



Heritage Assets, Cultural Significance, and Sustainable Community-Based Coastal Tourism: The Role of Authentic Experience



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ABSTRACT

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Cultural heritage plays a critical role in promoting sustainable community-based tourism, particularly in coastal destinations where local identity and ways of life are closely linked to cultural and environmental resources. This study aims to examine the structural relationships among Cultural Participation (CP), Heritage Awareness (HAW), Authentic Experience (AE), Perceived Community Support (PCS), and Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development (SCTD) in Bang Saray Subdistrict, Chonburi Province, Thailand. Data were collected from 500 residents and local stakeholders using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS–SEM). The results reveal that CP significantly influences both HAW and AE. In turn, HAW and AE significantly affect PCS. Furthermore, PCS and AE have significant positive effects on SCTD. However, the direct relationship between HAW and sustainable tourism development was not statistically significant. Overall, six out of seven hypothesized relationships were supported. These findings highlight that SCTD is not driven solely by awareness of heritage but rather through the integration of active CP, meaningful AE, and strong community support. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of community-based tourism by demonstrating the interconnected roles of participation, awareness, experience, and social support in achieving sustainability. Practically, the findings provide valuable implications for policymakers, tourism planners, and community leaders to design culturally sensitive and participatory tourism strategies that enhance authenticity, strengthen local identity, and ensure long-term sustainability in coastal destinations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coastal tourism has increasingly become an important pathway for sustainable local development, particularly in communities where ways of life, social identity, and economic livelihoods are deeply connected to the sea. In many coastal areas, tourism not only generates income and employment but also creates opportunities for communities to preserve and communicate their cultural distinctiveness to visitors. As tourism demand continues to grow worldwide, coastal destinations are under increasing pressure to balance economic development with the protection of local culture, identity, and environmental integrity [1]. In this regard, community-based coastal tourism has emerged as a promising model for promoting inclusive development while maintaining local control over tourism resources and cultural representation [2].

Within this context, heritage assets play a central role in shaping the attractiveness and sustainability of coastal destinations. Heritage assets refer to both tangible and intangible cultural resources embedded in a community, including traditional architecture, fishing landscapes, rituals,

culinary practices, oral histories, festivals, and local knowledge systems [3]. In coastal communities, such assets are not merely remnants of the past but living elements of everyday life that reflect the historical relationship between people and the maritime environment. When properly recognized and managed, heritage assets can strengthen tourism competitiveness while reinforcing community identity and intergenerational continuity [4]. Their value lies not only in their visibility as attractions but also in their capacity to embody meanings, memories, and local narratives that distinguish one destination from another.

However, the tourism value of heritage assets does not depend solely on their physical existence. Their contribution to sustainable tourism is strongly influenced by the degree to which they are perceived as culturally meaningful by both residents and visitors. This highlights the importance of cultural significance, which refers to the symbolic, historical, social, and identity-based meanings attached to local heritage by the community [5]. Cultural significance shapes how residents interpret, protect, and present their cultural resources, and it influences whether tourism development is perceived as

compatible with local values and traditions [6]. In community-based tourism settings, the recognition of cultural significance is particularly important because it helps communities define what should be preserved, how it should be represented, and under what conditions it may be shared with outsiders [7].

At the same time, contemporary tourists are increasingly seeking experiences that go beyond passive sightseeing and superficial consumption. They are drawn to destinations that offer Authentic Experiences (AE) rooted in everyday local life, genuine social interaction, and meaningful cultural engagement [8]. In coastal communities, AE may include participating in traditional fishing activities, learning local cooking methods, attending local festivals, interacting with residents, or observing customary practices in their original setting. Such experiences are increasingly recognized as a key component of sustainable tourism because they foster emotional connection, learning, and mutual respect between hosts and guests [9]. More importantly, authenticity enhances the experiential value of tourism products and may serve as the mechanism through which heritage assets and cultural significance are transformed into memorable and sustainable tourism outcomes [10].

Despite growing recognition of heritage-based tourism, the translation of local cultural resources into sustainable community-based tourism remains challenging. In many destinations, tourism development has tended to prioritize commercialization, visual consumption, and short-term visitor appeal, often at the expense of local meaning and cultural integrity [11]. When heritage is commodified without community consent or detached from its original context, tourism may weaken rather than strengthen local identity and participation [12]. This concern is particularly relevant in coastal communities, where traditional lifestyles are already vulnerable to rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, and socio-economic transformation. Sustainable community-based coastal tourism, therefore, requires more than simply showcasing heritage assets; it depends on ensuring that these assets retain their cultural significance and are experienced by visitors in ways that are perceived as authentic by the host community [13].

In Thailand, the promotion of community-based tourism has gained increasing policy attention, particularly under the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy Model, which emphasizes local participation, cultural preservation, and sustainable resource use [14]. While previous tourism studies in Thailand have largely focused on historic cities, temple destinations, or internationally recognized heritage sites, coastal communities with rich cultural landscapes remain relatively underexplored. Sattahip District, Chonburi Province, represents a compelling case of community-based coastal tourism due to its diverse coastal heritage, long-standing fishing traditions, local seafood culture, community rituals, and maritime ways of life shaped by both continuity and change [15]. The district encompasses a variety of coastal spaces and community settings in which heritage assets and local meanings remain deeply embedded in daily life. These characteristics make Sattahip District an appropriate setting for examining how cultural resources can contribute to sustainable tourism development through community-based approaches.

