 | 3 | 1.8 | 25 | 41.6 | +22 |
| Average score | | 16 | | 21 | | +5 |
| Max score | | 26 | | 30 | | +4 |
| Min score | | 4 | | 5 | | +1 |

**Source:** Research findings

The evaluation results from the pre- and post-training sessions offer crucial insights into the effectiveness of the training program aimed at enhancing the competencies, skills, and knowledge required for managing and promoting the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. The initial evaluation demonstrated that a significant portion of the participants, 38 out of 60 (63%), already had a foundational understanding of tourism planning and management at the site, as they correctly answered more than half of the assessment questions. This baseline knowledge indicated a solid starting point for further educational interventions.

Significantly, the post-training results showcased marked improvements: 56 of the 60 participants (93%) passed the post-training knowledge test, which exceeded the set criteria for understanding the management of the Ayutthaya World Heritage sites. The average score increased from 16 points before the training to 21 points afterward, signalling a substantial enhancement in participant capabilities.

Despite these encouraging outcomes, the evaluations underscored the necessity for ongoing training to sustain and expand the participants' competencies. Continual education is crucial, especially in areas related to creative tourism management, to ensure the effectiveness of the training remains relevant and adaptive to evolving challenges and opportunities within the heritage site management framework. Regular reviews and updates of the training content are recommended to keep pace with changes and to reinforce the professional growth of the stakeholders involved.

## Discussion

The research on the Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya World Heritage Site underscores the intricate balance required between preserving cultural heritage and managing the influx of tourists, particularly in a site of such historical significance. This balance is increasingly precarious in the face of mass tourism, which poses threats not only to the physical integrity of heritage sites but also to their cultural and social fabric. The study's focus on developing a stakeholder participation-based competency empowerment model is a strategic and forward-

thinking response to these challenges, offering insights that are both timely and relevant for heritage site management worldwide.

**Incompetence of manpower and personnel** emerged as a primary obstacle in the study, reflecting broader concerns within the field of heritage tourism. The lack of adequately trained personnel can lead to ineffective management practices, which, in turn, exacerbate the degradation of heritage sites (Bramwell & Lane, 2022). This challenge is particularly acute in developing countries, where the tourism sector often grows faster than the development of the necessary managerial and technical skills (Matiku et al., 2021). The study's findings suggest that without targeted interventions to build capacity, the Ayutthaya site—and similar heritage locations—will continue to suffer from suboptimal management, ultimately compromising both conservation efforts and visitor experiences.

A pivotal finding of this research is the significant impact of **budget constraints** on the effective management of the Ayutthaya World Heritage Site. Consistent with global trends, as highlighted by Zehrer & Raich (2021), heritage conservation often suffers from chronic underfunding. In Ayutthaya, these financial limitations have resulted in poor space utilization, which not only compromises the quality of the visitor experience but also contributes to the physical deterioration of the site. Recognizing the need for sustainable financial strategies, the research initiative included a specialized training component aimed at empowering stakeholders with the necessary skills to secure funding. The training provided comprehensive guidance on writing proposals, emphasizing the identification of both domestic and international funding opportunities. Participants were introduced to various potential funding sources, including:

- Domestic Sources: Agricultural Research Development Agency (ARDA), Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI), Program Management Units (PMU-A, PMU-B, PMU-C), National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), and Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI).

- International Sources: Agricultural Development Council (ADC), Asia Foundation, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Productivity Organization (APO), Council for Asia Manpower Studies, United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), and the World Bank.

This aspect of the training is designed to not only alleviate financial pressures by diversifying funding streams but also to enhance the capacity of local stakeholders to undertake larger-scale conservation and tourism management projects. By equipping them with the skills to successfully navigate the complex landscape of grant applications and funding proposals, the training aims to foster a more resilient management framework that can effectively address the multifaceted demands of heritage site conservation.

