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Policy Briefs for Potential Development of Railway Tourism at Khao Luang Area in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province



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Abstract

This study examines policy briefs for the potential development of railway tourism in the Khao Luang area of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. It is a mixed-methods study, with a sample of 560 people and 22 key informants representing various railway tourism stakeholders, including government agencies, the private sector, residents, and community enterprises. Using descriptive statistics, the study identifies two main issues related to the development of railway tourism potential in the region: 1) the community's existing potential for managing railway tourism and 2) the community potential that needs further development for managing railway tourism. The research considers the top three potentials for management and the final three potentials for development. This data will be analyzed and interpreted to create policy briefs for the development of railway tourism. Additionally, the researcher used the five strategic issues outlined in the Nakhon Si Thammarat Province Tourism Development Plan (2022-2027) as a guideline for writing the policy briefs.

Keywords: Policy Briefs; Railway Tourism; Development of Railway Tourism

Introduction

Thailand's tourism sector is undergoing strategic transformation to strengthen competitiveness and ensure long-term sustainability. Recent shifts in traveler behavior—shorter stays but more frequent trips—require transport systems that are affordable, efficient, and safe. Railway tourism has emerged as a policy-relevant instrument to address these demands, offering opportunities for immersive, community-based experiences while advancing sustainable and inclusive tourism. This aligns with national policy directions under the Master Plan of the National Strategy (2017–2037), which positions tourism as a driver of income distribution, competitiveness, and balanced regional development.

At the national level, the Third National Tourism Development Plan (2023–2027) emphasizes resilience, sustainability, and value-driven growth. The 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan reinforces these priorities by emphasizing green growth, equity, and sustainable lifestyles. Within this governance framework, tourism policies increasingly focus on enhancing service quality, upgrading infrastructure, and diversifying products to align with global trends and shifting tourist expectations. Policy instruments targeting railway tourism are thus positioned as mechanisms for fostering connectivity, expanding regional accessibility, and leveraging cultural and natural assets.

In Nakhon Si Thammarat, the Provincial Tourism Development Plan (2022–2027) integrates railway tourism as a strategic priority. The plan underscores infrastructure adaptation, capacity-building of human resources, and community participation in tourism governance. Railway routes traversing the Khao Luang Mountain Range link diverse communities whose cultural traditions, landscapes, and local resources

can be mobilized into tourism assets. Through stakeholder engagement—ranging from government agencies and railway operators to local communities—railway tourism can create value-added experiences while ensuring equitable benefits across groups.

The present study aims to generate policy briefs for the potential development of railway tourism in the Khao Luang area, focusing on governance structures, policy instruments, and stakeholder collaboration. The findings will provide actionable recommendations for government agencies to strengthen infrastructure, improve site quality, and implement sustainable management frameworks. By embedding railway tourism within broader provincial and national strategies, the study seeks to support policy coherence, promote inclusive growth, and position Nakhon Si Thammarat as a model for sustainable regional tourism development.

Research Objective

To study the policy briefs for potential development of railway tourism at Khao Luang area in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, with the research methodology outlined as follows:

1. Population and Sample: the population in this study consisted of people living within a 10-kilometer radius on either side of a train station along a major transportation route. The selected railway stations include Than Pho, Chawang, Khlong Chan Di, Lak Chang, Pho Than Klai Wajasit, Na Bon, Khlong Chang, and Thung Song Junction.

The sample consisted of local people living within a 10-kilometer radius on both sides of 7 railway stations—80 people per station, for a total of 560 samples—selected using quota sampling.

Additionally, 22 key informants were chosen through purposive selection to provide in-depth insights. This group consists of three local government officials, three community leaders, three community representatives, two officials from the Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, two from the State Railway of Thailand, one from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and representatives from two tourism associations, three occupational groups, and three community enterprises. The study collects detailed data on stakeholder perspectives through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and both participant and non-participant observations.

