Master Degree programme

in Intercultural Development of Tourism Systems

Final Thesis

Local to global: unveiling the strategic potential of Community-Based Tourism in Thailand

Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Nicola Camatti

Graduand
Erica Baggio
Matriculation Number 880291

Academic Year
2023 / 2024

ABSTRACT

Globally, the tourism industry is recognized as a very unsustainable industry, from contributing to environmental degradation to negatively impacting local cultures and societies. Promoting sustainable types of tourism has been a topic of significant importance since the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emerges as a promising solution to address the challenges of unsustainable tourism. It delves into the possibility of empowering locals in producing tourism experiences within their communities: from managing to planning to promoting both products and services. This research explores how Community-Based Tourism in Thailand can become the answer to the goals presented by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) for the coming years. Particularly, it analyses how the implementation of a digital ecosystem approach - referred to as 'CBT Net' - could enhance the opportunities of transforming Thailand's image as that of a globally recognized sustainable tourism hub. Moreover, this study examines how Community-Based Tourism initiatives can help Thailand elevate its destination image and reputation, target high-value tourists in the long run and gain strategic competitiveness. Through these insights, this work aims to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism and Community-Based Tourism initiatives in Thailand.

INDEX

CHAPTER 3 | THAI SOFT POWER AND ITS MARKETING

3.1 THAINESS AND THE POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF CBT TO THAILAND'S SOFT POWER

3.2 CASE STUDIES: PROMOTING CBT

INTRODUCTION

How to travel sustainably?

Polluting transportation, extreme plastic usage, seasonality overtourism and loss of cultural authenticity: these are just a few examples of how traveling can turn into an unsustainable activity. Tourists might find it difficult to distance themselves from certain practices, generally endorsing in them for holiday sake.

Still, unsustainable tourism also leads to the dissatisfaction of local populations, forced to live through the uneasiness of negative consequences. Locals' endurance plays a role in understanding how their viewpoint must be acknowledged when implementing sustainable tourism strategies. Addressing then all of these instability elements contributes to the attempt of preserving the integrity of current tourism resources for newer generations.

Thailand is one of the most recognized tourist destinations worldwide with its idyllic landscapes and rich heritage. However, this country faces challenges because of the unsustainability of the tourism sector: some destinations are overcrowded, several routes are overmarketed and the general image of Thailand still suffers from negative reputation. Still, the tourism flows grew exponentially with time, up until 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic affected the whole tourism industry. Nowadays, as the *Tourism Authority of Thailand* attempts to regain the circumstances of the pre-COVID situation, the need to address the unsustainability of tourism increases in relevance.

In 2015 the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* were created as a catalyst to enhance the development of sustainability with global-shared goals. The tourism industry should also play a role in the achievement of these objectives. The negative impacts of the tourism industry highlight the need to reshape the offer with a sustainable approach. Sustainable tourism grants to accomplish the intention of the SDGs, encompassing the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability. This is why it is important that government bodies seek the strategic prominence of tourism that implements long-term sustainability.

Sustainable tourism could take various directions, depending on the type of tourism experience, product or service. It could encompass sustainable accommodation, modes of transportation or particular practices when travelling. However, it could also revolve around specific tourism models that embrace various sustainable elements within their characteristics. That is the case for the dimension of Community-Based Tourism (CBT). This sustainable tourism model is based on locals managing their own tourism resources, from the possible impacts of tourism on the community, to the participation of locals in the creation of tourism activities (Suansri, 2003). By empowering locals with the decision-making process, this tourism model aims to confirm that it is possible to make a difference in sustainable tourism development. The decentralized management of Community-Based Tourism permits a bottom-up approach and leads to community participation, which promises benefits on all three dimensions of sustainability.

The potentiality of Community-Based Tourism could stimulate tourism flows to secondary cities, enhance the panorama of sustainable tourism in Thailand, and, consequently, raise the status of the country as that of a more sustainable destination. However, there are still some challenges to take into account. In particular, the CBT initiatives are hard to sell (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013), and sometimes difficult to recognize in the densely compacted offer of Thailand. Moreover, CBT is mostly targeted towards Thai people, turning it almost into a domestic-only offer. Yet, the possibility of extending this offer to a wider public could be strategically resourceful.

Therefore, how could Community-Based Tourism be strategically expanded to advance major competitiveness for the Thai tourism industry?

This thesis focuses on the concept of destination image for the purpose of competitiveness, in order to collect awareness on the dynamics of the tourism market. In particular, we will explore the distinction between 'projected image' and 'perceived image' and identify how branding appeals to those concepts. Then, we will briefly introduce Thailand and its tourism industry, as well as the challenges that the latter is facing.

Moreover, we will delve into the comprehension of sustainable tourism and the Community-Based Tourism model. This research attempts to envision its potential in enhancing the role of sustainable tourism in Thailand, as well as advance this country as a sustainable tourism hub. The methodology implemented consisted of a theoretical assessment of the aforementioned topics, as well as discovering the concept of the 'CBT Standard'.

As an evaluation of the importance of this type of tourism for Thailand, the *2023-2027 Executive Summary by The Tourism Authority of Thailand* was analyzed to comprehend the consideration of CBT by the official Thai tourism entity. However, the results were limited, proving that there is still little consideration for this tourism model. Yet, the potential of Community-Based Tourism disguises a note-worthy potential.

In fact, this research also delves into the concepts of soft power, trying to process if a sustainable tourism model could be advanced as an asset of a whole destination or whether it is possible to extract newer potential elements from the marketization of similar approaches to the one of CBT, as a way to advance them for CBT marketing. Another particular aspect of tourism marketing is persuasion. The Thai government established specific soft power assets to attract visitors and influence them to choose Thailand as their holiday destination. However, it is unclear whether those assets satisfy the emerging need to discover local authenticity and flee from touristy-destinations. Therefore, we will assist our research by exploring two video campaigns to understand the advantages of promoting sustainable tourism in tourism advertisements.

Lastly, we will explore if the conceptualization of a digital tourism ecosystem platform could become the tool to utilize in order to present the Community-Based Tourism offer of Thailand with a competitive advantage. By this means, the aim of this project is to provide a framework for the visibility of the CBT initiatives around the country and to enhance the involvement with visitors to let the offer become more known and reliable to both tourists and tourism operators. Therefore, we will overview existing digital platforms on Community-Based Tourism to understand what is lacking to implement our objective of providing major potential to this tourism model.

In addition, we will assess the real ecosystemic structure and implement it with stronger collaboration mechanisms. Lastly, we will discuss the innovative aspect of a digital tourism platform that has an ecosystemic approach, and how certain technological features could assist the CBT offer to become more attractive. By providing opportunities regarding market access and community empowerment, a digital platform could permit the sustainable development of the tourism industry in Thailand. To conclude, we will analyze in which regard a digital ecosystemic platform answers the Tourism Authority of Thailand's goals and how it can reinforce the role of CBT in acknowledging the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sustainable tourism hardly confines itself to a destination; it rather follows a mentality. The objective of this research is to understand the importance of Community-Based Tourism as a potential tourism model to present Thailand as a more sustainable tourism destination. In addition, we will try to understand in what ways the CBT model can attract emerging and target markets for the Thai tourism industry, such as the FIT travelers, the high-value market and the re-visitors segment.

CHAPTER 1 | TOURIST IMAGE OF A DESTINATION

1.1 COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES OF A TOURIST DESTINATION IMAGE

In this first section, we will explore theories and ideas that will guide our comprehension of *destination image, destination branding* and *reputation* in the context of tourism. Looking at various theoretical frameworks may allow a better understanding of the complex dynamics that affect tourists in their decision-making stage. We can analyze the processes behind the construction of *destination images* and how media influences can be responsible for the formation of the mental image that visitors might have.

The goal is to understand the significance of the aforementioned concepts in the context of competitive tourism, in order to understand how *Community-Based Tourism* can be a strategic advantage for Thailand and its goal of becoming a sustainable tourism hub.

1.1.1. Theoretical framework of destination image and reputation

"Tourism Destination" has been defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as: *<<a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries [...]. It is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various stakeholders and can network to form larger destinations. It is also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness>>[1].*

---

[1] UNWTO (2019). UNWTO Guidelines for Institutional Strengthening of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)–Preparing DMOs for New Challenges. World Tourism Organization: Madrid, Spain. (https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284420841) Last accessed: 7th of February 2024

This definition has several key points that should be highlighted. First of all, it describes the '*existence of a physical space*', so the representation of a real, accessible location that can be visited. Furthermore, a destination refers to the '*cluster of products, services, activities and experiences*', so it compromises a wide range of options that visitors can choose to do or see during their tourist experiences. A destination is also a fundamental component of a wider network that includes several actors: the interconnection with different stakeholders emphasizes the involvement of different organizations in the development and administration of the destination, and so the complex nature of it all. Moreover, this definition highlights the ability of a location to cooperate and potentially link with others to form bigger and more intricate tourism destinations. Lastly, it highlights the idea that destinations possess intangible factors, including their identity and image, which may have an impact on how competitive they are in the market.

The idea of a **destination image** has grown to become a particularly important topic in the tourism industry. The idea is that *<<the 'total product' of a tourism destination comprises attractions, perceived qualities of the destination that differentiate it as a product, which provide its particular allure [...]>>* (Redden, 2017). The hypothesis then is that all aspects relevant to the travel industry of a country or region can conform as an exclusive product that represents the essence of that destination. Surely it is ambitious to take a whole country's tourism services and condense them into the so-called concept of the *destination image*. It is too complex to logically get everything to fit underneath one umbrella term in a coherent way. Yet, it is significant in our modernized world: the amount of information is considerable and the stage of decision-making is crucial for competitiveness purposes. This is why *<<image facilitates decision-making>>* (Matlovičová and Kolesárová, 2012): mental representations can give an idea of a location that permits a favorable process of selection. In this sense, destination image can influence the perception of visitors and so its role in attracting economic growth and revenue for the locals.

As Beerli and Martín (2004) mentioned, most of the research done on destination image is of theoretical nature. However, introducing a theoretical framework to the topic of destination image still provides a few challenges. As Wang, Udomwong, Fu and Onpium (2023) analyzed, the topic was first introduced in the 1970s and underwent a long process of research and development up until today.

The idea of a destination image might sound simple, however the concept withholds a considerable range of dimensions. For instance, in 1994 Gartner conceived the *"Three Components Model"*, made up of *"cognitive image"*, *"affective image"* and *"conative image".* The distinction lies in how the visitors view the attributes of the destination and so create a mental vision of that location (cognitive image); how tourists perceive the destination based on their personal convictions, opinions and emotional attachment (affective image); and lastly about the intentions of the visitors, such as the likelihood of a traveler to visit that specific destination (conative image).

Another example comes from the research done by Bramwell and Rawdling in 1996, where they depicted the idea of a destination image through a *"Two Component Model"*, consisting of a *"perceived image"* and a *"projected image".* The projected one consists of the planned image that the local tourism organization or Destination Management Organization (DMO) wants to promote, whereas the perceived one relies on the perception that the public has of that particular destination. Moreover, more recently there has been a spike in interest in articles about e-WOM and the relationship between technology and destination image (Wang, Udomwong, Fu and Onpium, 2023); modern tools can have a high influence on the 'public' representations of a destination.

Craving into the idea that a destination image is a non-stop developing topic, being part of an industry that is constantly being tested and influenced by newer factors is challenging. Hence why, the complexity of the matter does not allow a simple theoretical framework. However, for the purpose of this research the *Two Component Model* will be taken into consideration; so that is an analysis of the 'perceived image' that the tourists have in their minds versus the 'projected idea' of a destination that DMOs are trying to implement.

Destination image could reflect the projected image a visitor has, based on opinions or personal experiences. However, they can also be influenced by factors coming directly from the destination itself like its socio-cultural environment or political situation (Wang, Udomwong, Fu and Onpium, 2023). As Yuan and Nyen Vui (2023) specified, there are four different dimensions that can shape a destination image: cultural aspects, natural circumstances, social elements and lastly, influences coming from marketing and promotion.

To be more precise, the cultural dimension reflects the representation of a country through its history, heritage and traditions which might entice visitors who look forward to connecting with local authenticity. The natural environment refers to all the natural landmarks of a destination - so the natural uniqueness of a specific area. The social factors are regulated by the local social-political environment, including the safety of the destination as well as the local's efficiency in welcoming the tourists. Moreover, the social factor is also manifested through word-of-mouth, both online and offline. Lastly, a skillful capability to present the destination to the visitors plays an important role in the marketing dimension, as it is necessary to create a powerful product that reflects the destination image (Yuan and Nyen Vui, 2023). This is because people generate visions in their minds about what a particular destination might be like, but these associations may not always be the ones that the branding authorities anticipated. This is why we differentiate between the perceived and the projected image when talking about the destination image.

Media also has a strong impact on destination image. The use of social influences can have a strategic approach at various levels. It is not new that the Internet took the lead as the number one tool that tourists use when picking a destination. Nowadays searching for information or booking directly is all digital. Hence why, the concept of destination image also has to become something that can be spoken online. Promotionally speaking, the role of marketing and efficient communication can have a strategic development in a competitive market like the one of tourism. In this process, the use of iconic elements permits the creation of a unique attraction and therefore a unique and iconic image. It must communicate with

potential visitors in a clear and dynamic way. Nowadays, tourists find a dense offer to pick from, therefore the use of the iconic landmarks that make up the essence of a destination must be very powerful. If the DMO is able to provide an exclusive projected image, then it must mean that the destination is able to *<<[...] provide a memorable image that potential visitors will associate with them>>* (De Las Heras-Pedrosa, Iglesias-Sánchez, Millán-Celis and Jambrino-Maldonado, 2020), plus it is also fundamental for the differentiation of the image from that of competitors. Marketing in this case has a direct influence on the decision-making process, so it becomes an extension of the destination. The DMO should understand what the best method to reach its target audience is and, once acknowledged, it must actively promote it in order to create a meaningful relationship with the visitors.

The concept of the destination image is also strictly tied to the **destination reputation**, which *<<derives from the image every person has of the destination identity and then depends on the alignment between identity and image>>* (Prado and Trad, 2012 as cited in Widjaja, Khalifa and Abuelhassan, 2019). This is another key factor that influences the profitability and performance of the destination because it is the first information that visitors encounter in their customer journey. It has the power to affect the type and the number of visitors, and it can also influence the tourists throughout their decision-making process. A positive reputation provides more competitiveness to the destination: it can enhance the chances of attracting the target audience and contribute to the country's revenue. When traveling, tourists almost always have high hopes for pleasant experiences. As a result, a positive reputation can boost customer loyalty, which can lead to a major sustainable improvement in a destination's tourism system (Yen, Quynh, Dinh, Mai, Duyen, Hong and Duc, 2024). In the case of tourism, that would translate as tourists' intention to revisit the country or a particular location, which is a consequence of a positive destination image (Ledesma, Navarro and Pérez-Rodríguez, 2005, as cited in Darwish and Burns, 2019). Thus, managing a destination's reputation can control the *perceived image* that visitors might have.

1.1.2. Importance of having a national tourism brand

When referring to the idea of the *projected image*, we can discuss the topic of **destination branding**. A destination brand is an essential characteristic of recognition, just like it would be for any other product or business. It must be embedded in the tourists' minds and so, it has to be well-planned and powerful enough to be remembered. It is supposed to embrace the uniqueness of that particular destination and serve as a tool for communication and competitiveness. In essence, it is a communication strategy that tourism organizations employ to create contact and relationships with tourists.

But why is it important for a destination to have a national brand? A destination brand often aims to create positive connections with a specific location in order to set it out from others. The implementation of branding helps erase negative associations with a particular destination (Pop, Baba, Năstase Anysz and Tohanean, 2020), but it can also help understand one's core value by finding what adds value to this specific area and enhances competitiveness. Building relationships as a tourism destination with potential and actual visitors permits more trust, as the connection turns emotional. In this sense, features such as satisfaction, likelihood to recommend and intention of revisit assure positive outcomes. Branding is also convenient as a tool of shared strategic planning for local stakeholders (Pop, Baba, Năstase Anysz and Tohanean, 2020) - as long as they share a common future vision. The idea of the *projected image* comes into play because of the psychological and socio-cultural influence that branding can have in shaping the perception of the destination. Brand elements such as name, logo and tagline resemble similar roles in destination branding too (Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou and Salonika, 2016): the name of the location (at the national, regional, or city level), a graphic trademark of the brand and a slogan that can inform visitors about what is unique about the destination. They become 'vehicles' and extensions of the destination, what the destination shows itself to the world. Media representations that a DMO constructs for the purpose of branding create an identity of that location that tourists can sympathize with. A unique identity benefits the destination in the vast

market of tourism, as authentic images get more spotlights in the limitless number of countries, regions or cities tourists can pick from.

Considering that the results of a branding strategy do not have a short-term effect (Pop, Baba, Năstase Anysz and Tohanean, 2020), a local tourism organization should generate a vision with its stakeholders in order to permit a co-creation that will not damage the economic results, nor diminish the emotional connection with the target market. If stakeholders are included in the conversation about destination branding, they will be more likely to endorse the branding strategy rather than oppose it (Hanna and Rowley, 2011).

Undoubtedly, just like with the idea of destination image, a whole country's identity hardly fits into one projection. The risk could also be that the creation of an *<<artificial image>>* (Pop, Baba, Năstase Anysz and Tohanean, 2020) does not consider the complexity of the tourism services present in that destination. This is why it could be also useful to implement regional branding (Margarisová and Vokáčová, 2016 as cited in Pop, Baba, Năstase Anysz and Tohanean 2020). There is still the question of international visitors: perhaps for them, it would be much more recognizable one branding at the national level, rather than a multitude of regional ones. Perhaps, in this case, regional branding could have a larger impact on revisiting tourists. Those who have already visited the iconic landmarks and the unique features that national branding promotes will most definitely be more interested in digging deeper into the relationship between themselves and the destination of choice, intensifying the existing emotional connection. In this case, having one main brand and various sub-brands associated with the main one could be a solution (Hanna and Rowley, 2011).

Within the topic of branding, we must identify **position strategy** as well. Nowadays the tourism industry is incredibly saturated and so it provides challenges when it comes to differentiating oneself. Positioning theory suggests that the way to break through the competitiveness of the market is by providing *<<simplified and focused messages>>* (Pike and Mason, 2011).

A good positioning strategy would be about finding and understanding features that are unique to the destination and that are capable of effectively diversifying it from its competitors in terms of its ability to satisfy customer needs. Additionally, another aspect that can have a strong influence on the positioning can be the concept of destination image itself, or to be more precise the 'perceived image' of a destination. In this sense what tourists think of a location can influence and contribute to the DMOs' strategies of repositioning. In order to change the positioning of a destination brand it is necessary to implement *image alteration*. This can be done by *<<redesigning or re-positioning the tourism product>>* (Ibrahim and Gill, 2005). Repositioning entails analyzing existing perceptions in the tourists' minds, which can provide insights into what can be done to implement newer destination's position strategies. This approach can significantly benefit DMOs in identifying which tourism market aligns with the destination's future positioning strategy (Ibrahim and Gill, 2005).

The identity and the branding (projected image) of a destination should not just co-exist, they should match (Pike and Mason, 2011) and develop to function as a positioning strategy. In the end, building a powerful destination brand and a powerful positioning strategy are essential to stand out in a fiercely competitive market.

1.1.3. Role of promotion and influences from a competitive point of view

The competitiveness of tourism destinations affects their performance in the tourism market. Therefore, before they travel, visitors form an impression of the destination in their thoughts based on information they have learned from various sources (Sadq, Othman and Khorseed, 2019) - this is what the 'perceived image' is all about. When it comes to the competitive tourism market, an inaccurate image can cost the number of visitors and revenue. This is why efficient communication is key to having a consistent and integrated branding strategy. In order to promote and increase tourism, tourism organizations use marketing to identify potential and anticipated visitor markets in order to implement strategies for gaining their

attention. Promotional activities can shape perceptions and influence the decisions of potential tourists. Hence why, their role in competitiveness is very high.