One of the most significant contributions of the research is its emphasis on **stakeholder participation** in tourism management. The inclusion of diverse stakeholders—ranging from central and local government officials to representatives from the private sector, community

groups, and academia—ensures that the tourism strategies developed are holistic and reflect the interests of all parties involved. This approach aligns with the broader principles of sustainable tourism, which advocate for inclusive decision-making processes that empower local communities and ensure that tourism development is equitable and culturally sensitive (Nunkoo, 2017).

However, the study also highlights the complexities of coordinating such a diverse group of stakeholders. Issues such as **overlapping roles of tourism agencies** and **lack of modern knowledge** are symptomatic of the fragmented and often siloed nature of tourism management in many regions (Li & Hunter, 2021). These challenges are exacerbated by power imbalances among stakeholders, where more influential entities, such as central government agencies or large private firms, may dominate decision-making processes, sidelining the voices of local communities or smaller businesses (Guttentag, 2022). The research suggests that addressing these imbalances requires not only structural changes—such as clearer delineation of responsibilities among agencies—but also cultural shifts that promote more collaborative and participatory approaches to governance.

The implementation of a **three-day intensive training program** as part of the study is a practical response to the identified challenges. The program's success, as evidenced by the 93% pass rate on post-training assessments, underscores the importance of capacity building in tourism management. Training programs that focus on enhancing competencies, skills, and knowledge can significantly improve the effectiveness of tourism stakeholders, enabling them to manage heritage sites in a way that balances conservation with visitor satisfaction (Richards & Marques, 2021). This finding is supported by previous research, which has shown that continuous training and professional development are critical for maintaining high standards in the tourism industry, particularly in heritage contexts where the stakes are higher due to the need for preservation (Hartwell, Smith, & Page, 2022).

The study's proposed **replicable model** for competency empowerment is particularly noteworthy for its potential application beyond Ayutthaya. By focusing on creative tourism—a form of tourism that emphasizes immersive, participatory experiences that connect visitors with local culture—the model aligns with global trends towards more sustainable and meaningful tourism practices (Richards & Wilson, 2007). Creative tourism offers a way to mitigate the negative impacts of mass tourism, such as environmental degradation and cultural commodification, by shifting the focus from quantity to quality (Duxbury & Richards, 2019). This approach not only enhances the visitor experience but also supports the preservation of cultural heritage by promoting local crafts, traditions, and practices that might otherwise be marginalized.

Furthermore, the study's emphasis on **continuous training and stakeholder engagement** reflects an understanding that sustainable tourism management is an ongoing process rather than a one-time effort. The dynamic nature of the tourism industry—characterized by changing visitor preferences, technological advancements, and evolving global trends—necessitates a flexible and adaptive approach to management (Vasquez & Chandra, 2022). The proposed model's adaptability makes it a valuable tool not only for Ayutthaya but also for other heritage sites facing similar challenges. By providing a framework that can be tailored to the specific needs and conditions of different locations, the model has the potential to contribute significantly to the global discourse on sustainable tourism.
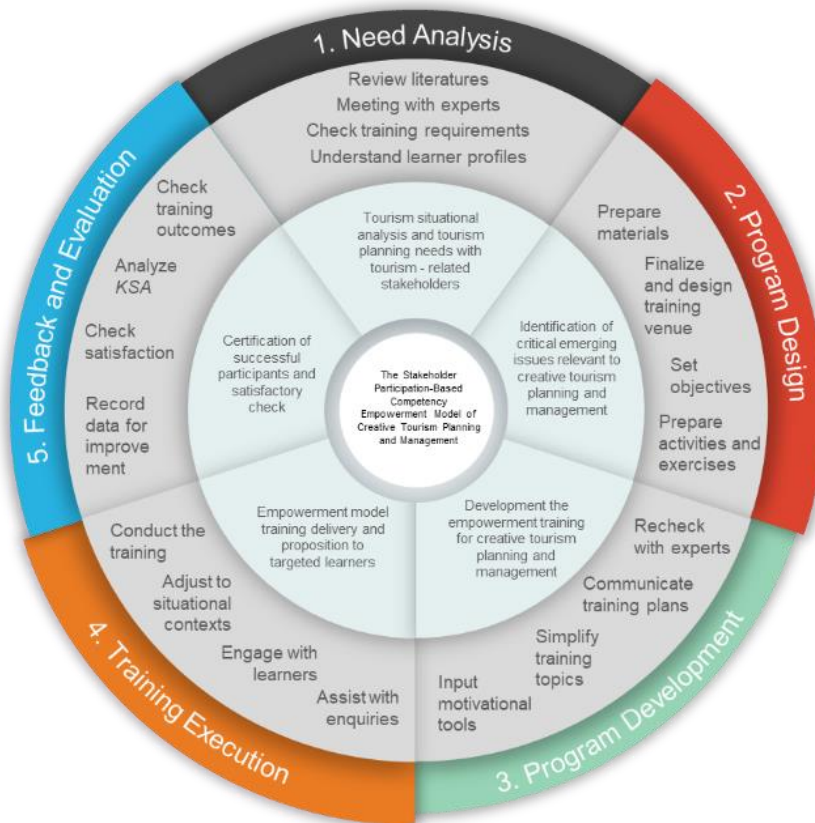
In addition to the practical implications of the study, there are also broader theoretical contributions. The research contributes to the growing body of literature on **stakeholder**