2. Research Instruments: there were categorized into two groups as follows:

2.1 Quantitative Research Instruments: the primary tool for quantitative data collection was a questionnaire designed to assess the potential feasibility of railway tourism development at Khao Luang area in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. The questionnaire was developed using a rating scale approach and followed these steps:

2.1.1 Review of theoretical concepts and related literature, including books, academic texts, documents, and previous research studies, to serve as a foundation for designing the questionnaire.

2.1.2 Development of the questionnaire, which was structured to evaluate the potential of railway tourism in the study area using rating scale questions. The questionnaire was designed based on operational definitions of key variables and consisted of three sections: section 1 : General information of respondents (7 items), section 2 : Opinions on railway tourism potential at Khao Luang area, using a 5 - point Likert scale (Likert, 1967), with level 1 = the least potential and level 5 = the most potential, Section 3 : Open-ended questions to provide recommendations on railway tourism management at Khao Luang area.

2.2 Qualitative Research Instruments: the qualitative data was collected using several instruments, including interviews, focus group discussions, participant and non-participant observations, and public forums. These methods were used to gather opinions from stakeholders on drafting policy briefs for the potential development of railway tourism in the Khao Luang area of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. The issues raised were then used to develop the final policy briefs.

The key Informants' opinions were collected from 22 key stakeholders. These included: Local government officials, Community leaders and representatives, Officials from the Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, Representatives from the State Railway of Thailand, Representatives from the Tourism Authority of Thailand and Representatives from tourism associations, occupational groups, and community enterprises.

3. Research Instrument Validation

3.1 Quantitative Research Instruments: to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a try-out with a sample of 30 participants. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (Silpcharu, 2020). The analysis of the questionnaire items yielded reliability values ranging from 0.81 to 0.90, which exceeded the threshold of 0.7, indicating an acceptable level of reliability for all studied variables.

3.2 Qualitative Research Instruments: the qualitative research instrument consisted of a structured interview based on the research framework, specifically focusing on policy briefs for potential development of railway tourism at Khao Luang area. The instrument was reviewed and validated by three experts.

To ensure research credibility, the study employed triangulation using the following methods: 1) conducting interviews in several groups of key informants and experts on the relevant issues (Podhisita, 2009), 2) performing in-depth observations of information

delivery and storytelling and 3) cross-checking data for clarity and refining understanding (Buosonte, 2013).

4. Data Analysis: the data analysis in this study was categorized into two groups as follows:

4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis: the quantitative data regarding the potential for railway tourism in the Khao Luang area of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province was analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, specifically percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were employed to examine participants' opinions on the development potential.

4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis: the qualitative data, derived from interviews, focus group discussions, and both participant and non-participant observations, were analyzed using content analysis based on qualitative research principles (Buosonte, 2013). The collected data from interviews were categorized and synthesized by identifying key themes and concepts. The findings were systematically described and presented in a narrative format in alignment with the research objectives.

5. Research Ethics: in conducting this research, ethical considerations were strictly adhered to. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they voluntarily agreed to provide information. The confidentiality of all data sources was maintained, and measures were implemented to prevent any potential adverse effects on participants resulting from their cooperation in the study (Podhisita, 2009).

Research Results

The analysis of the potential of railway tourism at Khao Luang area can be categorized into two key aspects: 1) community potential for managing railway tourism, and 2) community potential that needs to be developed for managing railway tourism. These two aspects were assessed based on a community potential survey conducted at seven railway stations and in-depth interviews with key informants. The study specifically focused

on the top three potentials for managing railway tourism and the final three potentials for further development. The details are as follows:

1. The potential to manage railway tourism has focused on the top three potentials of the community in railway management, as follows:

1.1 Appearance (High-quality Products and Services): the quantitative data analysis showed that the appearance of high-quality products and services for railway tourism at Khao Luang area, was rated at a high level (Mean = 4.08) by most respondents. This aligns with insights from key informants, who also emphasized that the railway tourism destinations spanning four districts—Chawang, Chang Klang, Na Bon, and Thung Song—offer a diverse range of locally distinctive products and integrated tourism experiences. These communities provide a comprehensive range of tourism services, including diverse tourism activities, local cuisine, retail stores, restaurants, and quality products and services. Additionally, these destinations offer essential tourist facilities such as restrooms, retail shops, clear directional signage, and well-marked tourist information points.