Against this background, this study argues that the sustainability of community-based coastal tourism is not determined solely by the presence of heritage resources, but by the dynamic relationships among heritage assets, cultural significance, and AE. First, heritage assets provide the

foundational resources upon which tourism activities and destination identity are built [16]. Second, cultural significance influences how these assets are valued, protected, and interpreted within the community [17]. Third, AE functions as a critical experiential mechanism that connects local heritage with tourist engagement and satisfaction, thereby strengthening the sustainability of community-based tourism [18]. This integrated perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of how coastal communities can utilize their cultural resources without reducing them to commodified attractions [19].

The significance of this study is threefold. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing literature on sustainable tourism by integrating heritage-based and experience-based perspectives into a community-based coastal tourism framework. Specifically, it advances understanding of how heritage assets and cultural significance interact with AE to shape sustainable tourism development in a coastal district setting [20-22]. Practically, the study offers useful insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and community leaders seeking to design tourism strategies that are culturally sensitive, economically inclusive, and socially sustainable. Socially and culturally, it supports the recognition of coastal heritage as a living legacy rather than a static tourism product, thereby encouraging communities to preserve and transmit their cultural identity to future generations [23, 24].

In conclusion, sustainable community-based coastal tourism requires a careful balance between cultural preservation, local participation, and experiential innovation. Heritage assets and cultural significance form the cultural foundation of tourism development, while AE plays a pivotal role in transforming that foundation into meaningful and sustainable tourism outcomes. The diverse tourism settings across Bang Saray Subdistrict, Sattahip District—including traditional fishing areas, local culinary environments, community festivals, and everyday coastal life—represent more than tourism attractions; they embody the cultural meanings and lived heritage of the district's coastal communities. By focusing on Bang Saray Subdistrict, Sattahip District, this study provides important empirical insight into how coastal communities in Thailand can mobilize their heritage resources and cultural meanings through AE to achieve more sustainable forms of community-based tourism development. While previous studies have examined individual relationships among participation, authenticity, and community support, limited research has integrated these constructs into a unified framework within the context of community-based coastal tourism. In particular, the combined roles of Cultural Participation (CP), Heritage Awareness (HAW), and AE in shaping sustainable tourism outcomes remain underexplored.

This study contributes by proposing and empirically testing an integrated model that explains how participation-driven mechanisms translate cultural resources into sustainable development through both experiential and social pathways.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Participation

CP refers to the extent to which individuals and community members engage in local cultural activities, traditions, rituals, festivals, and other forms of heritage-related practices [20]. It

is widely recognized as an important mechanism for strengthening community identity, social cohesion, and the continuity of local culture. In the context of cultural tourism, participation is not limited to passive observation but includes active involvement in preserving, practicing, and transmitting local culture to both residents and visitors. Such participation enables communities to retain control over how their cultural identity is represented and interpreted in tourism settings.

Previous studies have shown that active participation in cultural practices enhances local people's understanding of the significance of their heritage and strengthens their emotional attachment to place. When residents are regularly involved in cultural expression, they are more likely to recognize the historical, symbolic, and social meanings embedded in their traditions and local resources [21]. This process contributes directly to a stronger awareness of heritage and fosters a sense of ownership over cultural assets. Moreover, participation in local culture also improves the quality of tourism experiences by making them more genuine, interactive, and meaningful for visitors [22].

In tourism destinations with rich local traditions, CP serves as a foundational driver that links community identity with tourism development [23]. It supports not only cultural continuity but also tourism differentiation, as visitors increasingly seek immersive and meaningful encounters with host communities. In this regard, CP is expected to contribute to both community-based heritage understanding and the creation of authentic tourism experiences. Therefore, this study proposes that CP positively influences HAW (H1) and AE (H2). CP is positioned as the primary upstream construct because it reflects active engagement with cultural practices, which serves as the initial mechanism through which individuals develop both cognitive awareness of heritage and experiential authenticity. Without participation, heritage remains passive and experiential value cannot be fully realized.

2.2 Heritage Awareness

HAW refers to the level of knowledge, recognition, appreciation, and consciousness that individuals or communities have regarding their cultural heritage [24]. It includes awareness of both tangible and intangible cultural resources, such as historic buildings, local stories, traditional crafts, rituals, customs, and community values. HAW is a critical factor in sustainable tourism because it shapes how communities perceive the importance of preserving and utilizing cultural assets in a responsible manner.

In community-based tourism contexts, HAW helps residents understand the value of their local resources beyond everyday familiarity [25]. It transforms ordinary cultural elements into meaningful heritage assets that can be interpreted, preserved, and presented to visitors. A higher level of HAW often leads to stronger conservation behavior, increased pride in local identity, and greater willingness to participate in tourism-related initiatives. It also helps reduce the risk of cultural erosion by reinforcing the importance of maintaining authenticity and intergenerational cultural transmission.

HAW further contributes to the social legitimacy of tourism development. When community members understand the significance of their heritage, they are more likely to support tourism strategies that align with local values and conservation priorities [26]. In addition, awareness can encourage residents to engage collaboratively in tourism planning and to support

long-term destination management efforts. For this reason, HAW is expected to strengthen Perceived Community Support (PCS) and directly contribute to Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development (SCTD). Thus, this study hypothesizes that HAW positively influences PCS (H3) and SCTD (H6). HAW is hypothesized to influence both PCS and SCTD because awareness shapes how individuals evaluate the importance of preserving cultural resources and supporting tourism. A higher level of awareness encourages both attitudinal support and sustainability-oriented behavior.