**theory in tourism**, which argues that the success of tourism initiatives depends on the active involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders (Lalicic & Önder, 2018). The study provides empirical evidence supporting the idea that stakeholder engagement is not just a desirable outcome but a necessary condition for effective tourism management. This finding has implications for policymakers, who must consider how to design governance structures and processes that facilitate meaningful stakeholder participation.

Moreover, the research advances the concept of **competency empowerment** in tourism management. By demonstrating the tangible benefits of targeted training programs, the study highlights the importance of investing in human capital as a key strategy for achieving sustainable tourism outcomes. This aligns with the broader literature on capacity building in tourism, which emphasizes the need for ongoing education and professional development to equip stakeholders with the skills and knowledge required to navigate the complexities of the industry (Chaychun & Intarakumnerd, 2022).

**The Stakeholder Participation-Based Competency Empowerment Model** of Creative Tourism Planning and Management for Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya World Heritage Site as shown in Figure 2 addresses the critical challenges of managing creative tourism by focusing on enhancing local stakeholders' competencies while tackling issues such as incompetence of manpower, budget constraints, and ineffective space utilization. The model begins with a thorough situational analysis to identify these challenges, ensuring that the training program aligns with the specific needs of Ayutthaya and engages local stakeholders effectively (Richards & Marques, 2020). The program design then focuses on building essential skills for managing culturally enriching and economically sustainable tourism, incorporating strategies to optimize space utilization and address budget constraints through cost-effective methods and potential partnerships (González & Medina, 2021). During program development, training materials and activities are tailored to enhance the competencies of local stakeholders, directly addressing the challenges of manpower incompetence and leveraging available resources efficiently (World Bank, 2022). The training execution emphasizes practical, hands-on learning, adaptable to Ayutthaya's context, and ensures that the program remains effective despite budget constraints, with sessions demonstrating innovative uses of heritage spaces (UNESCO, 2023). Finally, the program's feedback and evaluation phase measures improvements in tourism management capabilities, assesses the success of budget and space optimization strategies, and uses participant feedback to refine the program continuously, ensuring it meets the evolving needs of Ayutthaya's tourism sector (Training Industry, 2022).

**Figure 2.** The Stakeholder Participation-Based Empowerment Model of Creative Tourism
Planning and Management
**Source:** Research findings

## Conclusion

This research offers an in-depth analysis of the barriers impacting the management of the Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya World Heritage Site, specifically focusing on the development of a stakeholder participation-based competency empowerment model. It identifies critical issues such as personnel incompetence, budget limitations, and poor space utilization, which have consistently undermined effective management. These challenges reflect wider issues in heritage tourism where rapid sector growth can outstrip the development of necessary managerial capabilities and resources.