1.2 Appreciation (Ability to Create an Impression): the quantitative data analysis showed that the appearance of creating a lasting impression of railway tourism at Khao Luang area, was rated at a high level (Mean = 4.07) by most respondents. This finding aligns with the perspectives of key informants, who consistently highlighted the communities' strong potential in delivering memorable experiences to tourists. Many areas have developed attractive tourism activities and events that effectively draw visitors to the region. These include local festivals and cultural traditions such as Chinese New Year festival, Chak Phra (Buddha procession) festival and the Rubber Tree Harvesting festival.

Additionally, the communities offer unique local products that distinguish them from other tourist destinations. Beyond physical attractions, these communities also emphasize interactive experiences

between locals and tourists, fostering mutual learning and cultural exchange through various participatory activities.

Furthermore, the diverse range of tourist attractions within the communities caters to different groups of visitors, ensuring that various preferences and interests are met. This broad appeal enhances the overall visitor satisfaction and encourages repeat visits, making the communities a compelling and memorable railway tourism destination.

1.3 Assurance: the quantitative data analysis showed that the appearance of the assurance in terms of safety and security of railway tourism in the local communities of Khao Luang area, was rated at a high level (Mean = 4.04) by most respondents. This finding is consistent with the perspectives of key informants, who emphasized that relevant agencies prioritize safety measures for both tourists and local attractions. In different tourist attractions, the authorities have used preventive measures to increase the security of visitors, such as installing signs and distribution of warning brochures for tourists to be careful of life and property as well as increasing the lighting lights along the route to the tourist attraction, etc.

2. The potential that needs to be developed in managing railway tourism has focused on the final three potentials for further development, as follows:

2.1 Accountability (Participation in Tourism Development): In terms of “Accountability” (participation in tourism development) the key informants expressed their opinions that participation plays an important role in developing tourism in the region. For communities, there is still a lack of participation from various agencies in working together, both in terms of policy planning and integration work. In addition, agencies that support communities in developing tourism potential do not cover all aspects, resulting in development being possible only in some areas. Therefore, it is necessary to receive academic advice or specific skills from experts.

2.2 Action (Planning for Tourism Development): In terms of “Action” (tourism development planning) the key informants expressed their opinions that there is a lack of participatory processes among key agencies (government, private sector, and community groups), which negatively affects the quality of core services like accommodation, restaurants, and souvenirs. Furthermore, there is a deficiency in collaborative planning suited to the local context, including a failure to create plans for conserving traditional local wisdom—such as the unique Chinese Hokkien food culture—despite its successful heritage preservation. These issues are compounded by inadequate budget planning for comprehensive development, leading to unevenly developed tourist sites, and a lack of policies derived directly from the input of tourist service providers.

2.3 Awareness (Perception of a Railway Tourism): in terms of “Awareness” (perception of a railway tourism) from in-depth interviews with key informants, it was found that creating awareness is a starting point for people in the community that will see the importance of train tourism, whether in social or economic dimensions, as well as preparation to be hospitable. Therefore, there should be a variety of communication channels to increase awareness, such as public relations channels via social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) and websites that have information about tourism. In addition, public forums and community meetings should be organized with local representatives to discuss tourism opportunities, address concerns, and promote active participation in tourism development. By strengthening the perception of the community, tourism development plans can cover and drive the community more, promote sustainable methods, and cooperate in tourism management.

From the analysis of the potential of railway tourism at Khao Luang area, the researcher has analyzed and translated the results to present policy briefs for potential development of railway tourism at

Khao Luang area. In developing these policy briefs, the researcher has adopted the Nakhon Si Thammarat Provincial Tourism Development Plan (2022-2027) as a guiding framework. This plan consists of five strategic areas, which serve as the basis for proposing policy-driven approaches to enhancing the potential of railway tourism in the region. The details are outlined as follows.