2.3 Authentic Experience

AE refers to the perception and experience of cultural tourism as genuine, meaningful, and reflective of the real identity, traditions, and way of life of the host community [27]. Authenticity is one of the most valued dimensions in cultural tourism, as contemporary tourists increasingly seek experiences that allow them to connect with local people, places, and traditions in a deeper and more personal way. AE may emerge through direct participation in cultural activities, interaction with residents, engagement with local stories, and exposure to uncommodified community practices.

The literature suggests that authenticity is not solely a characteristic of cultural products or attractions, but also a socially constructed experience shaped by interpretation, participation, and emotional engagement [28]. In destinations where communities are actively involved in presenting their heritage, visitors are more likely to perceive the tourism experience as authentic. At the same time, AE also affects local residents by reinforcing the value of their traditions and validating their cultural identity through tourism exchange.

AE plays a dual role in sustainable tourism development. First, it increases the attractiveness and competitiveness of a cultural destination by enhancing visitor satisfaction and memorability [29]. Second, it contributes to community support when local people perceive that tourism is based on real cultural strengths rather than artificial commercialization. In this way, authenticity becomes an important bridge between cultural resources and sustainable destination outcomes. Therefore, this study proposes that AE positively influences PCS (H4) and SCTD (H7). AE is expected to influence both PCS and SCTD because authenticity enhances both individual satisfaction and collective cultural validation. When tourism experiences are perceived as genuine, they not only strengthen visitor engagement but also reinforce community confidence in tourism, thereby supporting both social support and long-term sustainability outcomes.

2.4 Perceived Community Support

PCS refers to the extent to which residents feel that tourism development is accepted, encouraged, and collectively supported within the local community [30]. It reflects the social climate surrounding tourism initiatives and indicates whether community members believe that tourism contributes positively to local well-being, cultural preservation, and collective interests. Community support is widely recognized as a critical condition for the long-term success of sustainable tourism, especially in destinations where local culture and identity are central to the visitor experience.

The concept of PCS is closely linked to social exchange theory, which suggests that residents are more likely to support tourism when they perceive that its benefits outweigh its costs.

In cultural tourism settings, support tends to increase when tourism enhances local pride, creates opportunities for participation, strengthens cultural continuity, and generates visible benefits for the community. Conversely, when tourism is perceived as externally controlled or culturally exploitative, support tends to decline.

PCS also serves as an important mediating and consolidating factor in tourism development. Even when communities possess strong HAW and offer AE, sustainable tourism outcomes are unlikely to emerge unless there is broad local acceptance and willingness to support development initiatives. Community support therefore represents a collective readiness to sustain and advance tourism in a manner that is socially and culturally appropriate. In this study, PCS is considered a key mechanism leading to SCTD. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that PCS positively influences SCTD (H5).

2.5 Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development

SCTD refers to the process of developing tourism in ways that preserve cultural resources, strengthen community well-being, and ensure long-term economic, social, and environmental viability. In the context of heritage-based destinations, sustainability requires balancing tourism growth with the protection of local identity, community values, and cultural continuity. Sustainable development in cultural tourism does not focus solely on increasing visitor numbers, but rather on ensuring that tourism contributes positively to both the destination and its people.

The literature emphasizes that sustainable cultural tourism is most effective when it is rooted in local participation, cultural integrity, and shared community benefits [31]. Tourism destinations that successfully integrate cultural meaning, resident support, and authentic visitor experiences are more likely to achieve resilience and long-term competitiveness. SCTD also depends on the ability of communities to adapt to changing tourism demands without compromising the essence of their cultural heritage.

In community-based and heritage-rich destinations, sustainable tourism outcomes are not produced by a single factor, but by an interconnected set of social and cultural processes [32]. CP can stimulate awareness and authenticity; these, in turn, can foster stronger community support and directly shape tourism development outcomes. Therefore, in this study, SCTD is conceptualized as the ultimate dependent construct influenced by HAW, AE, and PCS. SCTD is measured through perceptual indicators because sustainability in community-based tourism is inherently a socially constructed concept, reflecting residents' evaluation of cultural preservation, community benefits, and long-term development rather than purely objective metrics.

2.6 Conceptual framework

Based on the literature review, this study proposes a conceptual framework in which CP functions as the exogenous construct that influences HAW and AE. These two constructs subsequently influence PCS and also directly contribute to SCTD. In addition, PCS serves as an important mediating mechanism that enhances sustainable tourism development outcomes.

This framework reflects the idea that SCTD is not solely determined by the existence of heritage resources, but rather

by how communities engage with culture, perceive their heritage, create authentic tourism experiences, and collectively support tourism development. The proposed relationships are presented in Figure 1.