To counter these issues, the research implemented a three-day intensive training program aimed at bolstering the competencies, skills, and knowledge of tourism stakeholders. With 93% of participants passing the post-training assessment, the program highlights the vital role of targeted capacity-building initiatives in enhancing tourism management practices. The findings underline the necessity of ongoing training and professional development to uphold

high standards in heritage tourism, where achieving a balance between conservation and visitor satisfaction is crucial.

The study also underscores the importance of stakeholder participation in crafting comprehensive and inclusive tourism strategies that reflect the diverse needs and values of all parties involved. This inclusive approach advocates for collaborative and shared responsibility in tourism management, involving government, private sector, community groups, and academia. However, the research recognizes the challenges in coordinating such a diverse group of stakeholders, especially given the potential for power imbalances and overlapping roles among tourism agencies.

The research proposes a scalable model for competency empowerment that can be adapted to other heritage sites with similar challenges. This model advocates for creative tourism, which prioritizes immersive, participatory experiences that engage visitors with local culture, shifting the focus from sheer visitor numbers to enhancing the quality of the tourist experience. Such an approach aims to alleviate the adverse effects of mass tourism, like environmental damage and cultural dilution.

Additionally, this study contributes to the broader theoretical discussions on stakeholder theory and competency empowerment in tourism. It provides empirical support for the notion that active stakeholder involvement is crucial for effective tourism management and emphasizes the strategic importance of investing in human capital to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes.

In conclusion, this research offers valuable insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and community leaders, presenting a structured method to navigate the complexities of heritage site management. The suggested model promises significant potential in advancing sustainable tourism practices globally, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage while promoting robust and sustainable tourism economies that benefit both residents and visitors.

## Recommendations

The study of the Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya World Heritage Site presents several strategies to improve tourism management, drawing on a stakeholder participation-based competency empowerment model to ensure sustainable practices. Key recommendations include:

**1. Continuous Capacity Building and Professional Development**: Regular, specialized training programs should be established to address evolving trends and skills gaps in tourism, particularly in digital marketing, sustainable practices, and cultural heritage management.

**2. Strengthening Stakeholder Collaboration and Governance Structures**: The formation of a multi-stakeholder coordination body is crucial to streamline efforts, enhance communication, and ensure inclusive decision-making in tourism management.

**3. Enhancing Financial and Resource Allocation**: Increasing investment in heritage conservation through varied funding sources such as public-private partnerships, grants, and crowdfunding is essential. Additionally, implementing sustainable financing models like tourism taxes or entrance fees can provide stable funding for conservation efforts.

**4. Leveraging Technology and Innovation**: Adopting smart tourism solutions such as digital visitor management systems, augmented and virtual reality experiences, and utilizing data analytics to optimize tourism management can significantly enhance the visitor experience and operational efficiency.

**5. Fostering Sustainable and Creative Tourism Practices**: Developing creative tourism offerings that allow visitors to engage deeply with local culture can enrich their experience and support the preservation of cultural heritage. Implementing sustainable tourism policies to control visitor numbers and reduce environmental impact is also vital.

**6. Enhancing Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms**: Establishing a comprehensive monitoring framework to track conservation outcomes and visitor satisfaction will enable timely adjustments to management strategies. Periodic impact assessments can help gauge the social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism, informing sustainable policy decisions.

**7. Engaging and Empowering Local Communities**: Deepening community involvement in tourism planning and decision-making processes ensures that local perspectives are considered. Supporting local entrepreneurship in tourism can diversify economic benefits and enhance the visitor experience.

These recommendations aim to foster a robust, sustainable approach to managing heritage sites, enhancing both conservation efforts and visitor experiences, ensuring the long-term preservation and vibrancy of heritage sites like Ayutthaya.

## Acknowledgements

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