Approach	Activity	Responsible Agencies
Guideline 1: Infrastructure and Facility Development for Tourism	<div>1. Allocating a budget for comprehensive and inclusive tourism development</div> <div>2. Improving facilities and accessibility within tourist attractions</div> <div>3. Providing information signs and safety warnings in tourist areas</div> <div>3. Developing connecting routes within tourist attractions to facilitate convenient and easy access and cater to a wider range of tourist groups</div>	<div>1. Local Administrative Organizations</div> <div>2. Tourism Authority of Thailand, Nakhon Si Thammarat Office</div> <div>3. Nakhon Si Thammarat Office of Tourism and Sports</div> <div>4. Department of Highways, District 16 Khao Luang National Park</div>
Guideline 2: Capacity Building for Tourism Personnel	<div>1. Developing service skills, language skills, and other skills necessary for supporting tourism</div> <div>2. Training and developing tourism personnel to ensure their provision of accurate and prompt service, meeting customer needs</div> <div>3. Promoting the use of technology to enhance the</div>	<div>1. Local Administrative Organizations</div> <div>2. Tourism Authority of Thailand, Nakhon Si Thammarat Office</div> <div>3. Nakhon Si Thammarat Office of Tourism and Sports</div> <div>4. Private sector and tourism associations</div> <div>5. Local communities</div>



Approach	Activity	Responsible Agencies
	value of tourism activities through exchange and learning	involved in tourism 6. Educational institutions
Guideline 3: Improvement of Tourism Products and Services Standards	1. Upgrading the quality of products and services to increase value 2. Encouraging tourism officials and operators to innovate their service processes, travel programs, and packages to cater to diverse groups of tourists	1. Local Administrative Organizations 2. Tourism Authority of Thailand, Nakhon Si Thammarat Office 3. Nakhon Si Thammarat Office of Tourism and Sports 4. State Railway of Thailand 5. Private sector and tourism associations 6. Khao Luang National Park Local tourism communities
Guideline 4: Proactive Tourism Marketing Promotion	1. Developing tourism activities targeting niche groups, such as senior travelers 2. Promoting cooperation networks and establish a tourism communication center, especially for railway tourism across four districts within the Khao Luang area 3. Encouraging partnerships between communities, government, and private sectors	1. Local Administrative Organizations 2. Tourism Authority of Thailand, Nakhon Si Thammarat Office 3. Nakhon Si Thammarat Office of Tourism and Sports 4. State Railway of Thailand 5. Private sector and tourism associations 6. Local tourism communities

Approach	Activity	Responsible Agencies
Guideline 5: Sustainable Tourism Management Development	1. Supporting cooperation and coordination between the public and private railway tourism networks to support and promote tourism 2. Developing a process for sharing knowledge, resources, and tourism services between the public, private, and public sectors to develop strong communities 3. Supporting communities and entrepreneurs to cooperate in developing existing cultural resources, adding value, and expanding them into more interesting tourism activities	1. Local Administrative Organizations 2. Tourism Authority of Thailand, Nakhon Si Thammarat Office 3. Nakhon Si Thammarat Office of Tourism and Sports 4. State Railway of Thailand 5. Private sector and tourism associations 6. Local tourism communities

Table 1 The Draft Model of Policy Briefs for Potential Development of Railway Tourism at Khao Luang area, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province

The draft model of policy briefs for potential development of railway tourism at Khao Luang area was then presented to stakeholders for feedback. Their opinions were gathered to refine and expand on different aspects of the proposal, leading to the formulation of the final policy briefs.

To ensure comprehensive input, feedback was collected from a total of 22 stakeholders, including representatives from local administrative organizations, community leaders, community representatives, the Office of Tourism and Sports, the State Railway of Thailand, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and tourism associations,

occupational groups, and community enterprises. This process resulted in the following policy briefs:

Guideline 1 : Developing Infrastructure and Tourism Facilities: to achieve successful implementation in this area, the following actions should be taken: allocate sufficient budgets to develop and improve tourist attractions, establish a systematic management framework for tourism sites, implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess tourism impacts, develop measures to ensure tourist safety, and enhance tourism facilities by providing adequate signage and interpretive boards and ensuring accessibility and usability across all tourism areas.