UNWTO defines the **competitiveness of a tourism destination** as follows:
<<[...] the ability of the destination to use its natural, cultural, human, man-made and capital resources efficiently to develop and deliver quality, innovative, ethical and attractive tourism products and services in order to achieve a sustainable growth within its overall vision and strategic goals, increase the added value of the tourism sector, improve and diversify its market components and optimize its attractiveness and benefits both for visitors and the local community in a sustainable perspective>>[2].

By this definition, we can identify that the focus is on creating tourism offers that are both appealing to visitors and that can also help achieve sustainable growth, ensuring the long-term viability of the tourism sector in a particular destination.

To maintain competitiveness, tourism businesses need to be aware of their customers' needs and wants. They also need to make potential tourists aware of the services they offer and use persuasive tactics to win them over (Sadq, Othman and Khorseed, 2019). The advertisement process should then focus on promoting both the destination identity and its services, which are ultimately what will create the visitors' experience. The effort to implement should be innovative and achievable, it should increase the value of the branding and expand benefits from both the demand and the supply side. The co-created vision of the destination[3] offers insights into the 'projected image' of the destination, while the 'perceived image' gets influenced by the media promotions. The level of attractiveness in marketing orientates tourists and potential visitors in their customer journey: *<<the more attractive the destination image is, the more likely a destination will be chosen>>* (De Las Heras-Pedrosa, Iglesias-Sánchez, Millán-Celis and Jambrino-Maldonado, 2020). Their intention to visit the destination depends on the 'perceived image' they have, so their willingness to recommend will depend on

---

[2] Un Tourism. *Glossary of tourism terms* (https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms)
 Last accessed: 12th of February 2024
[3] Co-created with local stakeholders.

their personal experience. Overall, destination marketing should maximize the benefits coming from tourism impacts and achieve the desired goals established with local stakeholders.

Tools such as social media, websites, E-WOM, User-Generated Content and other IT channels have a fundamental role in this process. These resources can convey knowledge about what the destination can and 'wants' to be. Moreover, it can help to indirectly communicate the positioning strategy that the DMO wants to implement to its target audience. It requires major improvements in the creation of tourist infrastructure, programs, images and events to ensure the positioning and promotion of a competitive tourism destination (Gato, Dias, Pereira, da Costa and Gonçalves, 2022). Nevertheless, if the goal is that of creating an emotional connection with the target audience, then **storytelling** gives promotion a different perspective. Storytelling refers to the act of *<<delivering a destination's story>>* (Choi, 2016). The message that the DMO co-created with the local stakeholders should be the focal point of the communication, but it should also implement acts of engagement with the audience for the sake of connection.

Considering that the perceived image affects the competitiveness of a destination, the role of promotion cannot be undervalued. Strategic communication and well-planned branding strategies can enhance performance in the competitive and dynamic environment of tourism. For a competitive advantage that is resilient in time, a tourism organization should implement offers that create an emotional connection to the visitors. This way they would be more likely to recommend it to others. Moreover, a sustainable offer maintains resources in the future and so, is more viable in the long term. Ultimately, if promotional marketing ensures to meet the desired goals of a destination, we could consider such tools as key elements in the establishment of a destination's image and competitiveness.

1.2 THAILAND

This section focuses on exploring the context of Thailand. First by providing a general introduction to the country and its tourism industry, then by analyzing how

and why this sector is of fundamental importance to the country. Moreover, we will delve into what challenges the current tourism industry in this particular destination. Lastly, we will explore Thailand's DMO and national brand, to suggest what is the 'project image' of the country, in order to comprehend what the strategic direction of the nation has been so far.

1.2.1. Introduction to Thailand

Thailand is located in central Southeast Asia, with half of the country on the mainland and the other half extending southward to form the Gulf of Siam [Figure 1]. This nation offers a wide range of travel options, from its vibrant capital Bangkok to the peaceful hillsides in the north and to the southern islands and their idyllic beaches. This country has a long history of tourism and it is globally referred to as *"the land of smiles"* for the cheerful faces of its people. When browsing and researching online about tourism in Thailand, images of Buddhist temples, paradise-looking islands and street-food heavens are among the prominent representations. The most popular pictures seem to depict the country as a relaxing destination, with bright blue water and wooden boats docked by the beach. But Thailand has a lot more to offer. It is composed of 77 different provinces that each have their own unique customs for visitors to discover, both from a picturesque and a cultural point of view. The ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation is proof of its rich migration and trade history. The major ethnic group is that of the *Siamese* people (or *Thai*), composing approximately 85% of the total population (Barman, 2023). Other predominant ethnic groups are the *Karen* and *Lao* people in the north (often referred to as 'hill people'), the *Chinese Thais* and lastly *Malay Muslims* in the south (Barman, 2023). The roots of the Thais are what generated the identity of the modern nation, from the official language to large parts of the perceived culture. The nation's multiculturalism is in part what makes the country so unique. The harmonious co-existence of diversity is still visible today. For instance, every year in Thailand they celebrate three different New Year celebrations: one from the Siamese tradition in April, the Chinese New Year around February and the common 31st of December like the rest of the world.

In the tourism picture, Thailand is seen as a *<<unified one, ethically and politically>>* (Redden, 2007). This idea resides in *Thainess,* the embodiment of Thailand's spirit[4]. That is the general term used to describe 'everything that is Thai', or everything that reminds of Thai culture, which is predominantly what the Siamese ethnic group is all about. For instance, the many depictions of Buddhist temples remind of *Thainess* because they are exclusively Thai. Culture encapsulates the essence of a country, and so allures tourists in the discovery of the destination. In this case, tourists can be attracted to the idea of *Thainess*[5].

The Thai tourism industry has a long history of development over the decades. Its beginning dates back to the Vietnam War, ending in the 1970s. In this period the presence of the US army in Thailand prompted considerable investments in tourism-like infrastructure from both Thai and Western companies. This marked the beginning of contemporary tourism growth in Thailand (Kayoko, 2010).

With time, Thailand has effectively established itself as a top travel destination in Southeast Asia. However, progressively, Thai tourism turned into an unsustainable sector: the alarming spread of HIV, the degradation of natural ecosystems throughout the country and the alteration of local communities were among the main issues affecting the industry (Kayoko, 2010). To aid the situation, the Thai government, NGOs and other social organizations turned their attention to eco-friendly tourist practices. The focus of such efforts was on community development, environmental preservation and HIV prevention. Proposals for ecotourism and participatory tourism models gained popularity during the Thai tourism industry's transition towards sustainability (Kayoko, 2010). Researchers started looking into how Thailand's tourism industry could strengthen and provide positive benefits to local communities in the 1990s. It was found that engagement with tourism frequently resulted in a loss of authenticity, as communities were merely 'commercialized' for the purpose of tourism revenue (Kayoko, 2010).

---

[4] Thaizer. *AMAZING THAILAND: IT BEGINS WITH THE PEOPLE* https://www.thaizer.com/amazing-thailand-it-begins-with-the-people/ Last accessed: 20th of February 2024

[5] *Thainess* as a concept will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Eventually, Thailand became an incredibly popular destination. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) stated that *<<Thailand has been the top-of-mind destination for many travelers>>* (TAT, 2017), and its popularity as a tourist destination is reinforced by its rating in numerous reports. In fact, overall Thailand ranked 31st on the World Economic Forum's 2019 report called *Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index,* gaining three solid positions compared to the previous report from 2017 (WTO, 2019). Turning to a modern perspective, we must consider how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the tourism industry worldwide. Still, Thailand takes a big slice of the total arrivals among the most visited destinations globally, welcoming almost 28 million international arrivals in 2023[6]. The results are not reaching the post-COVID numbers (39.916.251 arrivals[7]) but still demonstrating a peculiar resilience from the negative impacts of the pandemic. Its recovery is happening right in front of our eyes and as Thailand focuses on regaining its status as a prominent tourist destination, there is a growing recognition worldwide about the importance of sustainable tourism. Thailand has the chance to reconsider its offer. The country's landscape of sustainable tourism is quite broad: ranging from ecotourism to responsible tourism and even homestays. Nowadays, Thailand presents itself as both extremely contemporary and rooted in traditional authenticity. In Bangkok, modern skyscrapers surround smallish Buddhist temples; in beachy locations, fisherman villages border luxury resorts; up in the north rural villages are nestled around modern cities. One way or another, *<<the further a visitor travels away from the urban centers the more superficial the impact of the modern world becomes>>* (Osborne, 2016). Both the traditional side and the modern-like market seem to be prominent offers. Perhaps tourists see more of the *<<facilities that Thailand has, in contrast to what it essentially is>>* (Redden, 2007), yet a lot of the *Thainess* that is advertised is part of the so-called traditional offer. Ultimately, the juxtaposition of the two sides of Thailand engages with different tourist markets, including China, Malaysia, Korea, India and Russia

---

[6] The exact number in 2023 was 28.150.016 international arrivals. Tourism Authority of Thailand Statistics: available at https://www.mots.go.th/more_news_new.php?cid=411
[7] Tourism Authority of Thailand Statistics: available at
https://www.mots.go.th/more_news_new.php?cid=411

which were the top markets of 2023; perhaps being drawn to Thailand's unique blend of modernity and authenticness.

1.2.2. Tourism's role in the economic development of the country

There are several benefits that tourism offers to Thailand, especially respecting employment, economic benefits and market efficiency (Rezk and Rosario, 2019), contributing to the overall socio-economic prosperity of the country. Before the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand firmly established itself as an important tourism destination, ranking 4th for the *'highest international tourism receipt'* and 8th for the *'highest international tourist arrival'* globally (TAT, 2021). These numbers highlight how important tourism is to supporting Thailand's economy. In 2019 alone foreign tourists had a significant impact, granting a contribution of 11.5% of the country's GDP (Biswas, 2023).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the tourism sector, resulting in a crisis of restrictions and closed borders. The lack of international flights resulted in a sharp decline in visitor numbers, which weakened Thailand. Despite the challenges, tourism restrictions were gradually lifted in 2022, permitting a slow recovery for Thailand's economy from 2023 onwards (Biswas, 2023). The tourism industry's resiliency is obvious: the number of arrivals in 2019 was 39.9 million, while in 2023 it reached 28.1 million[8]. The difference between the number of tourists is still high, but it does show that the scars left by the pandemic are gradually fading away. It is then expected that Thailand's economy will continue to be significantly impacted by the international tourist market; thus its importance as a key growth driver is relevant for the survival of the sector. As the country strives to restore its status as a major tourism destination, strategic steps must be taken to ensure long-term growth and endurance. By accurately analyzing emerging tourism trends, new opportunities and challenges, Thailand could position itself as an even more competitive destination in Southeast Asia in the post-pandemic era.

---

[8] Tourism Authority of Thailand Statistics: available at
https://www.mots.go.th/more_news_new.php?cid=411

Local companies, such as *Thai Airways* and *TRAViZGO*, are in fact implementing measures to manifest the nation as more appealing to the international audience (Forbes, 2023a).

The full recovery is anticipated to arrive in 2025 (TAT, 2021), so it is still early to provide proper feedback on the recovery. Still, the significance of tourism for the economic development of the country remains valuable.

1.2.3. Challenges of tourism in Thailand

In Thailand tourism has a high economic potential, as it provides for a high percentage of the economic growth of the country (TAT, 2017). However, the tourism industry in Thailand faces a few obstacles that affect its long-term sustainability.

For instance, the typical itinerary to Thailand generally revolves around three primary destinations: the capital *Bangkok,* which is located in the center of the country; the nation's largest island *Pukhet* (or any other southern island such as *Koh Samui*) and neighbouring smaller archipelagos; and the city of *Chiang Mai* up in the north. While some locations draw high numbers of visitors, many lesser-known destinations remain unheard of, underrepresented and lack the resources and know-how to effectively market themselves.

Moreover, there is a further issue in this regard, concerning the standardization of the tourist experience. In fact, the routes tend to have similar arrangements and programs, which might take away from the value that visitors are supposed to receive from the experience. This might also happen because of the lack of awareness of the numerous potential routes due to the absence of promotions of said destinations by operators. Hence why, tourists are unfamiliar with off-the-beaten-path locations nor are intrigued in discovering them[9].

---

[9] These issues come from personal observation, as well as briefly mentioned in "Ushakov, Ermilova and Andreeva (2018). *Destination Branding as a Tool for Sustainable Tourism Development (the Case of Bangkok, Thailand). Espacios*". When analyzing tours of online companies (of various sources), it appeared that the majority of the routes covered these three main destinations or, if the tour foresees visits throughout the whole country, the three locations are always main stops or mentioned by the tour. Most times, the routes also offer little variation to the sightseeing within each destination.

However, when the more 'rural' or 'wild' areas gain attention, the approach to local communities could have a "*human-zoo*" effect. The risk is that tourism can harm the local communities by reducing them to mere cultural attractions and, as a result, diminish the local traditions: a sort of tourism exploitation that generally plays a role in a bunch of northern communities (Trupp, 2017).

Furthermore, environmental sustainability still lacks proper regulations - despite Thailand being known as an eco-tourism destination (TAT, 2021). Considering its status this challenge must be taken into account as well. Poor accessibility and a weak national transportation system also provide areas of improvement, as independent travelers drive the list of newer emerging trends (TAT, 2021). The opportunity to gain a positive relationship with this type of visitor cannot happen if infrastructures remain of low quality.

Moreover, the dependency on specific tourist markets (such as Chinese or Korean visitors) poses the challenge of whether the dynamics of reliance on limited tourism markets is a disadvantage (Ushakov, Ermilova and Andreeva, 2018). In fact, because of COVID-19 restrictions, the full return of Chinese tourists seems distant (Head, 2023), therefore narrowing the economic advantage brought by this market. This is why TAT is planning to diversify its target audience, intending to bet on emerging European markets[10]: perhaps an opportunity to invest in different tourism offers as well?

Lastly, the main part of economic benefits of tourism frequently go to huge tour operators and foreign investors, leaving local communities with little economic profit and exposing them to a variety of social and environmental difficulties (Rungchavalnont, 2022). The need to address sustainable development for the sake of locals' benefits should also become a more important matter.

---

[10] TRAVEL WEEKLY ASIA, (2023). These are the top markets for Thailand tourism in 2023 (https://www.travelweekly-asia.com/Destination-Travel/These-are-the-top-markets-for-Thailand-tourism-in-2023) Last accessed: 21st of February 2024

1.2.4. National brand analysis of Thailand: historical evolution and future prospects

In 1959 the *Tourism Organization of Thailand (TOT)* was established under the government of Field Marshal *Sarit Thanarat*. Because of the great impact tourism had on the Thai economy[11], twenty years later, in 1979, the establishment evolved into the **Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)** - which is the denomination still in use today. When created, the main purposes of the institution were the promotion of Thai tourism, the development of Thailand's destination image and to ensure a memorable experience for visitors coming to the country[12].

Over the years, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has embraced a vision to become the strategic leader in guiding Thailand towards experience-based and sustainable tourism (TAT, 2021). Its mission is to create a high-value tourism market that can boost Thailand's reputation and boost the sustainability progress. Moreover, TAT is committed to providing tourists with exceptional experiences and quality services[13], ensuring great satisfaction for its visitors.

We should also contrast TAT's function with that of another important organization in Thailand's tourist scene, the *Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourist Administration* (DASTA). **DASTA** (known in Thailand as อพท), is a public organization whose aim is to promote and improve the sustainability of the travel sector in the country. It was established in 2003 under a royal decree, turning today into one of the main institutions that take care of the equilibrium between the economic, social and cultural dimensions of sustainable tourism, with the added value of taking into consideration a participatory process (DASTA, 2021) and a *Community-Based Tourism* approach[14]. DASTA operates in nine 'Designated Areas' for sustainable tourism development throughout Thailand, ensuring the implementation of sustainable practices all over the country. It is the central

---

[11] First Strategic Insight, (2021). *Pivotal role for tourism: interview with Yuthasak Supasorn*
[12] Tourism Authority of Thailand official website. *About TAT*
(https://www.tat.or.th/en/about-tat/history) Last accessed: 29th of February 2024
[13] Tourism Authority of Thailand official website. *About TAT*
(https://www.tat.or.th/en/about-tat/history) Last accessed: 29th of February 2024
[14] The topic of Community-Based Tourism will be further analyzed in Chapter Two

organization in charge of formulating strategy and policy plans, and facilitating communication between government authorities, local communities and stakeholders. Its vision is to manage the direction of sustainable growth in the country by coordinating, promoting and supporting stakeholders (DASTA, 2021).

Thailand's brand: *Amazing Thailand*

Central to Thailand's tourism branding is the iconic slogan, known as **"Amazing Thailand"** [Figure 2]. It first appeared in 1998, as an attempt to revitalize the country following the Asian economic crisis of the prior years (Redden, 2007). The campaign aimed at boosting international tourism and delineating a new representation of the country worldwide, visioning a united image of the country. In fact, back in its first appearance, the branding strategy was that of attempting to sell images of Thailand as a harmonized "golden paradise". The idea was to depict the perception that tourists were able to discover and experience *Thainess* and authenticity (Redden, 2007). In 1999 Thailand registered an increment of +10% in international tourist arrivals (McDowall and Wang, 2009), showcasing the potential of the destination and the effects of the first campaigns. In fact, from 2001 onwards, the country kept registering at least 10 million international arrivals every year and more[15]. From 2002 to 2006, TAT produced several campaigns that aimed at advancing the idea that Thailand is a destination with high-value products and services, as well as a unique country worth visiting (McDowall and Wang, 2009).

The approach of sustainable tourism began in 2007, when the government took action in the protection of the environment and natural resources, for the sake of sustainable economic growth for the tourism industry (McDowall and Wang, 2009).

---

[15] With the exception of 6.7 million international arrivals in 2020 and 428.000 in 2021 (due to the impact of COVID-19).
Strangio S., (2023). *Thailand on Track to Meet Tourism Target for 2023, Government Says* THE DIPLOMAT
(https://thediplomat.com/2023/12/thailand-on-track-to-meet-tourism-target-for-2023-government-says/) Last accessed: 1st of March 2024

In 2013 TAT launched the **"Amazing Thailand: It Begins with the People"** campaign, focusing exclusively on social aspects of *Thainess*: attitudes connected to Thai hospitality, locals' behaviors and specks of culture. It was recognized that the human dimension of the Thai people is often what draws tourists to visit the country (Thomsen, 2014), especially considering how the campaign focused on the social features of the locals. However, it is crucial to understand if the aura of *Thainess* is representative of the country as a whole or not; this is a matter that will be discussed later in this thesis.

In 2018 TAT promoted **"Amazing Thailand: Go Local",** a campaign that aimed at boosting trips to secondary destinations and rural areas[16]. This project aimed at enticing travelers to venture off the well-traveled routes and more towards lesser-known areas. It is not clear if the promotion of this particular campaign involved forms of Community-Based Tourism or not. Yet, the aspects that relate to more sustainable tourism practices are visible.

One of the latest TAT campaigns is called **"Visit Thailand campaign 2023: Amazing New Chapters"**, which pushes on the promotion of the *'Five Fs'* of Thai's soft power: food, film, fashion, festival, and fight (TAT, 2023). The aim is to promote high-value and sustainable tourism to visitors in the post-pandemic era[17].

1.3. TAT'S EXECUTIVE PLAN'S ANALYSIS

As a state enterprise, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) must develop a five-year plan that aligns with the guidelines of the *National Economic and Social Development Plan*, which <<*aims to transform Thailand into a Circular Economy (CE) and low-carbon society>>*[18]. The **Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) Executive Summary 2023-2027** provides insights from both a policy and marketing point of view. It includes TAT's mission, vision and planned strategies

---

[16] First Strategic Insight, (2021). *Pivotal role for tourism: interview with Yuthasak Supasorn*

[17] ZeeZest.com, (2023). *Visit Thailand 2023: A Campaign Boosting High Value And Sustainable Tourism* (https://zeezest.com/travel/visit-thailand-2023-a-campaign-boosting-high-value-and-sustainable-tourism-3185) Last accessed: 11th of March 2024

[18] ASEAN Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, (2024). Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plan 2023–2027 ([Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plan 2023–2027](#)) Last accessed: 8th of March 2024

aiming at sustainable growth and development. The plan also illustrates the situation of the tourism industry in Thailand, as well as presenting the goals of the Thai tourism industry in the next few years.