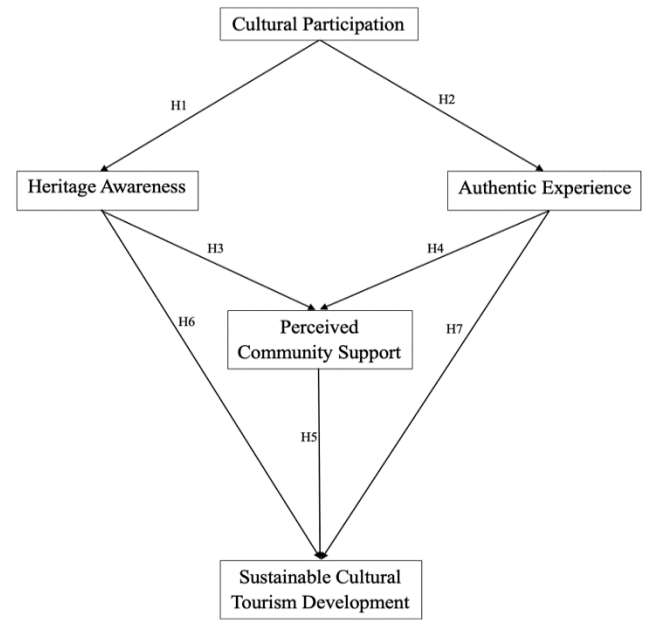


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

2.7 Research hypotheses

According to the literature review and conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1.** CP has a positive influence on HAW.
- H2.** CP has a positive influence on AE.
- H3.** HAW has a positive influence on PCS.
- H4.** AE has a positive influence on PCS.
- H5.** PCS has a positive influence on SCTD.
- H6.** HAW has a positive influence on SCTD.
- H7.** AE has a positive influence on SCTD.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study adopted a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to investigate the structural relationships among CP, HAW, AE, PCS and SCTD. A quantitative design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to examine the perceptions of local residents and tourism-related stakeholders at a single point in time and to empirically test the proposed conceptual model. The cross-sectional approach enabled the collection of standardized responses from a large number of participants within the study area, thereby allowing for statistical examination of latent constructs and their interrelationships.

To analyze the hypothesized causal paths among the constructs, this study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for predictive and exploratory model testing, especially in studies involving latent variables measured by multiple indicators and complex

interrelationships among constructs. It is also appropriate for tourism and social science research where theoretical extension and practical model development are central objectives.

3.2 Population and sampling

The target population of this study consisted of local residents and community-related stakeholders in Bang Saray Subdistrict, Sattahip District, Chonburi Province, who had direct or indirect involvement in local tourism activities, cultural heritage practices, or community-based coastal development. This population included residents, local entrepreneurs, tourism service providers, community leaders, and individuals engaged in cultural or coastal livelihood activities relevant to the study context.

The sample size was determined based on the widely accepted rule of thumb for structural equation modeling, which recommends a sample size of at least 20 times the number of observed variables in the measurement model. Since this study included 25 observed variables, the minimum required sample size was calculated as: $25 \text{ observed variables} \times 20 = 500$ respondents. Accordingly, a total of 500 respondents were targeted for data collection.

This study employed a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was first used to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria, namely that they were residents or stakeholders located in Bang Saray Subdistrict and had familiarity with local tourism, heritage resources, or coastal community activities. Subsequently, convenience sampling was applied to facilitate practical access to respondents through community networks, public gathering spaces, tourism-related locations, and local events. This combined approach was considered appropriate given the absence of a complete sampling frame for all individuals involved in community-based coastal tourism in the study area.

3.3 Instrument development and measurement

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure the core constructs of the study. The questionnaire was organized into two major sections. The first section gathered demographic information from respondents, including gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, and monthly income. The second section measured the five latent constructs included in the proposed model: CP, HAW, AE, PCS, and SCTD.

All measurement items were adapted from established literature related to heritage tourism, cultural sustainability, authentic tourism experience, and community-based tourism. The items were then refined to fit the socio-cultural and coastal context of Bang Saray Subdistrict. The wording of each item was adjusted to reflect the local tourism environment, cultural identity, and heritage-related experiences associated with the area.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in the fields of tourism management, cultural studies, and community-based development. Their feedback was used to improve the clarity, relevance, and contextual appropriateness of the instrument before the full-scale survey was conducted.

All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. This response format was selected because it is widely used in

perception-based tourism research and allows respondents to express varying levels of agreement consistently across constructs.

3.4 Data collection procedure

Data collection was carried out in Bang Saray Subdistrict, Sattahip District, Chonburi Province, where community-based tourism and coastal cultural practices remain visible in everyday life. The fieldwork focused on local areas associated with cultural and tourism activity, such as community spaces, seafood-related commercial areas, festival locations, coastal public spaces, and local gathering points where residents and stakeholders interact with tourism-related activities.

Questionnaires were distributed directly to respondents who met the study's inclusion criteria. Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to voluntarily participate or withdraw at any time. The on-site distribution approach was adopted to increase response rates and to ensure that the sample reflected individuals with lived familiarity with the heritage and tourism context of the study area.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. The research protocol, including the survey procedure, participant information process, and data confidentiality safeguards, received formal approval from the Ethics Committee in Human Research, Sripatum University Khonkaen Campus (No. SPUIRB-2025-058) on October 6, 2025.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All respondents were informed of the objectives of the research, and no personally identifiable information was disclosed in the analysis or reporting of results. The study adhered to internationally recognized ethical principles, including respect for autonomy, confidentiality, anonymity, and the responsible treatment of participant data.

4. RESULT

4.1 Demographic information of the respondents

A total of 500 valid questionnaires were obtained and included in the final analysis. The demographic profile of the respondents was examined to provide an overview of the characteristics of individuals participating in the study. The analysis covered six demographic dimensions: gender, age, marital status, educational attainment, occupation, and monthly income.

The respondent profile indicates that the study captured a diverse group of participants from Bang Saray Subdistrict, reflecting a broad range of socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. Such diversity is beneficial for understanding perceptions of heritage assets, cultural significance, AE, and sustainable community-based coastal tourism from multiple community perspectives (Table 1).

Regarding occupation, the respondents represented a range of socio-economic roles within the local community. The largest group consisted of government or public sector employees (125 respondents, 25.0%), followed by self-

employed individuals or business owners (105 respondents, 21.0%), students (95 respondents, 19.0%), unemployed or others (75 respondents, 15.0%), private company employees (70 respondents, 14.0%), and state enterprise employees (30 respondents, 6.0%). This profile suggests that the sample included a meaningful mix of residents and stakeholders with varying levels of engagement in local tourism, business, and community activities.