Guideline 2: Developing the Potential of Tourism Personnel: for this guideline, stakeholders provided recommendations on activities that would ensure successful implementation. Key suggestions include 1) expanding training programs for interpretive guides to enhance the skills of tourism personnel, ensuring they are well-prepared to serve as excellent hosts; 2) raising awareness about tourism by fostering a sense of responsibility among both local communities and tourists to protect and preserve cultural heritage; 3) instilling an appreciation for railway tourism and slow tourism, which aligns with the preferences of modern travelers who seek a more relaxed and immersive travel experience; and 4) developing community tourism leaders who recognize the value of their local heritage and are committed to preserving and promoting their unique cultural and natural assets.

Guideline 3 : Developing the Quality of Tourism Products and Services to Meet Standards: stakeholders also proposed additional activities for this guideline. Key suggestions include 1) upgrading and integrating local wisdom and traditional knowledge to cater to high-quality tourists; 2) Creating learning spaces that facilitate knowledge exchange and consultation among community tourism groups, government agencies, private sector stakeholders, and other relevant entities; 3) elevating the quality of tourism products and services to

meet the Thailand Tourism Standard—symbolized by the “Joyful Elephant” emblem—ensuring that all visitors receive high-quality, safe, hygienic, clean, fair, and uniquely Thai tourism services; and 4) promoting eco-friendly tourism products and services to encourage sustainable tourism development.

Guideline 4: Proactive Tourism Marketing Promotion: to enhance tourism marketing efforts, additional activities should be included 1) expanding market access and diversifying distribution channels for community products to increase visibility and revenue; 2) developing online marketing skills among local entrepreneurs to enable them to effectively promote their businesses; 3) educating stakeholders on the benefits of tourism development to encourage community participation in improving and promoting local attractions; 4) establishing railway tourism routes that connect different communities, fostering greater interconnectivity and cultural exchange; 5) updating social media platforms and tourism applications with current information about attractions and check-in points to enhance tourist engagement; and 6) utilizing a variety of media formats for promotion, such as short films and TikTok videos, to capture tourists' interest and inspire them to visit.

Guideline 5: Sustainable Tourism Management Development: to achieve sustainable tourism, stakeholders proposed the following activities; 1) supporting the establishment of community-based tourism networks and policy initiatives to enhance communication and coordination among tourism development stakeholders; 2) prioritizing the preservation of cultural and historical sites, such as religious and archaeological landmarks, rather than focusing solely on commercial tourism development; 3) strengthening community-based enterprises and local vocational groups by providing resources and support to ensure long-term sustainability; 4) encouraging greater involvement of the private sector in driving tourism development and fostering collaborations with government agencies; and 5) enhancing cooperation

with local administrative organizations to facilitate tourism promotion, development, and support for all relevant activities, ultimately leading to effective and sustainable tourism management.

The researcher then drafted of policy briefs for potential development of railway tourism at Khao Luang area. The draft policy briefs were presented to relevant stakeholders to review the findings, receive feedback, and clarify the research outcomes within the study area. This collaborative effort aimed to refine and establish policy briefs for enhancing railway tourism potential at Khao Luang area. The following model illustrates the proposed policy briefs for developing railway tourism potential in the region.