This last section of Chapter One will analyze the latest Executive Summary of the Tourism Authority of Thailand: first we will consider the current situation of the sector, then we move to exploring newer trends and future prospects.

1.3.1. Current situation, trends and goals

Key aspects of the past years' scene of the Thai tourism industry include (TAT, 2021):

- major revenue streams coming from main cities because of the number of visitors and average spending habits;
- predominant age group of visitors between 25-44 years old;
- short-haul visitors growing in popularity;
- high potential for gastronomy tourism;
- facility and infrastructure limitations that pose challenges;
- transportation and infrastructure limiting the growth of FIT (Fully Independent Tourism) travelers;
- local stakeholders tend to produce more customized experiences.

Through the *Five Forces Analysis* TAT was able to identify the challenges for the tourism industry in Thailand. In particular, the effects of COVID-19 still seem prominent considering its impact on the country's economy. In fact, TAT predicts that the full recovery of the industry might come when long-haul visitors fully come back - so, around 2027. Moreover, TAT highlights how new emerging destinations, as well as already existing competitors, push on the threatening side. That is mostly related to the competitiveness of acquiring customers who have more and more bargaining power. By tackling and addressing these challenges TAT can help actively strategize solutions to potential risks. TAT could also mitigate the challenges by taking advantage of promising opportunities. In analyzing newer trends in the tourism industry TAT has highlighted - among others - the rise of FIT

(Fully Independent Travelers) tourists, a major emphasis on sustainability and a shift to alternative tourism.

TAT also analyzed that Thailand keeps on having a high loyalty index (2nd place in Asia-Pacific rank) and a recognized status as a popular tourism destination thanks to its attractiveness in products and natural richness (TAT, 2021). A high loyalty index implies that there are a lot of ex-visitors who tend to revisit the country, which as a consequence will boost a tourism destination's revenue. It can also improve market share, produce favorable recommendations and cut down marketing expenses (Yen, Quynh, Dinh, Mai, Duyen, Hong and Duc, 2024). In addition, re-visitors could help shift the main concentration of tourists to lesser-known areas. As highlighted in the Tourism Authority of Thailand's *Executive Summary 2023-2027*, there is a high percentage of total tourist arrivals that are made up of past visitors deciding to book their holiday in Thailand once again (TAT, 2021). It is hard to confirm what exactly brings tourists back, so while reputation undoubtedly plays a significant role in this phenomenon, factors such as service quality, innovative offers or motivation may also influence tourists' decisions to return. Considering that satisfaction has been proven to have a positive effect on repurchasing (Thiumsak and Ruangkanjanases, 2016), we can discuss that Thailand radiates a positive image to tourists, as the growth rate of re-visitors is higher than that of newer visitors. Ultimately, we could argue that the level of satisfaction is the predominant aspect that drives tourists into the coming-back pattern. This would mean that there is a relationship between the destination and the visitor, which could be part of the motivation for why tourists would re-pick said destination.

A primary goal of TAT for this 2023-2027 period is to promote and develop a tourism offer that is more sustainable. To be more specific TAT's strategic objectives under the *Executive Summary* plan are (TAT, 2021):

1. *Drive demand: pursue value-based tourism for sustainability*

This is expected to be satisfied by expanding a high-value international tourist base, stimulating domestic tourism and establishing awareness as a sustainable and responsible destination.

2. *Shape supply: creating unique destination proposition and elevate industry standard*

TAT plans to create unique experience-based tourism products; to improve already existing tourism products, services and infrastructure for sustainability; and lastly to develop and utilize technology and innovation in transforming Thailand into a Smart tourism destination.

3. *Thrive for excellence: develop TAT to become a High-Performance Organization*

This last strategic objective follows four main actions, which are: striving for people excellence, promoting the utilization of innovation and technology, promoting collaboration within and outside the organization under a responsible framework, and enhancing organizational effectiveness.

By staying ahead of emerging trends and meeting the preferences of travelers, TAT can help the Thai tourism industry become more competitive and appealing to newer generations of tourists.

The emphasis on sustainability, value-based tourism and experience-based tourism could give high potential to TAT's vision of transforming Thailand into a sustainable tourism destination. The work to be done on targeting niche markets, improving digital marketing strategies and developing products is to be taken into consideration as the industry rapidly evolves.

1.3.2. Planning a strategic future: the role of sustainable tourism in the Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) Executive Summary 2023-2027

When looking into TAT's evaluation of the future of Thai tourism, we can observe that the institution envisions a positive destination brand image and an even stronger sustainable destination management strategy as part of its value proposition (TAT, 2021). In order to persist in promoting a sustainable environment for the Thai tourism industry the shift is indicated by the desire to switch to an alternative-tourism model with a value-based core. By 2026-2027,

TAT aims to extend its reach to second-tier cities (TAT, 2021), this kind of approach would most certainly foster the promotion of alternative routes and enhance different types of tourism in Thailand.

Many opportunities that TAT should strategize for bring out both opportunities and risks. For instance, the approach to FIT travelers could open the door to value-based tourism and Community-Based Toursim, especially considering the inclination of these types of visitors to visit off-the-beaten-track destinations. Moreover, the shift to sustainable tourism is favorable if the condition of increasing FIT travelers persists. But this could also happen to be a threat, due to the fact that Thailand still seems to lack adequate infrastructure, efficient transportation systems and accessibility for these kinds of visitors to conceptualize their trip on their own - language barrier aside. FIT travelers will be discouraged from visiting if the conditions do not permit an efficient travel experience.

Sustainable development has a key role throughout TAT's Executive Summary. In fact, it is often mentioned as a driver of the long-term success of the industry: from encouraging environmental and cultural conservation, to wanting to shift to an alternative tourism approach. To be specific, in the Executive Summary by TAT, the role of sustainable tourism takes a strategic approach. The plan tries to put into action a project that will transform Thailand into a country with a well-known reputation as a responsible and sustainable tourism destination by the end of 2027. Some planned strategies involve the environmental conservation and protection of natural resources; the support of sustainable tourism initiatives; the encouragement of collaboration with stakeholders to develop sustainable tourism policies and strategies; and the seek for experience-based products and services.

Another interesting strategy concerns ecotourism and responsible tourism, as both are acknowledged forms of sustainable tourism that are ramping up the market globally. Thailand has the qualities and characteristics to embrace such a trend, yet stronger environmental regulation enforcement is needed if the country wants to be perceived as an ecotourism hub (TAT, 2021).

Another TAT strategy is to *<<establish [Thailand's] tourism image as a high-value and sustainable destination>>* (TAT, 2021). Recognizing the impact that Community-Based Tourism has, could be one of the key strategies to achieve this vision. Yet, TAT gives limited consideration to this tourism model in the 2023-2027 plan. It is briefly referenced as an expected trend in tourist' behavior, among other trends such as FIT (Fully Independent Tourism) or Value-led tourism (TAT, 2021). Nevertheless, the role of sustainable tourism in TAT's Executive Summary is central. Generally speaking, the role of sustainable tourism is that of boosting socio-economic development that looks to the future. Minimizing the negative impacts and involving a promotional approach to long-term conservation is the main core of it all. In a way, the business ecosystem approach is considered to provide a stronger base for the implementation of this goal. Currently, the collaboration between stakeholders is weak; a common and shared vision is needed for the development of an efficient value-based tourism that is also sustainable. According to TAT's latest governor, Ms. *Thapanee Kiatphaibool*, there is a strong emphasis on building strength from within the sector by uplifting and supporting local businesses and communities (Forbes, 2023b). It should be important then to take into consideration opportunities and possible strategic elements of Thai tourism in order to boost the country's destination image. **Community-Based Tourism (CBT)**, although briefly mentioned in TAT's latest Executive Summary, presents significant potential. A brand's *Unique Selling Proposition (USP)*, is the aspect that explains why its products or services have more value than those of its competitors, demonstrating what sets them apart in the market (Forbes, 2022). In the vast sector of tourism, the choice for travelers is incredibly dense. Thus, it is crucial to differentiate oneself in order to be more attractive to the public. To echo Giannopoulos, Piha and Avlonitis (2011): *<<unless a country "stands for" something special and different, there is little chance that this country will be able to compete successfully for any of the precious attention>>.* It's clear that success in the tourist industry requires a distinctive image.

It is also relevant to take into consideration the desires of visitors: by meeting their needs and expectations, it is possible to attract the right market to the destination. It goes beyond just inspiring tourists with alluring photos or enticing catchphrases.

It resides in the essence of unquestionable value: how much more can the destination provide to the traveler that others cannot? What unique qualities make it a one-of-a-kind location in the world?

We will inspect later how Community-Based Tourism can become a key factor in the advancement of this goal - specifically, how CBT can become the UPS of Thailand's destination image in order to boost sustainable tourism in the country. This is the lens through which we can move to the next chapter, which analyzes sustainable tourism, Community-Based Tourism and the pivotal role of the two in shaping Thailand's destination image.

CHAPTER 2 | SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM (CBT)

2.1 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

As tourism keeps on growing exponentially, there is an urgent need to adapt practices that emphasize environmental and cultural conservation in the long run. This section presents the topic of sustainable tourism, analyzing the core of this type of tourism and its importance in minimizing the negative impacts of the industry. Moreover, we will analyze various types of sustainable tourism, understanding the main characteristics of each one. This section also explores the relationship between sustainable tourism and the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),* unfolding the real potential of tourism for the sake of sustainability.

2.1.1. Definition, fundamental principles, types of sustainable tourism and SDGs

In our globalized world, the tourism industry provides both opportunities and challenges. Its role in allowing the exchange between cultures and its ability to provide economic benefits surely have relevance as positive aspects. However, it is expected that the number of international tourist arrivals will reach 1.8 billion by

2030[19]. The high number of tourists will also contribute to the alarming need to develop sustainable tourism practices to control the negative impacts. Both the UNWTO and the UNDP observed that tourism has a double face: it surely brings many positive outcomes, but it does in fact have many negative effects. Mainly they refer to greenhouse gas emissions, economic leakages, resource management or negative impact on communities (Giampiccoli and Saayman, 2018), as well as overtourism, economic disparities and culture commodification.

It is then necessary for such an industry to implement a different approach, one that could enhance the positive effects and minimize negative impacts as much as possible. This is where sustainable tourism comes into play. The UN Environment Program and the UN World Tourism Organization define **'sustainable tourism'** as *<<tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities>>[20].* Essentially the term *"sustainable tourism"* describes actions — taken by and within the travel and tourism sector — that acknowledge and reduce the negative effects in favor of increasing favorable ones. A key factor is meeting the needs of the visitors while taking into account the limits of the industry; the consumerism that comes with tourism should not attack the destination nor its inhabitants. For tourism activities to be sustainable, they must have the least amount of negative impacts as possible, if none at all. For this purpose, it should preserve the natural environment, respect the social contexts and guarantee stable economic benefits in the long run[21]. The paradigm of sustainable tourism stands on the three pillars of social equity, economic growth and environmental conservation. Economy, equity and ecology are also often labeled as the *three 'E's of sustainability*. Moreover *<<a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term*

---

[19] UN Tourism. *Resource Efficiency in Tourism* (https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/resource-efficiency-in-tourism) Last accessed: 20th of February 2024

[20] GSTC. *What is Sustainable Tourism?* (https://www.gstcouncil.org/what-is-sustainable-tourism/#:~:text=Sustainable%20tourism%20is%20defined%20by,the%20environment%20and%20host%20communities.%E2%80%9D) Last accessed: 20th of February 2024

[21] UNWTO. *Sustainable development* (https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development) last accessed: 21st of February 2024

sustainability>>[22]. This means that to achieve sustainable development, all three pillars must be taken into account. By complying with the three dimensions, sustainable development can have positive effects in the long term. There cannot be sustainable tourism if one of the three is missing.

The three pillars of sustainability are briefly outlined below.

A) Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability should increase the monetary gain of the destination. The revenue that comes from the related tourism activities should be distributed locally and help improve the lives of the natives.

B) Social sustainability

Social sustainability or equity refers to the positive benefits of tourism on people, such as the generation of jobs and decent working conditions, quality of life improvement or community development. Moreover, the respect for local cultures and traditions also lies in the social sustainability pillar.

C) Environmental sustainability

Because of climate change and tourism's reputation as a polluting industry, the focus on environmental sustainability has always been a critical matter. This dimension refers to the conservation of natural resources and the minimization of waste. Tourism activities should minimize negative effects on the environment and foster ecological practices.

Sustainable tourism should also involve the collaborative participation of stakeholders for the sake of maintaining sustainable development in the long run. If all stakeholders actively participate in minimizing the impacts of tourism, the more likely that the process is a constant work in progress.

Observation n° 28 of the "I. The Global Challenge" section of the *Our Common Future* report also states as follows: *<<meeting essential needs requires not only a new era of economic growth [...] but an assurance that those poor get their fair share of the resources required to sustain that growth. Such equity would be aided by*

---

[22] UNWTO. *Sustainable development* (https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development) last accessed: 21st of February 2024

political systems that secure effective citizen participation in decision making and by greater democracy in international decision making>> (United Nations, 1987)*.* The report highlights how allowing the locals to engage in their own destination's tourism activities is a good sustainable practice. This, however, has to be followed through with the help of experts and policies that permit the development of tourism practices to have positive impacts (DASTA, 2019). This is why a participatory approach that involves a multitude of actors can enhance the chances of development. The paradigm of sustainable tourism then lies in the three dimensions as analyzed above, and in the ongoing collaboration between locals and other important tourism actors.

Continuing from this basis, we should briefly explore various types of sustainable tourism, each with its own unique characteristics but all with the same core.

Responsible tourism regards actions during tourism experiences that tourists apply in accordance with sustainable practices[23]. Partaking in sustainable tourism practices is the easiest way for tourists to travel responsibly.

A quite popular one is **ecotourism**, which is based on the ecological conservation of the environment and aims to educate visitors on the importance of responsible travel in nature (REVFINE, 2024)[24]. In 2015 *The International Ecotourism Society* defined it as *<<responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education>>* (TIES, 2015). Ecotourism prioritizes minimizing negative impacts on the environment and local communities while fostering awareness, respect and appreciation for nature and culture (TIES, 2015).

Adventure tourism seeks to give visitors a connection with nature through physical activities and immersive cultural experiences. Generally, it is centered

---

[23] GSTC. *What can you do to travel responsibly?* (https://www.gstcouncil.org/for-travelers/) Last accessed: 26th of February

[24] REVFINE (2024). *Sustainable Tourism Guide: What is, Why Important, Examples and More…* (https://www.revfine.com/sustainable-tourism/#ecotourism) Last accessed: 27th of February

around sports activities in nature and rural cultural practices like wellness activities or participatory culinary experiences[25].

Quite the opposite of the previous one is **slow tourism**. This type of sustainable tourism focuses on taking an extended period of time off to immerse oneself in nature and local culture. Other characteristics involve reducing one's carbon footprint by utilizing eco-friendly transportation, engaging in tourism experiences that enable a connection with local culture and taking the tourism experience as an escape route to daily life. This is usually why slow tourists tend to visit a destination for an extended period of time[26].

Homestays are an extension of sustainable tourism. This particular type is centered around accommodation, as visitors spend the night at a local facility and experience the lifestyles of the natives. They will not just be tourists, but guests who become part of the community for the time they spend there. The main aspect of homestays does not just involve around the accommodation, but also the cultural exchange between the tourists and the locals (Suansri, 2003). In addition, homestays permit a positive distribution of income to the hosts, contributing to their economic well-being[27].

Lastly, we will assess **Community-Based Tourism (CBT)**, which is a type of sustainable tourism that centers around the active involvement and participation of local communities in tourism development. We will further analyze the topic of Community-Based Tourism in section 2.2.1. but CBT could involve any of the types we briefly discussed above.

All of these types, despite only being briefly discussed, highlight the unique aspects of a sustainable tourism approach, aiming at fostering socio-economic development and ensuring environmental conservation. Moreover, they all tend to

---

[25] MEDUSA Project. *What is adventure tourism and why is it more sustainable?* (https://www.enicbcmed.eu/medusa-whats-adventure-tourism-and-why-it-more-sustainable) Last accessed: 3rd of March 2024

[26] Med Pearls (2023). *Slow Tourism, a sustainable and meaningful way to travel.* (https://www.enicbcmed.eu/med-pearls-article-slow-tourism-sustainable-and-meaningful-way-travel) Last accessed: 3rd of March 2024

[27] UNDP (2023). *Home Stay, Sustainable Tourism* (https://www.undp.org/acceleratorlabs/blog/home-stay-sustainable-tourism) Last accessed: 3rd of March 2024

minimize the negative impacts of tourism as they seek to be alternatives to mass tourism.

With tourism being one of the most important industries worldwide, covering approximately 10% of the world's GDP (UNWTO, 2017), its role in sustainability is vital. The direction of achievement for sustainable tourism is directed by the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and the **2030 Agenda**.

The *SDGs* consist of a list of 17 intentions [Figure 3], set by the United Nations Member States for *"The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"*. The 17 goals concern aspects of climate change, world hunger, economic development and social equity. The aim — set in 2015 by the UN members — was that of taking action and making progress towards a more sustainable world. In fact, the 169 objectives that make up the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are built upon the three pillars of sustainability, encompassing its economic, social and environmental dimensions (UNWTO, 2017).

In this context, tourism has a pivotal role in the achievement of these goals. Its importance as a global industry is well known and its contribution is then essential. Especially recognizing the contribution of sustainable tourism, this industry could strengthen the advance towards a better version of our world. Thus, by promoting sustainable tourism, destinations and tourism organizations can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. This will result in safeguarding the essence of sustainability and will create more benefits that can help overcome the negative impacts.

Currently in 2024, only six years before the conclusion of the 2030 Agenda, results show that there is still a lot to be done to achieve the sustainable goals created in 2015 (UN, 2023). In particular with tourism, the monitoring of sustainable practices is decreasing as more and more countries avoid supervising sustainable management — perhaps an accentuated consequence of the drastic changes brought by COVID-19 (UN, 2023). In Thailand for instance, poorly managed tourism has been shown to result in environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity, causing disparities in economic development (Rungchavalnont, 2022).

Actively directing sustainable projects and analyzing their outcomes is of incredible importance for the achievement of sustainable development. Thus, countries and destinations should embark on progressive sustainable monitoring of tourism products and services. This can be achieved only if there is a strong desire from all stakeholders to attain the challenges that arise with such operose responsibility[28].

2.2 COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emphasizes the active participation of the local community in the travel industry. Firstly, we will outline the main characteristics of this tourism model, in order to understand its sustainable core and its role in empowering local people in tourism management. Moreover, we will seek to understand how CBT aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Lastly, we will understand the context of CBT in Thailand, analyzing the *CBT Standard* by DASTA and its capacity to drive the country towards its goal of becoming a well-recognized sustainable destination.