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
1. Gender		
Male	280	56.0
Female	220	44.0
2. Age		
20–29 years	120	24.0
30–39 years	130	26.0
40–49 years	125	25.0
50–59 years	125	25.0
3. Marital Status		
Single	205	41.0
Married	285	57.0
Divorced / Widowed	10	2.0
4. Education		
Below undergraduate level	110	22.0
Undergraduate degree	300	60.0
Graduate degree	90	18.0
5. Occupation		
Student	95	19.0
Government / Public sector employee	125	25.0
State enterprise employee	30	6.0
Private company employee	70	14.0
Self-employed / Business owner	105	21.0
Unemployed / Other	75	15.0
6. Monthly Income		
Below 15,000 baht	145	29.0
15,000–25,000 baht	135	27.0
25,001–35,000 baht	90	18.0
35,001–45,000 baht	55	11.0
45,001–55,000 baht	35	7.0
55,000 baht or above	40	8.0
Total	500	100.0

4.2 Measurement model

Model fit indices indicated a good model fit (SRMR = 0.062; NFI = 0.899), meeting the recommended criteria [33]. The saturated model also showed strong absolute fit (SRMR = 0.037; NFI = 0.899). Values of d_{ULS} and d_G were within acceptable ranges for PLS-SEM, as summarized in Table 2.

The measurement model was evaluated using convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and indicator reliability criteria. As shown in Table 3, all factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.824 to 0.886, and were statistically significant. These results indicate that each observed variable adequately represents its corresponding latent construct.

Table 2. Model fit indices of the PLS-SEM model

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.037	0.062
d_{ULS}	0.433	1.240
d_G	0.377	0.473
Chi-square	1185.456	1301.203
NFI	0.908	0.899

Note: SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; d_{ULS} = unweighted least squares discrepancy; d_G = geodesic discrepancy; NFI = normed fit index. Values of SRMR below 0.08 indicate good model fit. NFI values approaching 0.90 or above suggest adequate comparative fit. d_{ULS} and d_G do not have strict cutoff criteria in PLS-SEM but are reported for completeness. The results indicate that the proposed model demonstrates an acceptable to good fit.

Convergent validity was further supported by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, which ranged from 0.725 to 0.759, exceeding the minimum acceptable level of 0.50. This confirms that a substantial proportion of variance in the indicators is explained by their respective constructs.

In terms of reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.905 to 0.921, while Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.929 to 0.940, both surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70. These findings demonstrate a high level of internal consistency across all constructs.

Table 3. The measurement model

Construct	Loading	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
1) Cultural Participation (CP)						
CP1. I actively participate in local cultural festivals and community traditions.	0.824	4.42	0.67	0.908	0.931	0.759
CP2. I regularly engage in activities related to local heritage and cultural practices.	0.869					
CP3. Community cultural events encourage me to become more involved in local tourism activities.	0.848					
CP4. Participation in local cultural activities helps strengthen my connection with the community.	0.869					
CP5. I believe that community members should take part in preserving and promoting local culture.	0.864					
2) Heritage Awareness (HAW)						
HAW1. I am aware of the cultural heritage that makes Bang Saray unique as a coastal community.	0.826	4.38	0.69	0.908	0.932	0.732
HAW2. I understand the importance of preserving local traditions, customs, and heritage assets.	0.861					
HAW3. Cultural heritage in Bang Saray reflects the identity and history of the local community.	0.869					
HAW4. I believe that awareness of local heritage should be promoted among residents and visitors.	0.870					
HAW5. Understanding local heritage can help strengthen community pride and identity.	0.850					

3) Authentic Experience (AE)		4.36	0.71	0.921	0.940	0.759
AE1. Tourism activities in Bang Saray allow visitors to experience genuine local culture.	0.856					
AE2. Local traditions and ways of life in Bang Saray provide authentic experiences for tourists.	0.886					
AE3. Cultural interactions between residents and visitors in Bang Saray feel natural and meaningful.	0.885					
AE4. Traditional festivals, food, and coastal lifestyles in Bang Saray create a sense of authenticity.	0.851					
AE5. Visitors can gain a real understanding of the local community through tourism experiences in Bang Saray.	0.878					
4) Perceived Community Support (PCS)		4.41	0.66	0.911	0.934	0.738
PCS1. People in Bang Saray generally support the development of cultural tourism in the community.	0.845					
PCS2. Community members are willing to cooperate in tourism-related cultural activities.	0.842					
PCS3. Local residents believe that tourism development should involve community participation and support.	0.885					
PCS4. There is a shared willingness in the community to preserve culture through tourism development.	0.866					
PCS5. Community support is essential for the long-term success of cultural tourism in Bang Saray.	0.856					
5) Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development (SCTD)		4.51	0.65	0.905	0.929	0.725
SCTD1. Cultural tourism development in Bang Saray should preserve local culture for future generations.	0.848					
SCTD2. Tourism development should create long-term benefits for local residents and the community.	0.828					
SCTD3. Sustainable cultural tourism should balance economic growth with cultural preservation.	0.843					
SCTD4. Cultural tourism in Bang Saray should be developed in ways that respect local identity and traditions.	0.869					
SCTD5. Community-based cultural tourism can contribute to the sustainable development of Bang Saray.	0.867					

Specifically, CP showed strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.908$, $CR = 0.931$, $AVE = 0.759$) with loadings between 0.824 and 0.869. HAW also demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = 0.908$, $CR = 0.932$, $AVE = 0.732$), with indicator loadings ranging from 0.826 to 0.870. AE exhibited the highest internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.921$, $CR = 0.940$, $AVE = 0.759$), with loadings between 0.851 and 0.886. Similarly, PCS ($\alpha = 0.911$, $CR = 0.934$, $AVE = 0.738$) and SCTD ($\alpha = 0.905$, $CR = 0.929$, $AVE = 0.725$) also demonstrated strong reliability and validity, with all indicator loadings exceeding 0.80.