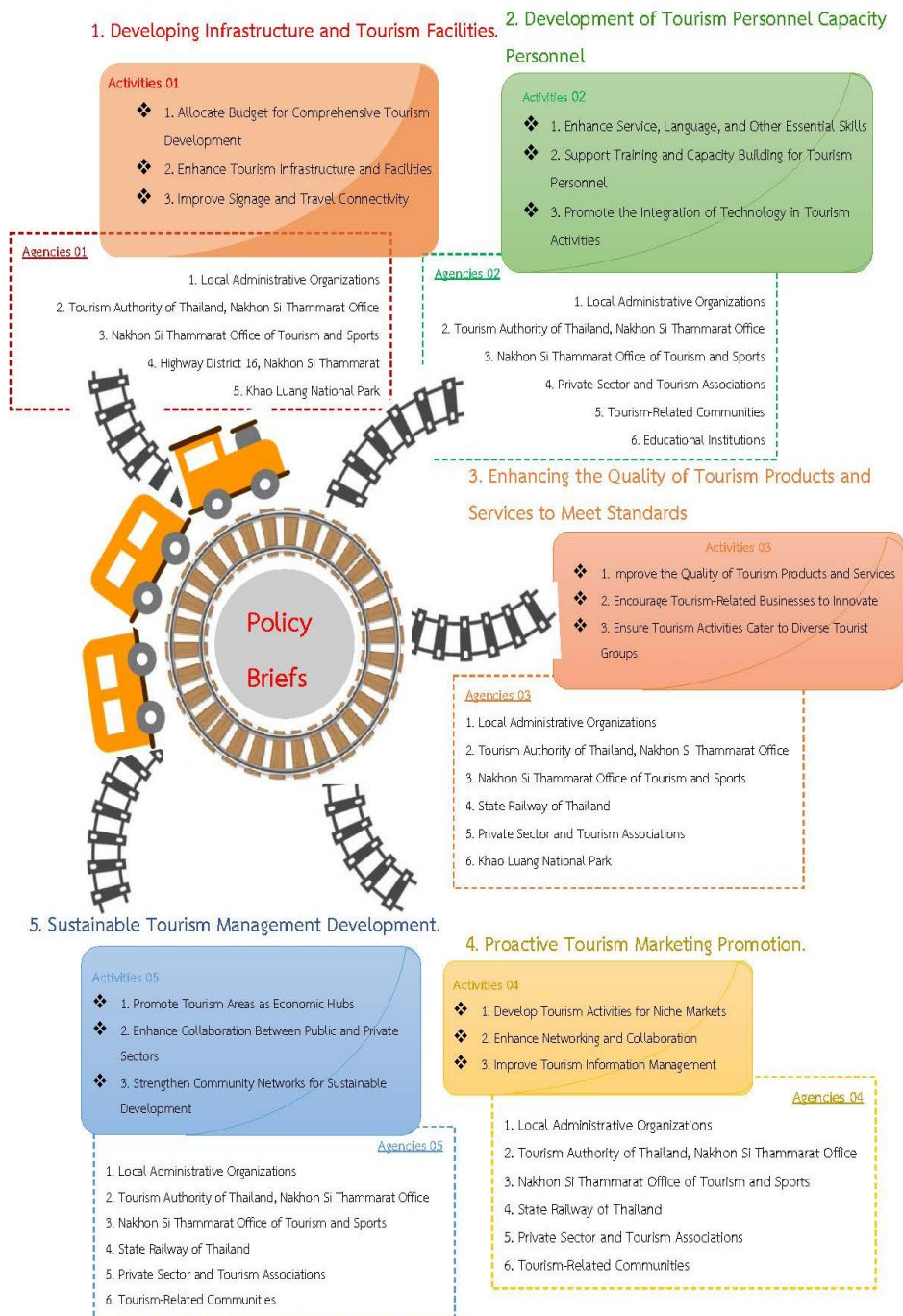


Figure 1 Policy Briefs for Potential Development of Railway Tourism at Khao Luang Area in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province

Discussion

The study on railway tourism potential in the Khao Luang area focused on identifying the top three existing potentials and the three primary potentials needing development, using the Nakhon Si Thammarat Tourism Development Plan (2022–2027) as its core framework. The findings align significantly with Pitsaengam's (2023) policy recommendations for secondary city tourism, which emphasized development across four areas: host, cooperation, development, and tourist attraction. Both studies conclusively show that achieving success in Nakhon Si Thammarat's tourism sector requires a unified strategy focused on strengthening collaboration among stakeholders, improving service quality, and leveraging unique local heritage and products through targeted marketing and government support.