2.2.1. Definition, principles and objectives of CBT

Because tourism is of vital importance to the economic growth of a country, the logical approach to it would be to have an up-down approach to get the most revenue out of it (Byrd, 2007 as cited in Phanumat, Sangsit, Mitrchob, Keasang and Noithammaraj, 2015). But the outcomes of this process are not really sustainable, as locals might not benefit from it. In fact, very frequently the economic gains from tourism end up to large tour operators and external investors, leaving local communities with minimal economic benefits and subject to various social and environmental challenges as well (Rungchavalnont, 2022). The impact of tourism can be then threatening to the survival of destinations. Referencing the 1980 Butler's *'Tourism Area Life Cycle'* (TALC) model, if the tourism industry pushes a destination to the point of decline, the negative impact on the host community will be severe. Generally speaking, the negative consequences of tourism can affect the

---

[28] UN. *The 17 Goals* (https://sdgs.un.org/goals). Last accessed: 13rd of March 2024

cultural, environmental, social or economic spheres. For instance, the natural resources might get destroyed or there might be damaging alterations to the original 'way of life' of the community (Suansri, 2003). This is why the process of **Community-Based Tourism (CBT)** is not a simple one, nor is it made for every destination or community that is interested in the matter.

So far Community-Based Tourism has been mentioned as a sustainable tourism practice, which is focused on the involvement of local communities in tourism activities; but what exactly is CBT? In 2019 DASTA provided the following definition: *<<community-based tourism is an alternative form of tourism which is managed creatively and at high standard by the community, creating learning process and leading to sustainability of the environment, local culture and good quality of life of the community>>* (DASTA, 2019). This definition shapes Community-Based Tourism as an approach that is very distant from that of mass tourism. It hints at the fact that Community-Based Tourism is characterized by a bottom-up approach, where the locals have direct control of the tourism activities and the management process. Moreover, it provides the planning of long-term tourism survival, by enhancing the conservation of both the environment and the local culture. In fact, CBT places a strong emphasis on maintaining the uniqueness of the local heritage, allowing locals to demonstrate the traditions and practices of their own community (Chatkaewnapanon and Lee, 2022). In summary, this definition provides a clear framework for understanding CBT as a tourism model. However, Community-Based Tourism also works as a community development tool, as it ensures the involvement of local communities in every aspect of tourism evolution: from planning, to developing, to managing the tourism experience [Figure 4].

Despite many of the communities being rural or economically weak (Boonratana, 2011), Community-Based Tourism should not be mistaken for 'village tourism' (Rungchavalnont, 2022). In fact, in Thailand CBT can take the shape of community markets, homestays, agrotourism, community-based tourism (CBT),

community-based ecotourism (CBET) and OTOP *(One Tambon One Product)*[29] villages (Boonratana, 2011). The focus is on the empowerment of the community as one of the main actors in tourism management. In this sense, tourism should not be considered a mere tool that a community can use to obtain economic benefits, instead, it should answer the question of *<<how can tourism contribute to the process of community development?>>* (Suansri, 2003). The tourism industry is known to boost economic growth and so one might think that the benefits are solely of monetary nature. However, if we plan for tourism to be sustainable we must take into consideration the social and environmental spheres – with Community-Based Tourism all three dimensions are covered. The perk of CBT is that the locals have direct access and power to all the tourism initiatives within their community, so they can manage the protection of the resources and their own well-being as well. In addition to being in control of the involvement and development of the community itself, they have power over the tourism experiences within it (Phanumat, Sangsit, Mitrchob, Keasang and Noithammaraj, 2015).

The main strategic path to follow in order to have sustainable CBT is by the means of a multi-stakeholder participatory approach. This particular process permits to take advantage of the expertise of a multitude of stakeholders, to obtain benefits for all, but especially for the host community (Phanumat, Sangsit, Mitrchob, Keasang and Noithammaraj, 2015). For instance, other stakeholders might help the community to understand the challenges they might face and how those issues can be fixed, or they could provide solutions and innovation-thinking to problems that emerged from the trial activities. Other examples of possible advantageous assistance that communities can obtain from the collaboration with stakeholders are: increasing promotion and popularity, understanding which sources attract visitors and providing prototypes of tourism routes. In this sense, we can acknowledge that CBT is *<<developed in tandem with the community rather than for the community and rarely solely by the community>>* (Alves de Abreu, da Conceição

---

[29] *One Tambon One Product* refers to a national policy that assign a particular product, food or handicraft to a particular sub-district (or *tambon*, in Thai ตำบล), in order to showcase the tradition of that particular area. (Nguyen, 2013).

Walkowski, Costa Perinotto and Fragoso da Fonseca, 2024). In this context, the role of an *intermediary agent* allows to connect the public and private sector and minimize those challenges that might arise from the CBT implementation system — especially considering that the main goal is to empower the community and its people in the managing process.

Byrd (2007) analyzed the benefits of a successful multi-stakeholder participatory approach, emphasizing not only economic benefits but also — and mainly — social ones. For instance, the author highlighted how this approach might enhance public awareness which can lead to the generation of innovative ideas and effective decision-making operations. Moreover, it can also reduce conflicts and strengthen trust among stakeholders, which can help cultivate shared responsibility (Byrd, 2007). However, there might be some issues in the fundamental multi-stakeholder participatory approach. That is to say that there are challenges that limit the effectiveness of the process. Tosun (2000) considered three main barriers: *the limits at operational level* (lack of coordination among stakeholders), *structural limitations* (lack of skills and high costs of implementation) and *cultural limitations* (limited skills, social hierarchies etc.). In Thailand, the role of DASTA is exactly that of reducing all of the problems arising in the pursuit of Community-Based Tourism. To be exact, DASTA tackles the participatory approach by being the *intermediary agent* [Figure 5] and managing two main groups: the national 'experts' group and the host community group (Phanumat, Sangsit, Mitrchob, Keasang and Noithammaraj, 2015).

Surely, CBT is about the self-governance of the community. However, the multi-stakeholder collaboration actually permits the community to self-manage itself. Different groups give the community knowledge on what needs to be improved or how they can sustainably uplift their livelihood. Thus, we can discuss that the tourism ecosystem approach gives added value to Community-Based Tourism, permitting sustainable development to turn into something legitimate.

2.2.2. Correlation with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The observation made by UNWTO is that tourism has an important role in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, which aims at reducing poverty, defeating inequalities and battling climate change[30]. When it comes to Community-Based Tourism, this has both direct and indirect effects on the SDGs, as it touches a multitude of matters. Yet, for the purpose of this analysis, we can discuss some of the main targeted SDGs, which are [Figure 6]:

- SDG n°8 *"DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH";*
- SDG n°10 *"REDUCED INEQUALITIES";*
- SDG n°12 *"RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION";*
- SDG n°13 *"CLIMATE ACTION";*
- SDG n°17 *"PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS".*

SDG n°8 "DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH"

The aim of SDG n°8 is *<<to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all>>* (UN, 2020a)*.* Tourism is known to be a key driver of economic development (UNWTO, 2023) and so its role is beneficial in the creation of jobs and the establishment of appropriate working conditions. The generation of fair job opportunities provides positive socio-economic benefits, particularly to vulnerable groups like women and young people[31]. This objective is further met by Community-Based Tourism, since it may help those communities who do not have easy access to the tourist sector and enhance the chances of the generation of revenue and jobs. Moreover, CBT further strengthens local economies through responsible tourism practices, which can have a wide range of positive impacts on a destination despite financial improvement.

---

[30] UNWTO. *Tourism in the 2030 Agenda* (https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda) Last accessed: 15th of March 2024

[31] UNWTO. *Tourism in the 2030 Agenda* (https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda) Last accessed: 15th of March 2024

SDG n°10 "REDUCED INEQUALITIES"

This objective's intention is *<<to reduce inequalities within and among countries>>* (UN, 2020b)*. Considering that tourism serves as a strengthening tool for local economies, its role in boosting local growth and lessening inequality is very important. It is then considered as a significant player in the development system. For instance, tourism allows people to improve their hometowns and gives them the opportunity to profit from the industry[32]. The co-creation of tourism products and services in Community-Based Tourism proves this point as the voice of the locals is acknowledged in the production process. Moreover, the development of CBT would boost community development and reduce the possibilities for youth groups to move to bigger cities by involving them in managing tourism in their own community.

SDG n°12 "RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION"

The goal is *<<to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns>>* (UN, 2020c)*. For tourism to be a sustainable industry, it must adapt its operations to sustainable models[33]. The shift towards sustainability can happen if both the production and the consumption of tourism have positive social, cultural and environmental effects on a destination. By promoting the creation of sustainable products and services, Community-Based Tourism helps communities become more sustainable and guarantees the preservation of the local way of life. Moreover, it creates more awareness of environmental preservation among both locals and tourists, encouraging sustainable management and responsible consumption.

SDG n°13 "CLIMATE ACTION"

<<Taking urgent action to tackle climate change and its impacts>> (UN, 2020d) is the target of this objective. Tourism has an impact on climate change as it is a very consuming industry. Yet, the effects of climate change are also affecting the

---

[32] UNWTO. *Tourism in the 2030 Agenda* (https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda) Last accessed: 15th of March 2024

[33] UNWTO. *Tourism in the 2030 Agenda* (https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda) Last accessed: 15th of March 2024

industry in return, with temperatures incrementing and sea-level rising. Small improvements in tourism can make a difference: for instance, the implementation of eco-friendly transport can help reduce pollution[34]. The aims of Community-Based Tourism are organizing tours that have a low carbon footprint, opting for public transportation and walking, considering environmentally friendly practices and minimizing single-use plastic waste.

SDG n°17 "PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS"

The purpose of goal n° 17 is *<<to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development>>* (UN, 2020e)*.* To achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda collaboration is essential. The objective of sustainable development should engage both the private and public sectors, as successfully accomplishing the SDGs means to manage to acquire global common goals. The aim of CBT in Thailand is to build a network of partnerships to be part of a greater change (DASTA, 2019). Through collaboration between communities, the government, local authorities and the public sector, the achievement of collective action towards sustainable development is more accessible.

It appears then that the three pillars of sustainable tourism are satisfied. Environmental conservation qualifies under the safeguarding of nature and biodiversity. The social equity pillar is fulfilled by preserving the local heritage and by allowing the local community to be in charge. Lastly, economic growth is compensated by allowing and maintaining tourism revenue within the community.

2.2.3. Contextualization of the concept in Thailand: identification of a CBT Standard

The term "Community-Based Tourism" (CBT) was used for the first time in Thailand in 1994 in relation to the *Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project* (REST) (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013). It gained attraction as tourists began to seek authentic experiences that could bring them closer to the local lifestyles of the

---

[34] UNWTO. *Tourism in the 2030 Agenda* (https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda) Last accessed: 15th of March 2024

destinations they visited. REST's work showed that local communities could actively participate in tourism development and that tourism could operate as a catalyst for community development[35]. That is how the CBT initiatives began, involving communities in the tourism sector. Nowadays, the implementation of Community-Based Tourism in Thailand is taken care of by DASTA, which operates across nine so-called '*Designated Areas'* [Figure 7]:

- *i) Chiang Rai* and *ii) Nan Old Town* up in the north;
- *iii) Bang Ka Chao* known as 'the green lung of Bangkok', in the center;
- *iv) Loei* in the north-east;
- *v) Sukhothai, Si Satchanalai and Kamphaeng Phet historical parks*, overlapping with the homonymous world heritage site;
- *vi) U-Thong ancient city and vicinity areas* in the west;
- *vii) Pattaya city and vicinity areas* and *viii) Koh Chang Archipelago and vicinity areas*, in the east;
- *ix) Songkhla Lagoon* in the south.

These areas showcase the wide range of landscapes and cultural heritage of Thailand. From north to south, all 'Designated Areas' can offer sustainable routes and an open door to discover Thai culture authentically.

As we have previously stated, Community-Based Tourism focuses on the sustainable activity of involving the local community in the management process of tourism development. Yet, for this to be effective in the long run, there was the need to implement a standard to be used as a mechanism of performance evaluation.

The idea of a **Community-Based Tourism Standard** in Thailand was born around 2006. A partnership between the EU and the Royal Thai Fisheries Department gave birth to the **CHARM-REST project**, whose name originates from the projects it embarks, accordingly the *Coastal Habitats and Resources Management Project* (CHARM) and the *Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project* (REST). This resulted

---

[35] Destination Mekong (2020). First Mekong Hero announced at Destination Mekong Summit (https://www.destinationmekong.com/tag/thailand-community-based-tourism-institute-cbt-i/)
Last accessed: 18th of March 2024

in the creation of a set of attitudes that helped communities to self-monitor and self-evaluate themselves, according to a series of CBT objectives based on the SDGs. The process took care of the tourism monitoring of *Ban Don* and *Phang Nga Bay* areas, in the south of Thailand (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013).

In 2009 the standard was improved under the *Corporate Social Responsibility* and *Market Access Partnerships Project for Sustainable Tourism Supply Chains*, naming it the **CSR-MAP project**. The goal of this project was to assess the demand for sustainable tourism in Thailand, in order to efficiently enhance products and services, including newer routes that would incorporate eco-tour operators, Community-Based Tourism (CBT), green hotels and restaurants, all guided by trained eco-tour guides. The added value of this further development was the inclusion of a participatory process, consisting of workshops where the guests crafted ideas on newer CBT objectives (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013). In 2011 a collaborative effort between the *Community-Based Tourism Institute* (CBT-I), *Thai Eco Tourism and Adventure Travel Association* (TEATA), *Green Leaf Foundation* and the *European Center for Eco and Agro Tourism* (ECEAT) resulted in a study on Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) as part of the CSR-MAP Project. The plan focused on developing criteria for Community-Based Tourism with an emphasis on enhancing the quality of the CBT experiences (DASTA, 2019). It was in 2012 that DASTA took charge of the establishment of a **CBT Standard**, by using the initial CRS-MAP project as a framework. After modifying and updating the draft, this standard was first experimented to scheme the development of only 13 destinations where DASTA operated. DASTA collaborated with various partners to establish a *CBT Destination Certifying Working Party.* This group (composed of representatives from government, private enterprises, civic organizations and scholars) worked together to enhance and adapt criteria specifically tailored to the CBT context in Thailand, aiming to promote improvement and development within the Community-Based Tourism sector. It was one year later, in 2013, that the *Working Party* was able to create the first Thai CBT criteria. DASTA once again put the CBT Standard to the test: this involved initiating a process for self-evaluation within each community, utilizing the evaluation results to arrange potential supporting plans tailored to the needs of each community. In the end, the *Working*

Party oversaw and evaluated the outcomes of this development initiative and in 2015 it revised the criteria based on the feedback obtained from the communities themselves. In particular, the upgrades also reconsidered the transparency of sustainable developmental matters.

In 2018 the so-called **'Criteria for Thailand's Community-Based Tourism Development'** (or *CBT Thailand*. From this moment forward referred to as '*CBT Standard*') produced by DASTA, obtained the *'GSTC-Recognized Standard'* status – the first in the world to obtain the certification. This means that the standard has been deemed to align with the GSTC criteria for sustainable tourism after undergoing thorough evaluation by GSTC experts. The GSTC recognition certifies that the CBT Standard comprises the critical aspects required to ensure sustainability (GSTC, 2018). Constant evaluation of the CBT practices is very important, thus nowadays the CBT Standard is constantly revised and updated every two years. It is used to evaluate the achievements of all the communities in the nine Designated Areas of DASTA (DASTA, 2019). It is deemed as an essential tool for constant monitoring to implement plans and operations for the growth of individual communities, but also for the development of Community-Based Tourism in Thailand overall (GSTC, 2018).

DASTA has established a set of criteria in order to evaluate the development of Community-Based Tourism according to five main aspects and their respective sub-criteria, involving a total of twenty-eight aims. The five main criteria of the CBT Standard involve (DASTA, 2019):
1. CBT sustainable administration and management (9 sub-criteria)
2. Good economic, social and quality of life management (4 sub-criteria)
3. Conservation and promotion of community cultural heritage (3 sub-criteria)
4. Systematic and sustainable natural resources or environmental management (5 sub-criteria)
5. Quality of community-based tourism services (8 sub-criteria)

Therefore, to sum up, this standard addresses sustainable management practices, local economic development, enhancement of quality of life, preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of sustainable environmental management (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013).

To understand if one of the main criteria is satisfied, there is an analysis measurement of the sub-criteria. The process of evaluation of the sub-criteria consists of assessing specific "evaluation issues" or aims, to determine whether a bunch of minor matters are met or not. Each issue/aim is evaluated individually: if the matter is satisfactory it will be assigned a positive indication (✔ symbol). These scores will then be summed up and given a score from 0 to 4 based on how many of them obtain a ✔ symbol [Figure 8].

These scores are then totaled for each sub-criteria to generate a "raw score", that will then be put in a summarizing sheet. The "raw score" is calculated based on the sum of all of the scores from each sub-criteria's aims (0 to 4) that will then be divided by the number of aims themselves. For instance, if a sub-criteria has three aims, each scoring 4, the "raw score" will be (*4 + 4 + 4) / 3.*

If the "raw score" has a level between 3.01 and 4, it means that the level is classified as "excellent". Scores ranging from 2.01 to 3 are deemed "good". Those falling between 1.01 and 2 are regarded as "satisfactory", while scores ranging from 0.00 to 1 indicate that improvement is needed. These classifications offer a qualitative assessment of performance, providing insight into the level of achievement of the aims.

The collection of all of these "raw scores" will add up to form a final number ("total number") that will then be divided by the number of sub-criteria within a main criteria. For instance, the main criteria number one (*'CBT sustainable administration and management'*) has nine sub-criteria. So the total of "raw scores" for this criteria will then be divided by nine [Figure 9].

To summarize, each sub-aim is deeply analyzed and given a score based on how many matters it satisfies. Then an arithmetic average will be calculated on such numbers to form a "raw score". The addition of all of the "raw scores" will add up to

form a total, which is the total number of points of the main criteria. This final number will then be divided by the number of sub-criteria that each main criterion has. This process permits us to understand the performance of Community-Based Tourism practices within a specific community. From such evaluations, it is possible to further analyze which aspects from which criteria the community still has not met, so it will be clearer on which aspect DASTA and all of the stakeholders – including the community group – should work on. The goal is to obtain a development plan based on the rating of the CBT practices. The concept of an evaluation standard, if successfully analyzed and applied, permits us to understand where communities have their flaws, what their strengths and weaknesses are and lastly, it helps identify how sustainable the products and services really are.

The idea of a one-size fits all evaluation-approach might seem as if there are a bunch of established directives that the community has to implement in order to be successful. However, the CBT Standard does not revolve around that. A set of criteria is analyzed – for the community above all stakeholders – to be aware of which aspects need to be improved and which opportunities could be taken advantage of. The impacts of tourism, whether positive or negative, can be managed by the community if they have the knowledge and resources to monitor them (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013). In essence, the existence of an evaluation tool permits the community to monitor its own achievements, manage its tourism initiatives in the long term and obtain access to newer markets (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013). It allows the community to utilize the standard as a guidance tool to comprehend its own sustainable development.

Lastly, the CBT Standard does not just benefit the community, but all stakeholders involved in the participatory process. As they get clear evidence of the development, they can learn which are the strengths and weaknesses of the community. This way, it would be much easier to help address the improvements to be made and how they can help the community succeed. But the benefits do not stop there. For instance, tour operators interested in targeting high-value markets could rely on the CBT Standard for the quality of the products and the safety of the visitors. Moreover, they will have more trust in a community that self-evaluates

itself, as the assessment of the criteria is based on collected evidence. Plus, it will be more likely that the community will be able to solve any issue that arises responsibly due to the strategic plans it created for its own sustainable development.

The local government benefits from the standard because enhanced community capacity alleviates financial pressure on the government. Moreover, community involvement contributes to the government's responsibilities in managing the environment and preserving sustainability. Additionally, as communities gain recognition for sustainable tourism practices, this positively reflects on the government as well.

Lastly, tourists gain benefits as the CBT Standard tackles the issue regarding the greenwashing of tourism in certain communities. So, they will be able to understand whether tourism products and services in a community are sold as fake CBT or not, especially if they are independent travelers. This would prove that the products they purchase ensure sustainable tourism, quality of services and recognized support to local communities.