Overall, these results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates strong convergent validity and internal consistency reliability, indicating that all constructs are measured accurately and are suitable for subsequent structural model analysis.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the AVE, which should exceed the correlations among latent variables [33]. The findings reveal that the diagonal values representing the AVE of each construct are greater than their correlations with other constructs (Table 4). Aligning with the recommended criterion (Table 5) [34]. In addition, the indicator loadings for each construct were higher than their corresponding cross-loadings with other constructs (Table 6). Collectively, these results confirm that all discriminant validity criteria were satisfactorily met.

Table 4. Fornell-larker criterion

Construct	AE	CP	HAW	PCS	SCTD
AE	0.871				
CP	0.825	0.855			
HAW	0.875	0.863	0.855		
PCS	0.839	0.835	0.829	0.859	
SCTD	0.812	0.796	0.785	0.864	0.851

Table 5. Cross loading

Item Codes	AE	CP	HAW	PCS	SCTD
AE1	0.856	0.734	0.766	0.721	0.669
AE2	0.886	0.718	0.790	0.738	0.724
AE3	0.885	0.738	0.765	0.733	0.728
AE4	0.851	0.672	0.739	0.695	0.694
AE5	0.878	0.731	0.752	0.767	0.720
CP1	0.641	0.824	0.692	0.638	0.617
CP2	0.707	0.869	0.731	0.723	0.660
CP3	0.715	0.848	0.730	0.720	0.686
CP4	0.733	0.869	0.753	0.735	0.719
CP5	0.725	0.864	0.778	0.745	0.716
HAW1	0.725	0.678	0.826	0.677	0.634
HAW2	0.751	0.750	0.861	0.700	0.686
HAW3	0.751	0.761	0.869	0.733	0.680
HAW4	0.741	0.750	0.870	0.707	0.662
HAW5	0.773	0.746	0.850	0.726	0.694
PCS1	0.711	0.696	0.727	0.845	0.699
PCS2	0.691	0.718	0.694	0.842	0.732
PCS3	0.743	0.744	0.720	0.885	0.769
PCS4	0.720	0.721	0.717	0.866	0.759
PCS5	0.738	0.705	0.704	0.856	0.753
SCTD1	0.714	0.675	0.668	0.741	0.848
SCTD2	0.680	0.680	0.657	0.704	0.828
SCTD3	0.675	0.666	0.679	0.725	0.843
SCTD4	0.689	0.687	0.682	0.763	0.869
SCTD5	0.698	0.682	0.656	0.744	0.867

The subsequent assessment of discriminant validity was conducted using cross-loadings, which ranged from 0.617 to 0.886. As presented in Table 5, each measurement item loaded highest on its intended construct compared with the other constructs. For example, the indicators of AE showed their highest loadings on AE (0.851–0.886), while the indicators of CP, HAW, PCS, and SCTD also demonstrated consistently

higher loadings on their respective constructs than on any other latent variables. These findings provide strong evidence of discriminant validity and confirm that each construct is empirically distinct from the others, allowing the study to proceed to structural model assessment.

The structural model was analyzed using PLS-SEM to examine the causal relationships among CP, HAW, AE, PCS, and SCTD in Bang Saray Subdistrict.

The structural results indicate that the proposed model provides meaningful explanatory power for the endogenous constructs. Specifically, the findings show that CP significantly predicts both HAW and AE, while HAW and AE significantly influence PCS. In turn, PCS has a significant positive effect on SCTD. In addition, AE also exerts a direct positive effect on SCTD. However, the direct path from HAW to SCTD was not statistically significant. The structural relationships are illustrated in Figure 2 and summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing results

Direct Effect	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	CP → HAW	0.863	52.560	0.000	Supported
H2	CP → AE	0.825	39.668	0.000	Supported
H3	HAW → PCS	0.405	6.352	0.000	Supported
H4	AE → PCS	0.484	8.252	0.000	Supported
H5	PCS → SCTD	0.594	6.288	0.000	Supported
H6	HAW → SCTD	0.078	0.922	0.356	Not supported
H7	AE → SCTD	0.245	3.109	0.002	Supported

Note: β = standardized path coefficient obtained from PLS-SEM bootstrapping results.