The findings of this study align with the work of Watcharapirak and Kheovichai (2019), who investigated management policy suggestions concerning temple tourist attraction development as creative learning resource. Their research revealed that temples designated as tourist attractions are well-prepared and possess strong potential as valuable learning sites. The management policy suggestions to develop temple tourist attractions to be creative learning resources consist of eight components, namely PAMAVASS, which include 1) public relation, 2) amenities, 3) management, 4) attractions, 5) values, 6) activities, 7) services and 8) support.

Additionally, the findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Pongnirundorn, et al (2016) on the management guidelines for tourism of Wang Nam Khiao District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. The findings revealed that 1) Natural resources were the main attractive factor of potential tourists, supported by rapid and convenient means of reaching the area. 2) Abundance of agricultural resources made “agro tourism” evolved, becoming a specific kind of tourism which was a great reputation for Wang Nam Khiao to be another outstanding

destination, with many types of accommodation and adequate amount of room to reserve for. However, there were relatively few public transportations and few taxi services within the area. The other incident was illegal invasion of forest area for commercial purposes. 3) The guidelines for effective tourism management in the 6 aspects consisted of tourism resources, access to attractions, facilities, security, capability of the area, and community participation. These findings further support the importance of a structured, participatory approach in tourism management, particularly in the development of railway tourism at Khao Luang area.

The findings of this study are also consistent with the research of Klinmuenwai (2011), who examined guidelines for community-based tourism development in Lampang Province. The findings show that the guideline proposed from this study included: tourism development should base on communities' resources, their uniqueness, and value added to enhance local economic; long-term tourism planning including education and training in tourism development to community; creating partnership between public and private sectors; and developing tourism trails such as cycling trails and horse-carting trails.

This study's findings are consistent with Klinmuenwai's (2011) research on community-based tourism in Lampang Province. Klinmuenwai highlighted the necessity of resource-centric development that enhances the local economy, long-term planning with community training, forging public-private partnerships, and developing specific tourism trails. The research's consensus is the application of a common philosophy for sustainable community development to create tourism based on local resources and potential. Klinmuenwai's approach emphasizes the use of unique resources, strengthening the local economy, and long-term training, directly reflecting the participatory approach required for the Khao Luang project. In both contexts, success requires combining key attractiveness factors (railway access or

infrastructure) with local readiness, skills development, and local offerings to ensure sustainable benefits and direct community impact.

Body of Knowledge

From this study, the researcher discovered that local communities have developed their potential for railway tourism. The research findings can be utilized in collaborative planning to enhance railway tourism capacity, covering Nakhon Si Thammarat Province or other areas nationwide. This can be achieved through the formulation of strategies, policies, and their implementation, as well as the development of practical approaches related to railway tourism enhancement. Additionally, the study contributes to the creation of new knowledge and the extension of local wisdom, fostering participation and leveraging the potential of personnel to improve railway tourism to gain recognition and meet quality standards. This, in turn, enhances competitiveness and provides preliminary data as a basis for policy recommendations for local administrative organizations and relevant agencies.

Conclusion

The study on Policy Briefs for Potential Development of Railway Tourism at Khao Luang Area in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province found that 1) the potential to manage the railway tourism has focused on the top three potentials of the community in railway management consist of appearance, appreciation and assurance and 2) the potential that needs to be developed in managing railway tourism has focused on the final three potentials for further development consist of accountability, action and awareness. The above findings were analyzed and interpreted to propose policy briefs for potential development of railway tourism at Khao Luang area. The researcher incorporated the Nakhon Si Thammarat Provincial Tourism Development Plan (2022-2027), which consists of five strategic issues, as a framework for policy briefs.

Relevant organizations can utilize these findings to formulate strategies, policies, and practical guidelines for enhancing the potential of railway tourism at Khao Luang in a way that aligns with the local context. This will contribute to the sustainable development of railway tourism in the region and inform further policy briefs for strengthening railway tourism potential at Khao Luang.

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