2.3 LEVERAGING CBT TO ACHIEVE TAT'S EXECUTIVE SUMMARY'S OBJECTIVE

As previously analyzed in Chapter One, TAT is seeking to achieve numerous objectives for the future of Thailand, most of which concern creating a sustainable future for the country and increasing its competitiveness. In *TAT's Executive Summary 2023-2027*, the topic of CBT was barely mentioned, yet this topic has high potential. Firstly, we will seek to understand how CBT can become the answer to what modern tourists look for in the post-COVID19 era. Then, gaining knowledge on everything we analyzed so far, we will delve into understanding how Community-Based Tourism can leverage the sustainable development of Thailand and underscore its value-based tourism goals.

2.3.1. CBT as a response to the needs of modern tourists

Identifying the newer market demand in the post-COVID19 era is essential to gain a competitive advantage. The pandemic initiated a movement of nature-seeking like never before, and so has changed consumer tourist demand patterns and intentions, highlighting the need for sustainability and wellbeing (Gurunathan and Lakshmi, 2023). One key aspect that has emerged in the past few years, is the increasing interest in travel experiences that will enrich visitors both mentally and physically. Modern-day tourists are now more and more interested in travel experiences that will bring them amidst nature and in more meaningful environments.

Community-Based Tourism could emerge as a model that can help address the needs of modern-day travelers. CBT crafts tourism experiences that sell the community itself as a 'product'. This approach identifies all the traditions and interactions with the 'local way of life' as experience-based products. The services provided have an authentic allure tied to them and so the immersive experiences of the tourists connect them with the locals in a very unique style, because in a way, locals as well *<<are "embedded" and are part of tourism products>>* (Thananusak and Suriyankietkaew, 2023). By offering authentic experiences to lesser-known destinations — often in the middle of nature or rural areas — CBT provides authentic opportunities that connect visitors with local communities, meeting the demand for meaningful travel experiences. We can then understand Community-Based Tourism as a tourism model that seeks to provide genuine and immersive experiences for visitors, while also fostering cultural interaction, environmental protection and socio-economic development. Identifying how the CBT model can precisely align with this demand could boost Thailand's competitiveness in the post-COVID19 era.

For instance, research by the *Centre for The Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries* showed that modern tourists coming from the West are inclined to travel to secondary destinations and are especially interested in Community-Based Tourism (TAT, 2021). Moreover, in the 2023-2027 Executive Summary, The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) analyzed that present-day tourists — especially from

the West — are inclining towards the FIT (Fully Independent Traveler) trend (TAT, 2021). This newer demand suggests that tourists prefer to independently travel around and create personalized experiences. For Thailand, this could be a great opportunity to strengthen the marketing for Community-Based Tourism. The Tourism Authority of Thailand — with the integration of DASTA — could design a plan that focuses on attracting this type of visitor to the numerous communities in Thailand that implemented CBT.

They could also organize a *CBT Net* that connects all destinations that adopt a Community-Based Tourism approach[36]. This way the offer would have a stronger base and it would also allow international independent travelers (FIT) to discover more and understand the concept of CBT as more than 'community travel'. This project could include developing better marketing strategies that will point out the sustainable practices of Community-Based Tourism, as well as emphasizing the unique experiences that visitors could have. This could be done by promoting digital platforms to reach both domestic and international visitors, improving storytelling advertisements that showcase the experience-based opportunity of CBT, and interactively engaging with audiences. Moreover, it could also bring out the opportunity to enhance partnerships with various stakeholders and support an ecosystem approach. Obviously, the plan should take into consideration capacity-building initiatives and regulatory frameworks to limit negative impacts.

By seizing the opportunity of growing interest in sustainable tourism, TAT and DASTA could work together to position Thailand as an attractive destination to those tourists who seek meaningful travel experiences. In the end, the contribution will not just satisfy the travel industry but it will sustain the communities and their socio-economic development.

---

[36] We will discuss the topic of the CBT Net in Chapter Four.

2.3.2. Analysis of the economic, social and environmental benefits of CBT in Thailand, in relation to the goals set by *TAT's Executive Summary 2023-2027*

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) plans to recover in 2024, by prioritizing reaching pre-covid revenue numbers instead of pre-covid number of arrivals. It plans to do so by attracting visitors interested in high-value and sustainable tourism[37]. Even TAT's past Governor, *Yuthasak Supasorn*, stated that *<<to build a new ecosystem, we need to become less reliant on the number of tourists and focus more on increasing tourist spending, attracting quality tourists [...]>>*[38].

In order to achieve the goals listed in the Tourism Authority of Thailand's *Executive Summary 2023-2027*, Community-Based Tourism might be extremely important. The essence of Community-Based Tourism lies in prioritizing the local community in the administration of its tourism resources, as well as acknowledging the impacts of the travel industry by providing sustainable solutions.

CBT in Thailand can contribute to the economic, social and environmental goals established by TAT. Economically, Community-Based permits the generation of jobs and the production of income for local people. This aligns with the Tourism Authority of Thailand's goals of increasing the high-value market and fostering sustainable economic growth of secondary cities. In addition, the creation of the CBT Standard by DASTA reduces the burden of financial pressure on the government as communities gain more knowledge of self-governance. Socially, Community-Based Tourism can have many positive impacts on the destination. An effective implementation of CBT empowers local people and contributes to life's quality, enhancing the pride of the community as well. In addition, it permits a respectful cultural exchange between hosts and locals, ensuring that the local culture and traditions remain unaltered. Furthermore, CBT also highlights the opportunity to involve numerous types of groups in the creation of tourism-related

---

[37] Bangkok Post (2023). *Green tourism on the rise*. Bangkok Post (https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/2662108/green-tourism-on-the-rise) Last accessed: 20th of March 2024

[38] ZAWYA (2023). *Thailand to focus on high-value, sustainable tourism.* (https://www.zawya.com/en/business/travel-and-tourism/thailand-to-focus-on-high-value-sustainable-tourism-y2toyub4) Last accessed: 20th of March 2024

projects, allowing them to contribute with innovative ideas in a hierarchical society like that of Thailand (especially for women and younger people). The social advantages of Community-Based Tourism correspond to the Tourism Authority of Thailand's goals of boosting high-value tourism that seeks to improve the quality of the sector and enhance the positive impacts of the industry.

Lastly, environmentally, Community-Based Tourism promotes the environmental preservation of the natural resources of the communities and supports sustainable resource management. For instance, waste management and energy conservation are important criteria that must be tackled in the CBT Standard, aligning with TAT's goals of environmental protection.

Thus, strategically, Community-Based Tourism can help with the objective of gaining the reputation of a sustainable and responsible tourism destination that TAT plans to achieve by the end of 2027. As previously analyzed in Chapter One section 1.3.1., TAT's strategic objectives for the 2023-2037 period are (TAT, 2021):

1. *Drive demand: pursue value-based tourism for sustainability*
2. *Shape supply: creating unique destination proposition and elevate industry standard*
3. *Thrive for excellence: develop TAT to become a High-Performance Organization*

Community-Based Tourism directly targets the first two goals. First of all, as for the strategic objective n° 1 *"Drive demand: pursue value-based tourism for sustainability"* the focus is on working on Thailand's destination image as a sustainable tourism hub. The further step is that of switching from a mass market industry to an alternative tourism approach (TAT, 2021): CBT succeeds in encouraging a responsible attitude towards travel practices. Moreover, the implementation of the CBT Standard, established by DASTA, can help foster trust among tour operators and tourists, establishing more confidence in the community with a satisfactory level of success. This way, it would be possible to target high-value markets and guarantee them a great level of safety, hygiene and appropriate sustainable involvement (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013).

Community-Based Tourism could also become a key actor for TAT's strategic objective n° 2 *"Shape supply: creating unique destination proposition and elevate industry standard",* as it stimulates the creation of an ecosystem mindset in order to be successful. Moreover, the creation of further experience-based products and services permits major uniqueness that can lead to tourists' satisfaction (TAT, 2021). In addition, a smart use of technology in both the management of CBT and its promotion to the public can enhance the innovative boost that could transform CBT as the unique selling proposition of Thailand to become a sustainable destination.

As we analyzed in section 2.1.1., sustainable tourism focuses on the three pillars of economic, equity and environmental conservation. Yet, it was also considered how the engagement of local people is crucial for the development of a destination, and for the impacts it will have on the long term. Community-Based Tourism considers this aspect. We could then consider CBT as an added value to sustainable tourism, as it empowers the locals in successfully achieving their sustainable development goals. Therefore, *empowerment* becomes an added sphere of sustainability that is accentuated by Community-Based Tourism. Based on everything analyzed so far, developing a sustainable tourism offer that involves Community-Based Tourism would be an effective approach to the accomplishment of TAT's goals. Articulating a tourism strategy that incorporates Community-Based Tourism could boost Thailand's destination image and its reputation on the market. This is because the Tourism Authority of Thailand mentioned many times how integrating sustainable tourism is the key to attracting the right market of visitors. Hence why, shaping the 'projected image' of Thailand towards an established offer like that of CBT could actually permit TAT to achieve its goals. By assessing the positive impacts of Community-Based Tourism, Thailand could strategically advertise its branding and enhance its image as that of a real sustainable destination. By an even stronger position, the CBT Standard produced by DASTA functions as evidence of the real sustainable spirit of the country. Emphasizing this aspect, could create a more meaningful identity of Thailand and so engage with a secure approach towards high-value markets. Those segments might perceive the destination as a proper

sustainable one, where they could find authentic experiences and a safe environment.

This strategic vision not only takes into consideration newer visitors but can also build upon the relationships with travelers that already visited the country. As mentioned in Chapter One, Thailand has a very high loyalty index and most of its visitors are in fact re-visitors (TAT, 2021). On this basis, incorporating Community-Based Tourism and proposing it to re-visitors might enhance the chances of deepening the relationship between them and the destination. Curating an offer that focuses on meaningful human connections could guarantee a competitive position in the market. With this kind of tourists pushing on regional branding could also work, as they are more familiar with the main brand already.

Thus, expanding the 'projected image' of Thailand — and so, its brand — to CBT initiatives could enhance the chances of the 'perceived image' to resonate with similar sustainable values. In this sense, Community-Based Tourism could become the vehicle to align the 'project image' to the 'perceived' one, and potentially transform Thailand into the sustainable tourism hub that TAT so wants to achieve.

The potential steps to take involve expanding the 'projected image' of Thailand by including Community-Based Tourism to create more meaningful relationships with visitors (especially re-visitors) and, as a consequence, increase the destination's competitiveness. In addition, embracing CBT as Thailand's unique selling proposition will boost the positive effects in the long run, as CBT ensures positive benefits to both the environment and the local communities.

CHAPTER 3 | THAI SOFT POWER AND ITS MARKETING

3.1 THAINESS AND THE POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF CBT TO THAILAND'S SOFT POWER

In the tourism context, influences can have the power to direct the target market in their customer journey, including the decision-making stage. In this sense, media and promotion are the basis of the influence process, as these are essential tools to persuade visitors to travel to a certain destination. However, a further way to increment this aspect is by focusing on the soft power of a destination – generally a whole country.

This section aims at understanding what soft power is, what are the main aspects that make it relevant and how it can be useful in the tourism industry. Moreover, we will explore Thainess and its role as a soft power leverage to build Thailand's identity and its role in tourism marketing. Lastly, we will analyze how Community-Based Tourism can encapsulate Thainess and appeal to international visitors as a sustainable tourism experience and serve as a vehicle for extending Thai influence in a sustainable way. This will allow us to understand in what way CBT can become a further extension of Thai soft power.

3.1.1. What is soft power?

The term '**soft power**' was first used by Joseph Nye in the 1990s to describe the influence of the United States of America in the post-Cold War era. It refers to a type of power that is distant from the authoritative and more intense military power. It does not impose itself, nor demand anything: it is simply 'softer'.

Nye (2004) expressed it as *<<the ability to shape the preferences of others>>*, generally through diplomacy and attractiveness. So unlike military power, soft power does not refer to a direct command, but instead more to an indirect offer. It transcends more than just an influencing role, it becomes *<<attracting power>>* (Nye, 2004), which implies that it can embody a persuasive approach. This means that the people influenced by it do not feel compelled to do exactly what it stands for, but are instead persuaded by it when they make a decision. It does not mean that an influence will generate a specific outcome, yet the consequences could create positive results nonetheless.

The key elements of soft power take shape in the culture, values, political ideas and policies of a nation (Casado Claro, Saacedra-Serrano and Huguet, 2023). According to Nye (2004), these elements work together to create the destination's attractiveness, enhancing the persuasive power. Among these aspects, culture specifically takes an important role in shaping soft power. Particularly because culture has the most attractive power among these components, transforming cultural attributes into a tempting force. Cultural resources can create an image based on both 'high culture' (such as literature, art, and education) and 'popular culture' (usually based on entertainment) – thus, culture is a tool that can persuade a wide range of the public (Nye, 2004). This suggests that culture is a strategic vehicle through which it is possible to influence people, their preferences and their actions. Thus, to a certain extent, soft power is then something that goes beyond the power of a government. It is out of policy control, yet subtly shaping the environment of a country's economy. But it might be possible, that a government plays the role of shaping and amplifying their soft power, through discovering and communicating it from a different perspective. For instance, a great example of soft power transmission through pop culture is South Korea. The Korean entertainment industry has grown exponentially in the last decade, allowing pop culture to attract global audiences (Valieva, 2018), which nonetheless influenced its tourism industry.

According to Ooi (2015), *<<soft power, exemplified through tourism, is most effective when it is insidious>>*. He digs deeper into this notion, presenting four main

scenarios to make sense of how soft power operates in the realm of tourism. Firstly, he suggests that when tourists visit a destination, they will very likely develop a sense of familiarity with it. Visiting and discovering from a first-person perspective will touch their emotional sphere, building a closer relationship between themselves and the destination. Soft power in this case works as an influencing force that leads visitors to repeated visits and a deeper connection to the areas, culture and identity of the destination.

The second point he makes refers to the role of tourism authorities in creating an effective destination image and branding. He emphasizes that in the competitive market of tourism, a powerful destination brand is the solution to let the soft power of the destination shine. A well-planned destination image should make it stand out among others, making it a desirable destination to potential visitors. Thus, it should attract and project soft power in a charming way. In addition, an effective image and brand will further captivate the re-visitors and their perception, deepening the relationship with them.

The author concludes by discussing two more points. First, the significance of hosting mega-events like cultural festivals or sports tournaments, which draw geopolitical attention and large numbers of visitors. Second, the influence of cross-cultural exchanges on tourists' behavior, highlights the inevitable expectations placed on visitors in our globalized world.

Therefore, using Ooi's analysis, for the purpose of our analysis soft power may be understood as a persuasive force resulting from increased closeness between the destination and its visitors, as well as from a carefully planned destination image that effectively draws travelers to visit multiple times.

Since tourism is a tool of soft power in and of itself (Casado Claro, Saacedra-Serrano and Huguet, 2023), soft power has a direct impact on the travel and tourism sector. Marketing is a common tool used in the tourism industry to convey soft power. Therefore, it is very important to influence tourists throughout their customer journey, particularly during their decision-making stage.

In Chapter One we analyzed the concept of destination image and destination branding. In this case, destination branding and destination image can serve as

means to demonstrate and show soft power. The attractiveness of the destination is directly influenced by its 'projected image', which is planned by the local Destination Management Organization. Thus, the strategy plan to attract visitors must include the promotion of the destination identity. According to Ozkan and Boylu (2021), a well-planned image that draws visitors and establishes the destination's identity is a reflection of the impact of soft power. This effect can also be attained by marketing strategies and slogans.

Moreover, if tourists' perceptions of the destination identity — which is shaped in large part by cultural assets — align with that shared by the local tourism organization, then the brand image may be favorably remembered. Therefore, leveraging cultural influence can affect travelers' decision-making process. Focusing on cultural resources and strategically promoting them to tourists may enhance the attractive perception of the destination's culture as a whole.

For example, Thailand's cultural influence reflects the history and heritage of the nation, embracing both *high* and *popular* culture. In Thailand, soft power is sometimes referred to as the *"Five Fs"* allegedly composed of food, film, festival, fight and fashion. *Food* refers to Thailand's distinctive and appreciated cuisine; *Film* illustrates the rise in popularity of innovative Thai cinema[39]; *Festival* concerns traditional cultural festivals that have gained media attention in recent times (such as *Loy Krathong Festival* or the Thai New Year celebrations known as *Songkran,* which entered UNESCO's *Representative List* in 2023[40] and officially became an *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*); *Fight* conveys the concept of *Muay Thai*, Thailand's national sport; and finally *Fashion* highlights the importance of Thai silk and textiles as part of Thailand historical heritage. These elements of so-called 'Thai culture' are thought to have a significant impact on how Thailand is portrayed as a destination, serving to attract potential visitors to the country.

As a matter of fact, in order to strengthen Thailand's identity and increase high-value tourism, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) deliberately

---

[39] The Nation (2024).*Thai cinema's soft power surge: Laughter, scares, and global influence* (https://www.nationthailand.com/life/entertainment/40036782) Last accessed: 10th of April 2024

[40] UNESCO (2023). *Songkran in Thailand, traditional Thai New Year festival* (https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/songkran-in-thailand-traditional-thai-new-year-festival-01719) Last accessed: 10th of April 2024

highlighted aspects of the country's soft power (the *Five Fs*) in its campaign *"Visit Thailand Year 2023: Amazing New Chapters"* [41]. These elements contribute to the creation of the destination's identity to project a clearer idea in the visitors' minds; an idea that is made up of elements that are representative of (generic) Thailand culture.

In addition, in today's globalized world, contemporary mediums such as digital marketing and media distribution channels, can help transmit soft power to inspire visits to the destination. Travelers' behaviour can be influenced by the narratives presented by tourism organizations. Communication is central to brand management, thus brand stories must be effective to convey a business' mission, values and identity (Campos and Almeida, 2022). Because of this, **storytelling** becomes a strategic tool to establish a unique identity. Furthermore, the distribution of culture in the 21st century highlights the influencing role of storytelling — particularly in the context of tourism, where linking visitors to distant sites is entirely digital. By leveraging storytelling, a destination can look for ways to differentiate itself and become more competitive and thus motivating visitors to travel to a specific destination. In fact, according to Touhino (2002), a tourist's mental image of a location influences their decision to purchase a vacation there (Tuohino, 2002 as referenced in Henkel, Henkel, Argusa, Argusa and Tanner, 2006). As a very persuasive force, soft power influences the customer journey. Therefore, travelers may be swayed by intangible factors while choosing a destination over another, such as the culture itself or the reputation of the destination. Thus, what a destination stands for becomes another way of how it can be perceived. A narrative approach on soft power assets becomes the mechanism to influence the perception that travelers have of said destination. The soft power dynamics shape the perceived image, cultural representations, emotional connections and brand identity.

---

[41] ZeeZest.com (2023). *Visit Thailand 2023: A Campaign Boosting High Value And Sustainable Tourism* (https://zeezest.com/travel/visit-thailand-2023-a-campaign-boosting-high-value-and-sustainable-tourism-3185) Last accessed: 11th of April 2024

If the focal point of the storytelling turns to a sustainable vision, visitors may desire to experience the responsible tourism practices represented by the marketing campaigns. If the values embodied by the destination switch, so does the projected image. Going deeper and local, allows us to embrace and grow soft power at different degrees, whether regional, at city-level or community-level. For example, this could be done by offering visitors a specific and unique narrative of a smaller destination, while at the same time suggesting analogous values from a broader perspective. Local culture, local food and the local way of life become interesting snippets of a whole destination, elevating them as appealing experiences to live. In essence, soft power provides a sense of identity to a general destination, and takes the potential travelers into a journey of discovering smaller destinations within the main one. We will dig deeper into this concept in the next section.

3.1.2. Thainess: from national cultural identity to tourism marketing

Thainess is composed of *'Thai-'* plus *'-ness'.* The first indicates a close relationship to the Thai ethnicity, while the latter refers to a condition or a state of being. By this means, *Thainess* is about the status of being something related to Thais.