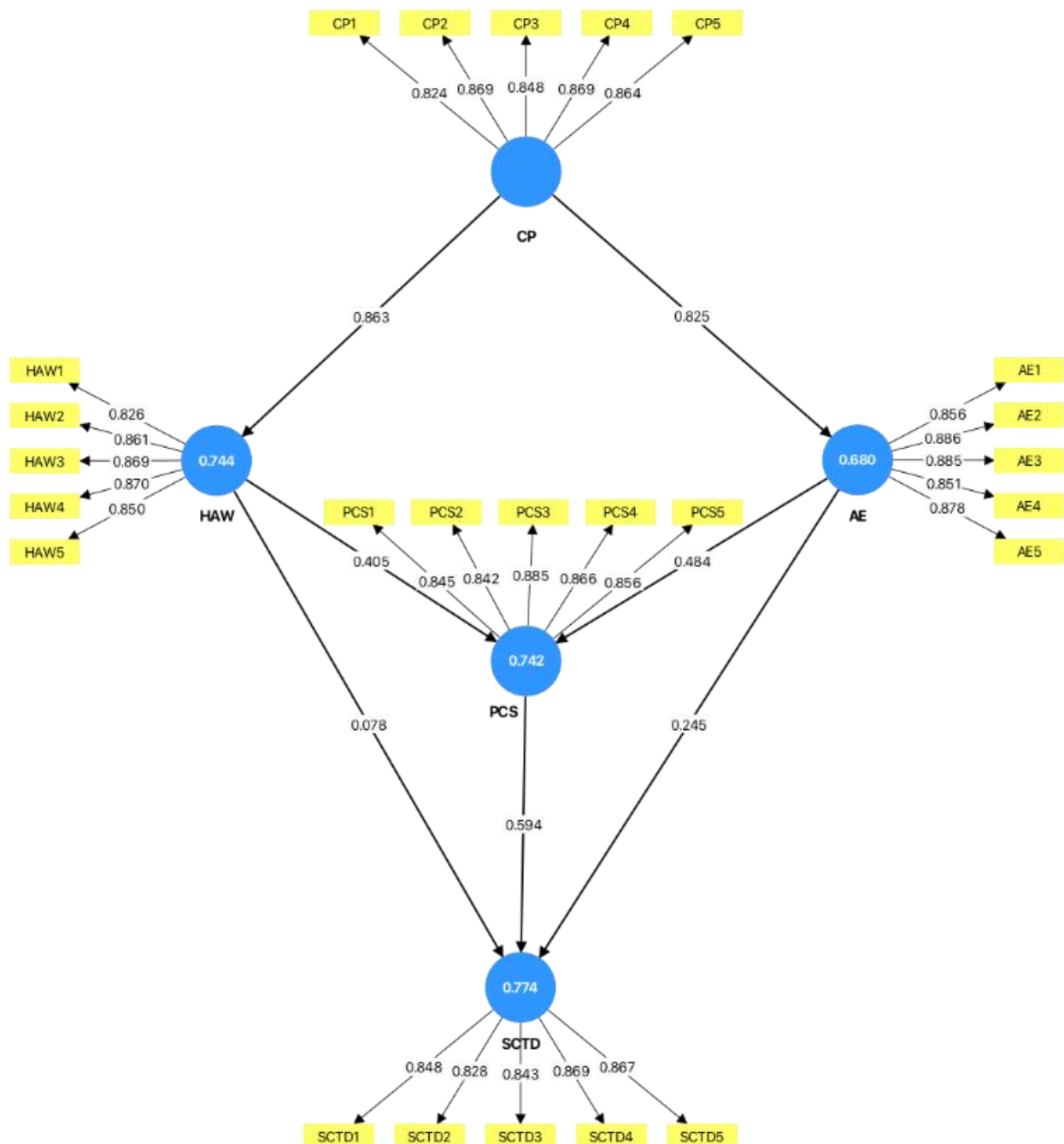


Figure 2. Structural model

4.2.1 Structural model assessment

The structural model was assessed using PLS–SEM to examine the hypothesized relationships among CP, HAW, AE, PCS, and SCTD in Bang Saray Subdistrict.

The results indicate that the proposed structural model demonstrates meaningful predictive relationships among the study constructs. Specifically, CP significantly influences both HAW and AE. In addition, HAW and AE both exert significant positive effects on PCS. Furthermore, PCS and AE significantly contribute to SCTD. However, the direct relationship between HAW and SCTD was found to be statistically insignificant. The structural relationships are illustrated in Figure 2 and summarized in Table 6.

4.2.2 Hypothesis testing

The hypotheses were tested using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. The results were evaluated based on the criteria of t -value > 1.96 and p -value < 0.05 for statistical significance. As presented in Table 6, six out of seven hypotheses were supported. Specifically, CP has a strong and significant positive effect on HAW (H1: $\beta = 0.863$, $t = 52.560$, $p < 0.001$) and AE (H2: $\beta = 0.825$, $t = 39.668$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that active engagement in cultural activities plays a fundamental role in shaping both cognitive awareness and experiential authenticity.

Furthermore, HAW (H3: $\beta = 0.405$, $t = 6.352$, $p < 0.001$) and AE (H4: $\beta = 0.484$, $t = 8.252$, $p < 0.001$) were found to significantly influence PCS, suggesting that both knowledge-based understanding and experiential interaction contribute to positive community attitudes toward tourism development. In addition, PCS (H5: $\beta = 0.594$, $t = 6.288$, $p < 0.001$) and AE (H7: $\beta = 0.245$, $t = 3.109$, $p = 0.002$) have significant positive effects on SCTD, highlighting the importance of social support and authentic engagement in driving sustainability outcomes.

However, the direct effect of HAW on SCTD was not statistically significant (H6: $\beta = 0.078$, $t = 0.922$, $p = 0.356$), indicating that awareness alone may not be sufficient to directly promote sustainability without being translated into community support or practical engagement.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the structural model provide strong empirical evidence that CP functions as the primary upstream construct in shaping both HAW and AE within the context of Bang Saray Subdistrict. The significant effects of CP \rightarrow HAW ($\beta = 0.863$, $p < 0.001$) and CP \rightarrow AE ($\beta = 0.825$, $p < 0.001$) indicate that active engagement in cultural practices serves as the foundational mechanism through which individuals develop both cognitive understanding of heritage and meaningful experiential connections. This finding reinforces prior research suggesting that participation is essential for transforming cultural resources into both knowledge and lived experience [35, 36].

Furthermore, the significant relationships HAW \rightarrow PCS ($\beta = 0.405$, $p < 0.001$) and AE \rightarrow PCS ($\beta = 0.484$, $p < 0.001$) highlight the complementary roles of cognitive and experiential dimensions in fostering PCS. HAW contributes to a rational understanding of the importance of preservation, while AE enhances emotional and symbolic engagement with local culture. Together, these dimensions strengthen residents' willingness to support tourism development, suggesting that both knowledge-based and experience-based mechanisms are

necessary to build collective support. This interpretation aligns with previous studies emphasizing the dual importance of awareness and experience in shaping community attitudes [37, 38].

The findings also demonstrate that PCS has the strongest direct effect on SCTD ($\beta = 0.594$, $p < 0.001$), confirming its role as a key social driver of sustainability outcomes. In addition, AE exerts a significant direct effect on SCTD ($\beta = 0.245$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that authenticity not only enhances tourism value but also contributes to long-term sustainability by reinforcing cultural identity and integrity. These results suggest that sustainable tourism development is achieved not merely through the existence of cultural resources, but through the interaction between experiential quality and collective social support.

However, the non-significant relationship between HAW and SCTD (H6: $\beta = 0.078$, $p = 0.356$) provides an important theoretical insight. This finding indicates that awareness alone is insufficient to directly drive sustainable tourism outcomes. Instead, awareness must be translated into social processes—particularly community support—before it can influence development. In this sense, HAW operates indirectly through PCS, highlighting the mediating role of community dynamics in transforming cognitive recognition into actionable sustainability outcomes. This result helps explain why some communities with high levels of HAW may still struggle to achieve sustainable tourism if such awareness is not accompanied by collective engagement and support [39–42].

Overall, the findings reveal a coherent structural pathway in which CP stimulates both HAW and AE, which in turn enhance Community Support, ultimately leading to SCTD. This integrated mechanism reinforces theoretical perspectives on community-based tourism by highlighting the interdependence of participation, authenticity, and social support as key drivers of sustainability [43–45].

More importantly, this study extends existing theory by demonstrating that participation-driven mechanisms, rather than awareness alone, are central to achieving sustainable tourism outcomes. In line with recent research, sustainable tourism behavior is not shaped by single direct effects, but by the interaction of ethical (moral norms), cognitive (perceived effectiveness), and social mechanisms that jointly translate cultural engagement into sustainability outcomes [46–48].

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides empirical evidence on the key determinants of SCTD in Bang Saray Subdistrict by examining the roles of CP, HAW, AE, and PCS.

The results confirm that CP significantly enhances both HAW and AE, indicating that active engagement in cultural activities is essential for strengthening both knowledge and experiential dimensions of local culture. In turn, both HAW and AE significantly contribute to PCS, highlighting the importance of combining cognitive understanding with meaningful cultural experiences in fostering positive community attitudes toward tourism.

Importantly, the study identifies PCS and AE as key drivers of SCTD, while HAW does not directly influence SCTD. This suggests that awareness must be translated into community engagement and support mechanisms in order to effectively contribute to sustainable tourism outcomes.

From a practical perspective, the findings emphasize that

policymakers and tourism planners should prioritize community participation, authentic cultural experiences, and local support mechanisms when developing sustainable tourism strategies. Encouraging local involvement in cultural activities, preserving authentic cultural expressions, and strengthening community collaboration are essential for achieving long-term sustainability in coastal tourism destinations.

In conclusion, this study proposes a comprehensive framework in which participation, awareness, experience, and community support function as interconnected drivers of SCTD, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of community-based tourism.

7. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted exclusively in Bang Saray Subdistrict, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other coastal or non-coastal destinations with different cultural and socio-economic characteristics. Future studies should consider comparative analyses across multiple locations to enhance external validity.

Second, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, collecting data at a single point in time. This approach may not fully capture temporal changes in community perceptions or the dynamic nature of tourism development. Longitudinal studies are therefore recommended to examine how these relationships evolve over time.

Third, the data were based on self-reported measures, which may be subject to response bias, including social desirability effects. Although widely used in tourism research, future studies could incorporate mixed-method approaches, such as qualitative interviews or observational data, to strengthen the robustness of findings.

Finally, while the model successfully explains key relationships among CP, HAW, AE, PCS, and SCTD, other potentially influential factors were not included. Variables such as environmental sustainability, governance quality, stakeholder collaboration, and tourist behavior may also play important roles and should be examined in future research.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The authors attached the raw data supporting the finding in the supplementary material.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

For research articles with several authors, a short paragraph specifying their individual contributions must be provided. The following statements should be used: Conceptualization, D.T and J.L.; methodology, D.T and J.L.; software, S.O.; validation, D.T. and J.L.; formal analysis, J.L.; investigation, J.L. and S.O.; resources, J.L.; data curation, D.T.; writing—original draft preparation, J.L. and S.O.; writing—review and editing, D.T and J.L.; visualization, D.T.; supervision, S.O.; project administration, J.L.; funding acquisition, D.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

ETHICS APPROVAL

This study received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Sripatum University, Khon Kaen Campus (Approval No. SPUIRB-2025-058; October 6, 2025). All research procedures involving human participants were conducted in compliance with institutional ethical guidelines and in accordance with the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

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