Thainess (or in Thai *kwampenthai* ความเป็นไทย, literally *'being Thai'*) embodies a wide range of dimensions. Jocuns (2020) explored the concept of Thainess in relation to five different themes: (1) national identity, (2) sense of otherness, (3) *Thai-fication*, (4) popular culture and (5) commodification.

Historically, Thainess was constructed as a form of nationalism (1), defining what Thailand's identity is supposed to embrace. The term originated as the national identity during King Rama IV's reign and evolved throughout successive reigns, particularly under those of King Rama V and VI, where it became utterly linked to nationhood, religion and monarchy (Jocuns, 2020). This sense of Thainess comes closer to a stronger power, rather than a softer form.

The sense of otherness (2) comes into play as a consequence of the concept's historical background. In fact, Thainess was a response and a defense mechanism against Western imperialism, which means that it was crafted as a way to

homogenize the population, leaving Westerners and ethnic minorities out of the conversation (Jocuns, 2020). Especially, under General Phibun's dictatorship, Thainess was further formalized by state directives aimed at homogenizing Thai identity and eliminating regional differences. This measure aimed at developing a more coherent national identity. This point is closely tied to the *Thai-fication* process (3), which concerns the aspect of standardizing the local population to the same criteria. Language, values and identity were to be consistent all over the kingdom, transforming society into a single homogenous category (Jocuns, 2020), leaving no space for 'others' — such as ethnic minority groups.

Thainess could also represent a symbol of popular culture (4), embodying daily activities done by Thais, almost crossing the borders of stereotypes. We could consider this a postmodern reflection of Thailand's identity. For instance, Jocuns (2020) lists spirit houses, lottery numbers or Buddhist talismans as examples of symbols that represent what it means to be Thai. By this definition, Thainess becomes a practical experience that can be mimicked and consumed, especially by tourists. The commodification theme (5) comes closely to the experience of consumption, especially in relation to tourism experiences. Jocuns (2020) pointed out that if historically Thainess was a form of nationalism and so was by definition something that excluded non-Thais, then advertising it to tourists (and so, to outsiders) challenges the original notion. Perhaps Thainess is about just this: co-existing ideas of the same concept, despite differences.

However, one noteworthy feature of Thainess is its adaptability to cultural changes. For instance, a popular symbol like the *Ronald McDonald* mascot (from the homonymous brand) in Thailand is represented by performing the *wai* (ไหว้), a traditional greeting that involves placing both hands together in front of the chest to express respect and gratitude. The localization of iconic symbols like these demonstrates how Thai culture adapted to Western influences and created something specifically tied to Thai cultural practices. Another example of this flexibility approach is connected to "Museum Siam". In 2017 Bangkok's "Museum Siam" opened its main exhibition called *"Decoding Thainess"*, which aims at understanding, explaining and literally 'decoding' what Thainess stands for — that is, grasping the essence of what it means to be Thai. The name of the exhibition

proposes the idea that it is actually difficult to pinpoint what Thainess actually is or relates to. The exhibition consists of fourteen areas that showcase various facets of Thai culture from many different perspectives: tracing its history, perceived as the country's identity (e.g. the national anthem, the monarchy or Buddhist religion), leading to the subsequent evolution of Thainess as an expression of pop culture (e.g. instant noodles, student uniforms or *tuk tuks*)[42]. "Museum Siam" arranged the exhibition with a considerable amount of interactive rooms for visitors to fully immerse themselves in Thainess. By this means, Thainess is represented as something that can be consumed and experienced. This aspect of participation assigns Thainess a real sense of commodity, particularly considering that non-Thais can engage with it as well. Moreover, in the context of tourism and in particular in TAT campaigns, Western visitors are often represented as the actors that take action or participate in Thainess-related activities. By creating a sense of Thainess that can be experienced, Thainess becomes an iconic representation of Thailand's identity and so a visual representation of the 'projected image' of the destination.

As mentioned, while traditionally Thainess has had a fixed meaning that was not intended to be related to Westerners, promotional Thai tourism videos have depicted a sense of Thainess that can be accessible to tourists. The most common and explicit campaign was that of *"Discover Thainess"* in 2015, which focused on marketing the cultural and traditional heritage of the country. The goal was to produce an offer that could be perceived as if it had an added value. The promotional video embraces numerous elements that represent Thai culture at the surface. It displays projections of Thai culture and typical experiences that tourists can participate in, almost shrinking Thainess as a tourism consumption experience. Jocuns (2020) analyzed how some of the *"Discover Thainess"* campaign's videos portray agrarianness activities in ethnic minority communities (which was once considered to be something non-Thai) as both *Thai* and something that foreign visitors may identify as *truly Thai.* In this sense, two things are contradictory: the

idea that ethnic minorities are uniquely Thai, and the idea that heritage tourism may be perceived as authentic by international visitors (Jocuns, 2020). This further proves that the shift of Thainess in post-modernity could be summarized as *<<where once Thainess was an identity strategy for a nation, Thainess is now an authentic tourist experience for foreigners>>* (Jocuns, 2020).

At this point, one might ask: is '*Thainess'* Thailand's soft power?

Perhaps it is, or at least we could consider it one of its extensions. If we thoroughly think about it, Thainess is the concept that withholds what Thailand's identity is about, so it sums up its traditions and heritage. As we have previously analyzed culture is a key element of soft power, representing an attractive force that can persuade indirectly, especially within the context of tourism. Thainess represents a simplification of the identity of the country. Thus, the concept becomes a unique tool of attraction and influence, making it then a considerable important aspect related to Thai soft power. The *'Five Fs'* of Thai soft power could be considered assets of Thainess, as they reflect the specks of popular culture and heritage of the country. But still, these *<<homogenized representations of Thainess>>* (Jocuns, 2020) iconize Thainess as a standard nature of Thai identity, leaving so much more depth left unnoticed. Yet, these aspects are almost the symbols of Thainess, making it a recognizable offer in numerous tourism campaigns. In fact, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) often promotes Thainess in its campaigns, leveraging it as an attractive force that could influence tourists to discover the destination, or perhaps persuade loyal visitors to come back once again. Since 2015, TAT has developed the *Thainess-experience* and taken advantage of the idea of Thainess as a marketing tool to encourage travel towards Thailand. It has employed the strategy of Thainess's perceived worth and emphasized positive communication, high quality and standards of products and services within its strategy (Suksutdhi and Boonyanmethaporn, 2022). As a marketing tool, although it is reduced to pictures and gestures in TAT promotional videos, Thainess becomes an ideological construction that shapes the everyday discourse of Thai people. These advertisements show a Thainess that visitors might want to imitate, giving the impression that they could be temporarily immersed in the culture (Jocuns, 2020).

I believe that when employed in marketing, Thainess plays an important role in re-visiting purposes. As we have analyzed in Chapter One, Thailand has a notably high loyalty index which means that most of its visitors have visited the destination before (TAT, 2021). Pushing on the idea that visitors seem to repeatedly keep coming back to Thailand, and the fact that soft power in tourism can create deeper relationships with visitors, Thainess emerges as an extension of Thailand's soft power that could effectively persuade these returning visitors.

This concept could be strategically utilized to influence re-visitors in exploring Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiatives. However, promotional materials frequently overlook CBT. From a quick research, it is in fact hard to find any information or offer regarding CBT, which is instead targeted towards a Thai audience, with information predominantly available only in Thai. Yet, this omission is noteworthy considering the increase in foreign visitors interested in tourism experiences in lesser-known destinations and authentic cultural immersions. Thus, the opportunity to leverage on this enthusiasm and market CBT to a larger audience is missed.

Thainess could become an umbrella term that considers a wide range of cultural aspects, from the traditional identity to a reflection of the multitude of diversity present throughout the country. Because if Thainess represents the country's identity, it must also mean that it represents the destination's image. Thainess is a dynamic concept that is influenced by both its historical background and constant modern influences, permitting an evolving idea of what it stands for. Thus, its flexibility permits it to turn into a unifying thread that allows differences to still be visible. Community-Based Tourism provides responsible authentic experiences and cultural sensitivity. By transforming its cultural soft power by leveraging the competitive advantage of the uniqueness the CBT offers, TAT might permit to upgrade the overall landscape of tourism in Thailand. Overall, local authenticity advances the country as a whole in the competitive tourist market. Yet, Thainess should not be perceived as the compelling force that the communities should utilize to attract tourists. If they were to promote the same assets or act all the same throughout different provinces, the preservation of cultural identity otherwise would be diminished to *'Thai-washing'* or *'Thai-fication'*. However,

Thainess is also about adaption and flexibility. Instead, the customs and traditions of the communities should be perceived as elements of Thainess, as elements of the country's rich heritage mosaic that enriches even more the concept of Thainess itself.

3.1.3. Analysis of how CBT can contribute to the country's soft power

Thailand's soft power may not align perfectly with the concept of Community-Based Tourism on a first look, but upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the gap between the two is reduced by the similar values they share. If historically Thainess focused on preserving the Thai identity, similarly CBT prioritizes the protection of local authenticity and traditions, thereby safeguarding the integrity of smaller destinations. Moreover, as briefly mentioned, in recent times Thainess has demonstrated remarkable flexibility, adapting to changes and accommodating cross-cultural influences that were previously excluded. This adaptability enables Thainess to broaden its scope to embrace 'others', thereby enhancing its cultural environment. This could be an opportunity to fit Thailand's rich cultural heritage within the broader concept of Thainess.

As analyzed, Jocuns (2020) pointed out how some scenes from the 2015 campaign "Discover Thainess" propose agrarian practices and hill tribes as elements of Thainess. In particular, the videos depict rice sifting and weaving activities. These types of representations go against the original concept of Thainess that excluded 'others'. Perhaps, this could be an introduction to further flexibility of Thainess, expanding the concept to be open to so-called 'otherness'. Considering how in the advertisement these activities are practiced in relation to a Caucasian female tourist, the practices may be *Thai-fied*, in the sense that they make the potential tourists believe that the activities they are witnessing in the video are possible authentic tourism experiences they can also engage in. Thainess almost works as a framework for promoting authentic tourism experiences to visitors. But if that is the case, then why not promote it in a sustainable way?

Community-Based Tourism consists of a locally managed tourism model that produces tourism experiences that center around local communities. Managed and executed by locals, Community-Based Tourism becomes a tourism offer that prioritizes cultural conservation and provides authentic experiences to visitors in the most sustainable way there could be. The cultural immersion and exchange with locals will provide visitors an opportunity to live authentic tourism experiences, while at the same time generating a positive impact.

As we have previously mentioned, Thainess is the spirit of Thai identity, referring to the country as a whole entity. From a destination branding point of view, Thainess permits to create a cohesive image that embraces Thai culture as a whole and represents a unified offer to visitors. Community-Based Tourism embodies the essence of Thai culture, as each community — each with its own local traditions and wisdom — can offer unique cultural heritage to visitors, thus contributing to the concept of Thainess by adding to Thailand's cultural identity puzzle. The tourism landscape being made up of a multitude of protected heritage represents the possibility of embracing an interconnection between various communities and the advancement of a sustainable offer as a whole. Community-Based Tourism celebrates the differences of heritage between the communities, building the notion of Thainess to more than just stereotypes. CBT is then able to present parts of Thailand's identity to tourists in an uncommon style. In this context, Community-Based Tourism becomes a platform to present Thainess, or to be more exact, the multitude of facets it is composed of. Both Thainess and Community-Based Tourism share similar objectives. Both focus on celebrating identity, empowering the respect of culture and the showcasing of local wisdom. Thainess emphasizes the promotion of Thai culture, while CBT celebrates the importance of local heritage. If historically Thainess was a fixed concept and in the modern era it welcomes changes, then CBT challenges both notions by amplifying Thainess to a multitude of cultural diversity within Thailand. In essence, Thainess does not and should not be considered as a mere stereotypical format of Thai identity, but instead should become a tool to research the purest form of Thailand's culture. By focusing on the diversity of traditions highlighted by Community-Based Tourism, Thainess becomes a cultural mosaic of one nation. Thus, the image of

Thailand extends to so much more. This perspective allows us to extend the image of Thailand to many more opportunities to enhance the Thai identity, many more opportunities to embrace cultural heritage, and why not? even many more opportunities for visitors to discover Thailand.

If well-planned, CBT could feature Thainess and promote it to tourists. Allowing tourists to immerse themselves into the local culture by engaging with communities themselves, offers an opportunity to understand the essence of Thainess from a protagonist's point of view. In essence, the richness of different traditions allows tourists to discover and appreciate the diversity present in Thailand.

However, this will not just benefit tourists with more insights into the destination, but it will also contribute to shaping a broader framework of destination branding. Community-Based Tourism could in fact develop both the national destination brand and regional destination brands. From a national brand point of view, the focus is on creating a cohesive offer to gain a competitive advantage and attract visitors. In this context, Thainess resonates with the destination identity and permits to persuade tourists with its influencing allure as a soft power asset. This is particularly important for those newer visitors who will get to know the destination for the first time ever. If strategically managed, Community-Based Tourism might raise the status of the national brand as a whole by increasing the sustainable development of its offer.

On the other hand, from a regional brand point of view, CBT becomes the protagonist of the tourism experience. In particular, because Community-Based Tourism could leverage the creation of smaller destination identities and therefore newer 'sub-brands'. These types of smaller destinations will probably attract those re-visitors interested in building a deeper relationship with the destination. Thainess turns into the connection needed for visitors to become interested in exploring these types of initiatives, but CBT permits to reflect the local authenticity in a sustainable way.

This is to say that the initiatives of CBT highlight a different portrayal of Thailand and Thainess, enhancing the emergence of smaller destinations by at the same

time fostering the sustainable image of the country as a whole. As the national brand gains its sustainable status, regional brands (which could be at the province, city, or community level[43]) gain popularity and opportunities to reach their niche markets of choice.

Connecting Thainess and CBT presents an opportunity to extend Thailand's cultural identity to that of the communities — also those of ethnic minorities — as a way to promote Thailand even further. By showcasing how CBT ensures the promotion of authenticity of the local communities and promoting its own traditions and local heritage, visitors might be intrigued to discover this new side of the country. Soft power similarly communicates these purposes, by reflecting the country's identity as an influencing force. By this means, Community-Based Tourism promotes Thainess and hence, contributes to the soft power of Thailand.

The CBT offer could then be considered as an influencing factor of attraction, to persuade visitors to *discover Thainess* even in lesser-known destinations. The synergy between Thainess and CBT enriches visitors, Thailand and communities as both turn into the common thread needed to tie the regional brands to the national one.

However, it is important to understand whether this strategy produces an extension of the *"Thai-fication"* process, in which minor communities are forcefully integrated into generic 'Thai culture', or if it constitutes a shift toward embracing cultural and ethnic diversity within the concept of Thainess. *"Thai-fication"* consists of homogenizing culture to conform to a unique and almost stereotyped notion of Thainess, potentially diminishing the originality of minority cultures. There is a risk of commodification when local culture and heritage are only seen as commodities to be marketed and sold to tourists (Yodsurang, Kiatthanawat, Sanoamuang, Kraseain and Pinijvarasin, 2022). Negative effects may result from this, including cultural appropriation, authenticity loss and the exploitation of local communities. From an etymology point of view, Thainess does reflect something related to *Thais*, so perhaps combining it with CBT might diminish the heritage of

---

[43] In Thailand it might also refer to a *chumchon*/ชุมชน (or community), a *tambon*/ตำบล (or sub-district), an *amphoe*/อำเภอ (or district) or a *changwat*/จังหวัด (or province).

those communities that are non-Thai. But again, the concept of Thainess showed outstanding flexibility to *otherness* in modern times.

On the other side, encouraging Community-Based Tourism as a manifestation of Thainess does not necessarily lead to unsustainability. If Community-Based Tourism stresses inclusivity and actively embraces Thailand's cultural and ethnic diversity, it would represent a step towards eventually accepting cultural and ethnic diversity in and for itself. Respecting and protecting the natural and cultural environments of the communities involved is crucial when it comes to CBT initiatives. This calls for a well-balanced strategy that emphasizes sustainable growth, cultural preservation and community empowerment. This strategy would involve encouraging local communities to conserve and promote their own traditions, dialects and heritage, resulting in a more complex and accurate representation of Thainess.

Overall, the projected image of Thailand might become one of a competitive destination with a rich cultural heritage. The fact that the tourism products of CBT are created by the communities themselves, rather than coming from popular culture, pushes on the notion that the identity of the community is authentically Thai. This reinforces the idea that CBT preserves Thainess and is able to showcase a genuine representation of it to tourists. In summary, Thainess and CBT share a dedication to conserving local authenticity, supporting cultural heritage and demonstrating Thai cultural identity. Thailand can successfully use its soft power to attract visitors and impact global opinions by constructing an offer that encompasses both Thainess and CBT assets. In particular, the concept relies on the elements of an alluring force that will allow to attract the high-value market that the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is trying to target. So not only, will they attract their desired visitor profile, but they will also permit a sustainable and responsible development of the tourism industry at the same time. This is because soft power is not a product, it is the ability to subtly influence one to do what we desire them to do. So if the goal is to attract the high-value market, it is important to first create and promote something that will entice that same high-value market to be curious about discovering the offer in the first place.

In particular, the creation of a consolidated **Community-Based Tourism digital ecosystem** (or CBT Net) could increase the resilience of this particular offer, coming as a united force on the tourism market and possibly enhancing the competitiveness of the country as a whole. Perhaps this project embraces the high-value tourists' potential needs as it provides a secure offer that can permit them to experience immersive authentic cultural experiences. This would also become significant for those loyal visitors who just want to dig deeper into their relationship with the destination. In addition, it might also become a catalyst for sustainable domestic tourism and serve as a sustainable economic asset for the local communities.

3.2 CASE STUDIES: PROMOTING CBT

This section focuses on the analysis of two existing marketing campaigns promoting Thailand. The first refers to the 2023 *"Meaningful Relationship"* campaign, while the second one focuses on a late 2021 domestic tourism promotion campaign called *"Come travel, I want to meet you"*. Both campaigns are part of the *Amazing Thailand* brand and were shared by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). The decision to focus on these two particular campaigns lies in the fact that both of them — despite never really openly expressed by TAT — seem to promote an offer that comes very close to the essence of Community-Based Tourism.

3.2.1 Meaningful Relationship

In November 2023, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) launched a storytelling video named "*Meaningful Relationship*"[44], for its 2024 marketing strategy[45]. The video represents three foreigners — a Brazilian woman, a French man and a Korean man — reminiscing about their holiday in Thailand. They start

---

[44] *'Meaningful Relationship'* promotional video (available on Youtube: https://youtu.be/aX26BitIcHs)

[45] TAT News (2023). *TAT premiers 'Meaningful Relationship' advertising film to the world.* (https://www.tatnews.org/2023/11/tat-premiers-meaningful-relationship-advertising-film-to-the-world/) Last accessed: 18th of April 2024

by alluding to the fact that they fell in love during their stay, as the video progressively shows frames of their holidays. The short film continues to hint at the idea that the romantic connections they built were with local people, as each scene brings the visitors closer to the Thais. Ultimately, the short film has a twist: the relationship the tourists are talking about is actually the one they developed with the destination, thus a 'meaningful relationship' with Thailand.

The following table is a visual analysis of the 'relationship aspect' of the advertisement and its corresponding twist. The first column indicates the actor that is being talked about, whether it is the Brazilian woman, the French guy or the Korean man.

The second column involves two pictures. The first considers the sentimental feature in the first part of the short film, which makes the viewer believe that the main actors were involved romantically with the locals. This aspect showcases the actors always alone with the Thais. The second photo reveals frames of the twist of the campaign, which show how the 'meaningful relationship' goes beyond a mere romantic connection between a tourist and a local. The real message of the video is depicting the actors being in love with the destination, each one featuring almost the same themes (as in the connection they built with the destination), but all more focused on specific aspects. For instance, I would consider the Brazilian woman more tied to nature, the French man interested in helping the local community and the Korean man generally involved in an intimate meal and enjoying typical Thai spicy food.

Table 1. Visual analysis of the twist in the *"Meaningful Relationship"* advertisement

Main actor	'Romantic' relationship and twist (nature, community, food)
Brazilian woman	

French man	
Korean man	

Source: Compiled by the author

This is further proved by the words each actor enunciates. In fact, the Brazilian woman's connection to nature is not only proved by the way she is portrayed in various frames throughout the short film, but also through her own words. In fact, she states that the relationship she has goes beyond love and that it is one between *<<you and beautiful nature>>* (min. 2.48) and *<<you and places>>* (min. 2.58). She also states is a relationship between *<<you and yourself>>* (min. 2.54), perhaps intending that because of her relationship with (Thai) nature, she found a connection with herself as well. For the French guy, the relationship is between *<<you and the people>>* (min 2.20) as well as *<<you and the community>>* (min. 2.28)*. The Korean guy simply confirms is a relationship between *<<you and explosive flavours>>* (min. 2.37), which limits the experience of this relationship to food. However, the Korean man also had his fair number of local immersive experiences, by visiting a local textile factory and trying on traditional clothes. However, he does not state anything in particular about these other experiences.

Nithee Seeprae, Deputy Governor of the Thai Tourism Authority Marketing Communications department, suggested that the *"Meaningful Relationship"* advertising film is a key element of their plan to persuade visitors all around the globe to engage in immersive experiences in Thailand[46]. The aim of this campaign seems to be to inspire visitors to engage in travel routes that go beyond ordinary tourism, and to encourage them to commit to unconventional travel experiences that will connect them with locals. This advertisement does not have the typical aura of a commercial. It is a great example of storytelling, that highlights the

---

[46] TAT News (2023). *TAT premiers 'Meaningful Relationship' advertising film to the world.* (https://www.tatnews.org/2023/11/tat-premiers-meaningful-relationship-advertising-film-to-the-world/) Last accessed: 18th of April 2024

possibility of developing meaningful connections in Thailand, whether it is with its people, culture, food or nature. The message of the short film was definitely that of showcasing the principles of sustainable tourism, and the value of developing the emotional sphere of visitors; providing then mutual benefits to both visitors and locals.

In addition, as previously analyzed, understanding the newer trends in the post-COVID19 era is a key strategy to boost tourism. The strategy behind this promotional video seems also to advocate for lesser-known destinations and experience-based tourism within local communities. This is because the destinations shown in the short film represent very distinct areas of Thailand. For instance, the Brazilian woman appears to have had her tourism experience in the northern provinces (north or northeast) because of the abundance of natural landscapes and the presence of elephants, usually a popular offer from the north and northeast of the country. The French man is set in a coastal area, and so it hints at the fact that he traveled to the south of Thailand. Lastly, the Korean man appears to visit areas nearby Bangkok, even though the chaotic side of the city is never really shown. The filming locations for the short film are in fact communities set in various provinces: *Kanchanaburi* (east of Thailand), *Chumphon* (south of Thailand), *Nakhon Phanom* (northeast of Thailand), and *Nonthaburi* (center of Thailand)[47]. So in a way, very different areas and tourism offers are represented to the audience. Yet, the tourism aspect is not evident, nor promoted in any way. The storytelling aspect does a great job of immersing the viewer in the plot of the short film, as well as focusing on the natural landscapes and social aspects of the local communities.

This marketing campaign could be targeted to visitors who have never visited the destination before but are interested in tourism experiences that will enrich their souls. However, despite never really being mentioned by TAT, I believe this campaign is best fitted to be addressed towards re-visitors. As previously analyzed

[47] TAT News (2023). *TAT premiers 'Meaningful Relationship' advertising film to the world.* (https://www.tatnews.org/2023/11/tat-premiers-meaningful-relationship-advertising-film-to-the-world/) Last accessed: 18th of April 2024

in Chapter One, Thailand has in fact a high loyalty index, which means that the number of revisitors is higher than that of newer ones. The 'connection' aspect is most probably a common shared feeling for those tourists who have already been to the destination. Thus, by emphasizing this, the advertisement appeals to all of those visitors and speaks to them from an emotional point of view. The idea that as a visitor you would be able to participate in something so emotionally engaging sounds thrilling and might inspire others to pick (or re-pick) that destination. In addition, the areas shown in the video are not the popular landmarks recognized among mainstream visitors. Thus, the re-visitors might be more interested in finding out more about the lesser-known destinations where the 'meaningful connections' could intensify.

However, the re-visitor focus could also be reflected in the nationalities of the travelers and actors. In particular, France and Korea are two of Thailand's most popular tourist nationalities for inbound tourism. In 2023 they accounted for approximately 500.000 and 1.600.000 tourists each[48]. On the other side, Brazil is not a very popular one, with around 50.000 visitors in 2023[49]. Thus, it is hard to understand why exactly those nationalities were chosen for the creation of this particular promotional video, but we could believe that the aim was focusing on groups that tend to repeat their tourism experience in Thailand despite having it done before. Also because the statistics do not specify how many out of those tourists in 2023 were in fact re-visitors. Perhaps the Brazilian market is actually especially loyal. However, the available data does not provide clear insights on the matter.

In analyzing the main themes of the *"Meaningful Relationship"* video in comparison to the *'Five Fs'* of Thai soft power we can uncover whether there are insights into the strategy used for this marketing campaign. In particular, it appears that the five elements of Thai soft power were not really considered key elements in this particular campaign. If we analyze the theme analysis in comparison to Thailand's

---

[48] Tourism Authority of Thailand Statistics. Available at:
https://www.mots.go.th/more_news_new.php?cid=411
[49] Tourism Authority of Thailand Statistics. Available at:
https://www.mots.go.th/more_news_new.php?cid=411

Five Fs, we can observe the following. *Fight* and *Film* were not really represented in the short film. *Food* is shown as a sociable and shared experience. Both the Korean and the French man are portrayed as happily engaged in having meals with locals. As for *Festival*, by the end of the video, the Brazilian woman is shown included amongst local women in what seems to be the celebration of a traditional festival. Lastly, for *Fashion*, that is shown in the Korean man's parts: from production at a textile company to trying traditional clothes all together with his new Thai friend. In addition, *Fashion* is also represented as the traditional clothes worn by local women during the last festival scene. Despite some aspects not being included at all (such as fight and film), the others are fairly represented, and thus can still play an indirect role in influencing the audience. However, other elements take the spotlight in the campaign. These are the **presence of nature** and obviously the **connection with people.** Both the emphasis on the environment and the focus on communities effectively capture the essence of Community-Based Tourism and reflect the essence of sustainable tourism as well. By this means, the campaign broadens Thailand's appeal beyond typical tourism.

Despite CBT never really being mentioned, it is clear that the themes showed also reflect the offer to a certain degree. Apart from the concept of 'community' being mentioned by the French guy, the general warm atmosphere of communal involvement provides clear insights into the topic. In addition, the sustainability factor is further suggested by the meaningful communication of the video. At a certain point, the French man says *<<"it's about being part of their sustained preservation…">>* (min. 3.04). Perhaps 'their' hints at communities, so 'being part' of the communities's sustained preservation.

In conclusion, the *"Meaningful Relationship"* campaign encourages travelers to partake in genuine experiences that go beyond standard tourism by utilizing storytelling and emotional resonance. The short film highlights Thailand's distinct uniqueness and captures the spirit of Community-Based Tourism through its emphasis on nature, community and cultural immersion.

3.2.2. Come travel, I want to meet you

The second advertisement that will be analyzed was shared by TAT at the end of 2021[50] and features a revisitation of a Thai song in the context of tourism. The slogan for this campaign is "มาเที่ยวเถอะนะ อยากเจอ", which translates to *"Come travel, I want to meet you".* The short film stars *Violette Wautier*, a mixed Thai-Belgian artist who takes the role of a tourist who visits many different areas and sings melancholically, transforming lyrics from a song called ยังคงดอย (*Still on the mountain*) by *Singto Namchok,* a popular Thai singer. Considering the Thai-centered communication and the time of publication, we can assume that this particular campaign was strategically aimed at domestic tourism in the post-COVID19 era. This is also because of the limitations for international tourists extending until 2022[51], which discouraged them from visiting the country.

Perhaps, the *"Come travel, I want to meet you"* slogan symbolizes the relationship between the tourism industry and visitors since the latter had not had a chance to travel due to the risks of COVID-19. In addition, the song Violette Wautier sings often repeats <<คอยพี่กลับมา>>, which means <<*waiting for you to come back*>>, implying that the communities and the whole travel industry are waiting for (domestic) visitors to come back.

The following table shows the different settings of the promotional video and the potential areas or provinces in which they might be set in.

Table 2. Visual representation of the different sets of the *"Come Travel, I want to meet you"* advertisement

SETTING	VISUAL FRAME

FIRST SETTING: mountains, colder weather, *Akha* minority's attire (probably *Chiang Rai*/northern province)	
SECOND SETTING: Presence of the sea, seafood-centered meal (probably southern province)	
THIRD SETTING: river, raft (unclear, possibly *Phang Nga* or *Chiang Mai*)	
FOURTH SETTING: countryside, presence of buffalo (unclear)	
FIFTH SETTING: street food area (unclear, probably *Buriram* or generally *Isaan* /north-east province)	

Source: Compiled by the author

This campaign seems to focus on multiple travel trends: cultural tourism, gastronomy, responsible travel and ecotourism. The cultural tourism is showcased by the immersion in the traditions and local way of life of the *Akha* ethnic community, up in the mountains. The gastronomy part is leveraged by the numerous scenes of food in various settings. In particular, in the southern-looking setting, the shared experience of having a seafood meal together highlights Thai

food as an interactive experience. This aspect is further highlighted by the warmth of the local vendor when she sells street food to the main actress. Responsible travel and ecotourism align when the girl and her friends take a stroll on bicycles in the middle of the Thai countryside. In addition, the calm environment of the river location provides further insights into the sustainability of that setting and that type of tourism. Another interesting point is the care of the environment that the actress has: from using reusable drinking bottles and reusable containers, to picking up plastic bottles from the side of a field. This might be a subtle invite for tourists to be environmentally responsible as well. It shows them that it is possible to have amazing tourism experiences while still taking care of our earth.

Each setting highlights sustainable tourism practices, whether from actions or environments. As we have analyzed in Chapter Two, focusing on the post-COVID19 tourism trend is a smart way to welcome tourists back to travel. In particular, this promotional video takes into consideration numerous aspects regarding the trend. For instance traveling to secondary destinations, engaging in immersive cultural experiences and utilizing ecological means of transportation are just some of the practices to encourage visitors to engage in tourism experiences in the post-COVID19 era. As such, because of the wellness that those practices can bring to everyone.

Table 3. Visual analysis of the sustainable practices of the *"Let's travel, I want to meet you"* advertisement

SUSTAINABLE ASPECT	VISUAL FRAME
Reusable drinking bottle	
Reusable food container	
Collecting plastic	
Sustainable means of transport	

Source: Compiled by the author

The ending line recites <<ยิ่งไป ยิ่งให้ ยิ่งสุขใจกว่าที่เคย>> (min. 3.14), meaning *<<the more you go, the more you give, the happier you will be more than anytime before>>*. Again, another invitation to sustainability and responsible practices while traveling. At the same time, this last line suggests that the Thai tourism industry in the post-COVID19 era is even better than how it was before. This leaves the impression that the visitors will not be disappointed in their tourism experiences and so it pushes them to book their holiday without worries.

When it comes to the emerging assets discovered in the previously analyzed campaign – the **presence of nature** and the **connection with people** – these are also elements present in this domestic-targeted campaign. In particular, the connection with nature is shown in the river setting and countryside location, which bring this asset to an exceeding importance. In fact, the areas shown seem to be secondary trails, far from bigger cities. The advertisements then promote tourism experiences in lesser-known destinations. The places shown are not particularly touristy-worthy, acting almost as backdrops of the activities happening in the short film. The tourist attraction does not seem to focus on places, but

instead on an atmosphere that can be found. This point connects with the second aspect: the connection with people. This element is prominent throughout the entirety of the video, which showcases the warm hospitality of Thai people. The local people in the video are portrayed as particularly generous and are represented sharing a lot with the actress. For instance, in the first scene, the girl asks if she could just have something warm to drink, yet the following scene shows the locals involving the singer in their activities, from trying on traditional clothes to letting her play music. In the end, she is gifted the traditional clothes and leaves still wearing them. In the second setting, which seems to be a southern-looking area, she is sharing a heartful meal with what seems to be a local family and is given another plate by the woman hosting her. In another setting, a street vendor fills her reusable container to the brim with warm sausages. The actress is often showcased as being immersed in the activities and involved in the social environment of each setting, further emphasizing the warmness of Thai hospitality.

Ultimately, the *"Come travel, I want to meet you"* promotional video demonstrates the industry's resilience during hard times. The rendition of the song sung by Violette Wautier resonates with the audience in a genuine way. Moreover, the focus on cultural immersion, food exchange and natural destinations inspire the viewers to explore a different approach to tourism, one all about responsible tourism.

3.2.3. Overall analysis

The one difference between the two advertisements lies in the target audience. The *"Meaningful Relationship"* marketing campaign's message and language do in fact communicate with an international audience. In particular, because it emphasizes the differences between the main actors by letting them speak in their own native language. In addition, the words they chose to enunciate give a clear message of value, perhaps trying to inspire international viewers to experience a similar situation. On the other hand, the *"Come travel, I want to meet you"* campaign uses the Thai language as a communication vehicle to connect with Thai viewers. In addition, it has more insights into Thai culture, which are aspects that will clearly

resonate more with Thai people. Despite targeting distinct audiences, both campaigns offer similar messages. In fact, the theme seems to concentrate on the pursuit of sustainable tourism experiences, which permit tourists to engage with locals and participate in the communities' local way of life in an authentic style. Both advertisements seem to show a general vision of the different areas of Thailand, from north to south, east to west.

One aspect to notice is that the *"Meaningful Relationship"* advertisement focuses more on the connection between the tourists and the locals, while the *"Come travel, I want to meet you"* one is more experience-based and has almost a nostalgic aura tied to it. In this second one, the connection with the locals is a bit more distant than in the other campaign — perhaps also due to the recent event of COVID-19. In fact, the call to action in this latter advertisement is for Thais to go back to traveling, but to do so sustainably and responsibly. In contrast, the *"Meaningful Relationship"* one does not have a straightforward message but it seems as if they used an influencing approach in inspiring visitors to engage in similar activities that could have as an outcome a so-called 'meaningful relationship' with the destination. At the end of the short video, when the Brazilian girl states *<<I've groomed a beautiful relationship in Thailand>>* (min. 3.20), the Korean man follows by *<<What will yours be?>>* (min. 3.26), almost talking to the viewers. Perhaps, the call to action in this case is to inspire the international audience to travel to communities and lesser-known destinations, embrace the local way of life and engage in sustainable tourism as well. The impact that both campaigns might had on the audience was an invitation to rethink the way they travel. Perhaps it inspired some visitors to partake in more authentic tourism experiences and in actively being more responsible in their role as tourists. Therefore, similar campaigns could be implemented to suggest tourism behaviour in engaging with the CBT offer. Additionally, CBT marketing should educate the public about the distinctions between CBT and mass tourism, helping them to understand the value of CBT as a sustainable tool for the cultural preservation of communities. Only the right marketing campaigns will draw the right kind of travelers to CBT communities (Suansri, 2003), thus it is important to make smart marketing decisions. Storytelling, as used in the analyzed promotional videos, leverages the

sense of belonging to the communities, influencing the viewers in the discovery of the lesser-known destinations present in the videos. TAT can attract tourists looking for immersive and meaningful travel experiences by highlighting lesser-known sites and experiences, while also encouraging sustainable tourism practices.

Considering the two added assets found in the analysis of the advertisements — nature and connection with people — one could ask: could not CBT, alike Thainess, become another extension of Thai soft power?

If the offer becomes competitive enough to highlight Thailand's unique effort in implementing sustainable tourism, then it should become it. Or perhaps it could develop alongside it and take the concept of Thainess to an extended level, turning what used to be a constricted nationalist ideology into an inclusive multicultural mosaic of traditions. It is crucial that state enterprises or the government itself acknowledge the value of these assets, which have great potential but are undervalued.

It has to be noted that soft power could either attract or disinterest tourists. A positive perception of soft power could enrich the image of the destination, however, there might arise the case of distancing oneself from potential visitors, or at least the one we are planning to attract. Surely, the boost on the *Five Fs* (Food, Festival, Fight, Film and Fashion) is coherent, as all five of these assets can be important alluring aspects that contribute to visitors coming to Thailand. However, many more deserving elements should be considered and promoted, to allow Thailand to have an even more attractive image globally. In addition, the value creation of different assets could also have an impact on the competitive advantage of the destination. If government organizations begin valuing their soft power in a way that could support local people while retaining that unique attracting force, then perhaps it would be possible to influence outsiders interested in discovering more about supporting sustainable tourism. However, it is important to note that the outcomes of such soft power initiatives may take time to manifest explicitly. Following the steps of these campaigns, Thailand should leverage its offer on these two extra potential soft power assets: ***nature*** and the ***connection with people***,

both in relation to CBT. This will allow TAT and DASTA to expand the destination's attractive power to these themes as well, permitting major competitive potential to the CBT offer.

As analyzed in Chapter One, the goals that the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has for the 2023-2027 period, are:

1. *Drive demand: pursue value-based tourism for sustainability*
2. *Shape supply: creating unique destination proposition and elevate industry standard*
3. *Thrive for excellence: develop TAT to become a High-Performance Organization*

Given the goals outlined by TAT we shall analyze the *"Meaningful Relationship"* and *"Come travel, I want to meet you"* marketing campaigns' attempt to achieve these objectives.

As for the first goal, both campaigns highlight a tendency toward attracting a target audience interested in sustainable and responsible tourism practices. The impact of these two advertisements is great in addressing the possibility of experiencing a different tourism approach in Thailand, one that is distant from mass tourism and that focuses on cultural immersion and getting in touch with locals, as well as engaging in sustainable behaviours. These types of travel products and services are perfect for those tourists who might have higher spending habits, especially for unique experiences. This then answers TAT's first goal of attracting a value-based audience that will enhance the sustainability image of the country.

In addition, the two campaigns are also increasing the overall image of Thailand as that of a sustainable tourism hub. This would further improve the supply side, by adhering to more responsible practices and the creation of unique travel products as well; in particular, the focus on addressing tourism towards lesser-known destinations — especially smaller communities — that will benefit from the positive impacts of the industry. The more promotion of sustainable tourism, the more chances of encouraging stakeholders to change their approach, so the more possibilities of elevating the standards of the overall industry.

As for the third goal, that is very much related to TAT's role in giving the right direction to the industry as a whole, in order to create an effective performance as the country's main tourism authority. TAT's commitment to increase its status and become a high-performance organization is visible and these campaigns are valid indications that TAT is on the right track.

The three goals of TAT *(driving demand, shaping supply* and *thriving for excellence)* become the starting point to highlight Community-Based Tourism promotion.

In fact, CBT initiatives could be promoted through similar marketing techniques, by advertising the unique and authentic experiences of tourism while maintaining the focus on the self-management of a CBT tourism product. The storytelling aspect could also be a strategic asset to consider in this type of advertisement, such as the approach used for the analyzed marketing campaigns.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand could promote Community-Based Tourism initiatives within its marketing and promotion strategies as follows. First of all, it is important to set an accurate informational storytelling, that enhances the uniqueness of CBT initiatives, by highlighting the sustainability of the offer. The creation of promotional content should focus on authentic experiences, cultural immersions, natural conservation and local support. In addition, it would only make sense if the establishment of ideas for CBT promotion comes from locals, as the core of CBT is the self-management of tourism resources by local communities. TAT, especially with the help of DASTA and other involved stakeholders, could actually allow the communities themselves to take care of concepts for their specific marketing campaigns and generally just bring attention to the topic of CBT as a whole. Local community groups are the most aware of the unique features of their own communities. They know the culture, the traditions and the heritage that their cities hold, understanding at a deep core the sense of place of these destinations. Thus, the power of the story should come directly from their experience as active members of the community. Soft power simply becomes a value-creation element, while storytelling pursues to gain contact with the visitors during their customer journey. This would mean that the local community groups would manage the contact with their target audience, whether domestic,

international or both. The involved tourism organizations should just be supporting actors in the marketing process. Their duty should be to educate travelers in understanding the importance of responsible tourism and the positive impact that CBT has on local communities. Perhaps they could provide the correct resources to permit an accurate system of comprehending CBT and also become more interested in CBT.

In addition, if TAT highlights the sustainable practices that come from supporting CBT, then it will allow the increasing demand for sustainable tourism and be able to slowly transform Thailand into the sustainable tourism hub they want to achieve. This would also foster tourism towards lesser-known destinations, further adding to the positive benefits of advertising CBT. By doing so, TAT would be able to further attract travelers interested in these types of tourism practices, simply from a promotional point of view. However, the work to be done to highlight the CBT initiatives should not just stop there. Instead, TAT should encourage more attention towards CBT with the creation of special projects that can highlight the reality of CBT initiatives for the brighter future of sustainable tourism in Thailand. In Chapter Four we will analyze the concept of the **CBT Net**, a potential project that could answer this urge and elevate this type of tourism overall.

4 | THE CBT NET

4.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CBT NET

On the basis of what was analyzed in the past chapters, we could overlap the already existing multi-stakeholder approach of CBT to a potential digital project to

foster the Community-Based Tourism offer as a competitive advantage of Thailand, which will further prove the country's dedication to sustainable development. This initiative, called 'CBT Net', aims to create a CBT digital ecosystem that could increase the visibility of this offer and therefore attract the right market to Thailand. In addition, we will understand how this system enhances the sustainability of the destination overall.

4.1.1 Existing platforms on Community-Based Tourism in Thailand

In our rapidly evolving digitalized society, well-designed digital platforms have become important competitive advantages to the tourism industry. When it comes to digital platforms regarding Community-Based Tourism in Thailand, we can observe a series of projects that integrate features to elevate the CBT offer to a digital dimension. The projects we will analyze include the *CBT-I* platform, *The Thailand Village Academy,* the *CBT Travel Mart* and the *CBT Thailand* platform.

*The **Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute** (or **CBT-I**)* was founded in 2006 by Ms. *Potjana Suansri*[52], one of the original creators of the REST Project (Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project). From what originally was an innovative action research project, the *CBT-I* was transformed into a legally registered and internationally respected resource hub for Community-Based Tourism. The *CBT-I* has played a crucial role in coordinating the Thai CBT offer, to successfully influence the Thai government to formalize local community participation in rural tourism from a policy point of view. Additionally, the *CBT-I* engaged with tour operators and tourism associations to understand, support and promote the CBT offer[53].

Currently, the *CBT-I* digitally operates through its Facebook page. Facebook is one of the most used social media platforms for businesses in Thailand, used by Thai

---

[52] Ms. Potjana Suansri is considered one of the pioneers of Community-Based Tourism in Asia.
[53] Sustainability Leader United (2019). Potjana Suansri on How to Succeed with Community-Based Tourism (https://sustainability-leaders.com/potjana-suansri-interview/) Last accessed: 15th of May 2024

businesses for marketing, advertising, customer engagement and brand promotion. The main purpose of the *CBT-I* Facebook account seems to be a supporting and promoting role to the CBT initiatives throughout Thailand. The platform used to have a website, which is currently unavailable[54].

The second platform we are going to analyze is called **Thailand Village Academy**[55]. This is a project founded in 2019 by the *Department of Cultural Promotion* and the *Ministry of Culture of Thailand,* which involved numerous stakeholders including the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Thai Airways and Hello Local, among others. *Thailand Village Academy* presents itself as a website that offers online brochures that highlight the tourism programs of twenty-two villages throughout Thailand. All of these communities were selected because of their rich history and protected traditions that permit future generations of tourists to learn about them. Under the direction of local specialists, referred to as "masters" (some sort of local guides), tourists are able to fully engage with the real culture, local way of life and traditions of each community presented on the platform. An interesting feature of *The Thailand Village Academy* project was a competition for global storytellers and young travel bloggers to share their experiences and inspire others through social media sharing. The participants — who were selected through a contest method on the organization's Facebook page — consisted of 44 finalists, half of whom were Thai and half of whom were foreigners. They had the opportunity to compete for a $10.000 prize by creating engaging travel stories involving traveling to a local community. The competition, held from July 24th to July 29th 2019, encouraged participants to showcase their most captivating travel stories online, with the winner determined by a committee and also by social media engagement. The 44 finalists of the program were tasked with immersing themselves in a rural Thai community for six days, guided by a local expert who would show them the uniqueness of that particular community. Each of the 22 communities was assigned one Thai blogger and one foreign

---

[54] The *CBT-I* website used to be available at the following link: http://www.cbt-i.or.th
[55] *The Thailand Village Academy* is available at the following link:
https://www.thailandvillageacademy.com/

blogger. The goal for the creators was to gain firsthand insight into authentic Thai culture and rural life. Drawing from their experiences, the finalists had to craft inspiring and creative stories that would inspire visitors to explore Thailand's lesser-known destinations. Their stories were then shared on the *ReadMe* website[56], a Thai tourist-friendly platform that collects reviews, opinions and stories from tourists themselves.

It is hard to tell if this project is still ongoing as updates on both their Facebook platform and the online blog stopped in 2019. Perhaps due to COVID-19 the project was abandoned. Still, *The Thailand Village Academy* is a great example of how to collaborate with bloggers and potential visitors in highlighting the importance of the CBT offer by providing compelling storytelling material for the community groups.

The third platform regards the concept of the **CBT Travel Mart**. The *CBT Travel Mart* is a component of DASTA's *SMART CBT* system. It serves as a conduit for buyers (tourism businesses) and sellers (communities) to locate and set up online business meetings, leading to effective business operations between stakeholders[57]. Basically, the *CBT Travel Mart* is a platform for communities to sell tourism products and services as well as engage in business matching activities that lead to product testing. The tourism operators have the opportunity to discover the CBT offer, while the communities have the chance to learn what should be improved in their products. DASTA works as an intermediary to bring together and coordinate the diverse actors, in order to achieve real sustainability[58]. The project is built with a B2B approach, connecting tourism business operators to communities and guides, with the plan of reaching high-value tourists. At the same time, the *CBT Travel Mart* is Thai-focused, excluding international operators not able to speak Thai.

A recent update from May to July 2024 involved an initiative that aims at connecting communities to tourism operators. In particular, from the 7th to the

---

[56] The *ReadMe* website is available at the following link: https://th.readme.me/#
[57] https://smartcbt.dasta.or.th/en/travel-mart/about-project
[58] https://smartcbt.dasta.or.th/en/travel-mart/about-project

24th of May both community groups and operators registered on the *CBT Travel Mart* platform. The registration process step was followed by a business negotiation segment between communities and operators, which took place from the 20th to the 31st of May 2024. Lastly, in July 2024, after the stakeholders discussed with one another, the procedure continued by engaging in product testing activities, for the operators to evaluate the quality of the offer proposed by the community groups. The update resulted in 66 community users, 40 business users and 39 community locations [Figure 10].

The fourth and last platform we will analyze is called **CBT Thailand**, which is — like the *CBT Travel Mart* — part of the *SMART CBT* project created by DASTA. This web-app[59] focuses on a B2C approach, by presenting some CBT communities. For each community they present a brief overview, the offered activities with estimated prices, location and contact information (phone number of reference person and phone number of homestay provider), traveling tips to reach the community and a one-minute-long video showing clips of the CBT activities. An important aspect to note is that this platform provides information in English, which makes it accessible to international tourists.

Some other interesting features that the *CBT Thailand* platform offers are:
- seasonality awareness (as in it recommends specific communities for specific months of the year);
- recommended routes (pre-planned itineraries involving both CBT initiatives and other attractions in the area)
- a festival search feature (which does not provide many results)
- an accommodation list, including the type of accommodation, price, facilities and address[60];
- an activity list, including an overview of activity, appropriate season, office hours, duration, cost, location and contact (phone number or website).

---

[59] The *CBT Thailand* platform is available at the following link:
https://cbtthailand.dasta.or.th/webapp/
[60] They also provide a contact section (with number and website) but no structure updated that information.

The following is a brief overview of the analyzed digital platform.

Platform name	Dimension	Purpose	Still active?
CBT-I	Official website (unavailable) Facebook page	Resource and knowledge sharing, promotion of CBT	Still active
Thailand Village Academy	Facebook page (inactive) Official website (probably inactive)	Co-creation of storytelling, promotion of CBT	Probably inactive since 2019
CBT Travel Mart	Digital platform	B2B approach between communities and operators	Still active
CBT Thailand	Digital platform	Closer to a B2C approach	Still active

Source: Compiled by the author

While all the analyzed platforms contribute to the Thai CBT offer, there are still some steps to take in order to make it more competitive and attractive. When it comes to the current CBT digital environment, the approach seems to focus more on the B2B aspect. While the B2B approach remains of crucial importance in building stronger ties between communities and operators, the B2C approach could enhance the chances of competitiveness for CBT. The *CBT Thailand* platform takes care of the B2C approach, but not in a very ambitious way. However, when it comes to tourism, the role of tourists themselves is quite important and it seems as if the CBT offer still does not have a strategic plan to involve them in a more holistic way. In addition, this platform provides some limits: having just a phone number to get in touch with the community makes it less accessible considering that FIT international visitors or international operators might not be able to call the reference person directly. In addition, a standard booking system is more reliable and provides instant information on available dates and prices. Yet, that is not an option on this platform.

To acclimatize, the CBT offer could implement some innovation strategies that revolve around a more complex digital ecosystem. To have a strategic innovative approach, we should focus on what the real ecosystem lacks, and implement those gaps into a further digital dimension.

4.1.2 Overview of the CBT Net: objectives and goals

Community-Based Tourism can play a big role in advancing the sustainable development of the Thai tourism industry. Despite the existence of a few CBT digital platforms, there still seems to be something lacking to extend the CBT offer from a local tourism model to an extended and recognized tourism offer. In fact, it seems as if the analyzed projects lack the intention to interconnect tourists to the CBT offer directly and instead keep them as generic consumers. These projects also pose issues regarding the digitalization of the offer, whether the platforms are inactive, unavailable or limited to a B2B approach. To address these challenges, the need for a cohesive and innovative digital platform that connects the actors involved in the CBT offer is essential.

The **CBT Network** (or **CBT Net**) consists of a digital ecosystem project that connects all destinations within Thailand that offer CBT initiatives into a digital network. We could visualize the CBT Net as a dynamic and collaborative platform that allows the linkage between multiple communities that apply Community-Based Tourism principles. In particular, the structure of the CBT Net revolves around having an organized matryoshka-like structure, consisting on having an arrangement of geographical ecosystems within one another.

The purpose of this project relies on the possibility of creating a more attractive offer that could represent Thailand as a sustainable tourism destination, by at the same time contributing to the tourism development of numerous communities. This is because by promoting CBT, the CBT Net also promotes a sustainable tourism offer that will positively impact smaller destinations on the economic, social and environmental levels. Furthermore, the offer can be improved from a local to global perspective by interacting with tourists — especially revisitors — by proving an added value to their role in the digital ecosystem.

First of all, we should provide some theoretical framework regarding what exactly an ecosystem is. Hillebrand (2022) describes it as a *<<dynamic entity consisting of a heterogeneous, interdependent and continuously evolving set of actors that, positively or negatively, can influence or can be influenced by a value proposition>>*. This implies that a business or industry is not static but rather in a constant state of evolution, which is influenced by several actors that are interconnected between them to achieve the desired outcomes set by the value proposition. In tourism, this means a network of communities, government entities, tourism operators and other stakeholders interacting dynamically with one another. When it comes to the real ecosystem, the multi-stakeholder approach organized by DASTA shapes the CBT offer similarly to that of an ecosystem. The value shared by stakeholders is to promote sustainable tourism that permits local communities to gain positive benefits from tourism.

The CBT Net initiative intends to improve Thailand's Community-Based Tourism offer by incorporating new value into the existing ecosystem using digital innovation. In the next sections, we will delve into the composition of the ecosystem, exploring both its real and potential digital dimensions and which stakeholders are involved in the net, as to understand its structure.

The **vision** of the CBT Net would be to allow an easier understanding of Community-Based Tourism practices in Thailand by creating a system that showcases the products and services that each community offers. At the same time, it would foster the idea and the projection of sustainable development of the Thai tourism industry and have an impact on the communities involved in the project. In addition, the CBT Net should provide the opportunity for all communities in Thailand that implement CBT initiatives to have easier access to the tourism industry.

The **mission** of the CBT Net consists on the creation of an interconnected digital network for Community-Based Tourism experiences that can provide benefits to all actors involved in the ecosystem. By leveraging digital tools and features, the CBT Net aims to enhance the attraction of sustainable tourism, especially to

international visitors. In addition, the interactive relationship with tourists will also have a great impact on the competitiveness of the offer, especially through their recommendations, satisfaction and word-of-mouth.

The main objectives of the CBT Net project reside in:
- Engage visitors and especially re-visitors in the ecosystem, to advocate for CBT initiatives as a way to improve engagement and loyalty;
- Contribute to visualize the CBT offer as a competitive advantage of the Thai tourism industry;
- Facilitate market access to communities that implement CBT initiatives;
- Foster visibility of the CBT offer of Thailand and Thailand's efforts in promoting sustainable tourism;
- Provide easier technological integration for community groups;
- Promote tourism towards lesser-known destinations;
- Contribute to the economic, social and environmental development of the communities;
- Increase collaboration among stakeholders;
- Develop both national brand and regional brands;
- Provide a platform to present the CBT offer to a wider audience;
- Elevate Thai cultural soft power and Thainess to a cultural mosaic hub.

The added value of the creation of the CBT Net takes shape in many themes. First of all, the facilitated collaboration among CBT ecosystems throughout the country provides a secure space for the exchange of knowledge, skills and resources, as well as highlighting the CBT sector as a whole. In fact, the idea of a connected digital network would provide more visibility to the numerous CBT initiatives and projects among the many provinces of Thailand and create a platform for communities interested in partaking in sustainable tourism as well. It will allow the opportunity of accessing the market and facilitating the promotion process.

The CBT Net also emphasizes the contribution that travelers, particularly repeat visitors, can make to the development of CBT promotion. The platform can increase

the overall competitiveness of Thailand's tourism business by leveraging the experiences and recommendations of these devoted travelers to draw in new ones.

4.1.3 The real ecosystem

For a digital ecosystem to work efficiently, a real ecosystem should exist accordingly.

The 1997 Thai constitution included the potential of giving local governments the power to promote tourism in their communities while decentralizing governmental authority (Suansri, 2003). Thus, the 1999 Decentralization Act signified a significant departure from the previous responsibilities of local governments, which were quite limited. In fact, despite responsibilities still being divided between central, provincial and local administrations, the power of the latter was restricted and controlled by the Ministry of Interior's Department of Local Administration. The 1999 Act permitted the expansion of responsibility to local authorities, also including *"Planning, Local Investment Promotion, Commerce and Tourism"*[61]. The decentralization of tourism power meant for local authorities to take action and manage the tourism development of their own areas.

As for the general structure of the real ecosystem, there are two arrangements for the government structure: central and provincial administration. The Provincial Administrative Organization (or PAO) is divided into sub-districts, towns or city municipalities, which are used to represent different local levels of government (Pathak and Ahmad, 2018).

The real ecosystem infrastructure allows the management of the collaborative process among stakeholders and permits them to gain more benefits in the digital dimension. It is in this context that DASTA takes the most important role as the supervisor of the ecosystem, interconnecting actors with one another. The tourism industry is constituted of a plentiful number of actors that all contribute to the progress of sustainable development. When it comes to Community-Based Tourism, the number of stakeholders involved is not confined to the geographical

---

[61] Thailand Public Financial Management Report 2012. *Central-Local Government Relations in Thailand*. World Bank

borders of the community. Therefore, cooperation among actors should foster the safeguarding of the community's identity and offer. That is, making sure the collaboration doesn't allow outside actors to take advantage of the community for their own benefit (Suansri, 2003). The multi-stakeholder approach implemented by DASTA aims at moving the power of development from a centralized position to a more local overview (Phanumat, Sangsnit, Mitrchob, Keasang and Noithammaraj, 2015). This means that the decision-making process is managed by the local citizens in response to their own needs and in accordance with their own benefits. When it comes to CBT, the multi-level administrative structure permits local communities be supported in the management of tourism resources. However, CBT requires the help of higher-level administrators, whether at *Tambon*, provincial or national level. As analyzed in Chapter Two, DASTA already works as an intermediary agent between community groups and external stakeholders to provide easier collaboration among all groups. The need to have external stakeholders involved in the process lies in the fact that the community groups might lack the skills to implement a high-quality tourism offer. In this reality, external stakeholders provide knowledge, funds, support, partnership opportunities or whatever is needed by the communities to better manage their offer. They are simply the consultants and supporters of the community groups.

The sub-division that the CBT Net could implement is the following:
- A) Community ecosystem
- B) regional ecosystem (connecting the *community ecosystems* (A) of one *Designated Area*)
- C) CBT Net (connecting the multiple *regional ecosystems* (B) of all *Designated Areas*)

A) Community ecosystem

A *community ecosystem* refers to the interconnected network within one community that implements CBT initiatives [Figure 11]. It is composed of all the necessary actors needed for the creation of the tourism experiences (e.g. community groups and operators), but also of all those stakeholders that

contribute to the success of the local offer (e.g. external stakeholders or tourists themselves). This dynamic system sees functionality in the connections that the community groups maintain with other stakeholders within the ecosystem, as well as their ability to adapt their management strategies to potential risks. This first sub-division is implemented by DASTA's coordination between community groups and 'experts' groups.

B) **regional ecosystem**

A *regional ecosystem* (B) consists of the connection between neighbour *community ecosystems* (A), which could be within one specific *Designated Area* [Figure 12]. If we take into consideration DASTA's nine Designated Areas (as seen in Chapter Two), we could visualize nine different *regional ecosystems* based on the connections of the *community ecosystems* (A) of those areas. Each Designated Area becomes an ecosystem within itself and the communities work with one another to maintain a balance in their region. The balance might regard collaboration projects, as well as cooperation among communities in trying to target tourists, but also in knowledge sharing. This integration tries to simplify the complex dynamics of the ecosystem approach and works to have a more significant regional development by assisting weaker communities by pairing them to stronger ones. However, to maintain the CBT approach, each community still manages its own tourism resources and own ecosystem. The creation of a multi-community ecosystem (B) could facilitate regional projects concerning sustainable tourism development or to coordinate plans to mitigate negative impacts of tourism that affect the region as a whole entity. These types of ecosystems could coordiante regional workshops, where each *community ecosystem* (A) shares knowledge regarding specific themes, whether it is entrepreneurship, innovation, technology or other types of skills. In addition, multiple communities within one area could work together to enhance the tourism flows to their region, aiming at fostering the local infrastructures, transportation systems or public spaces. DASTA's Designated Areas offices, as well as *Tambon* Administrations or TAT province offices, take an important role in these kinds of ecosystems.

C) CBT Net

The CBT Net is then the sum of the two previous concepts. It refers to the integration of the *regional ecosystems* (B) throughout the country, as a way to connect all CBT communities (A) in a less intricate process [Figure 13]. The larger ecosystem (C) aims at giving support to all communities by spreading a cooperation and multi-stakeholder approach, as well as by building a stronger and more unified offer to propose to visitors. By connecting multiple *regional ecosystems* (B) the CBT Net also maintains a stronger capability to face large-scale challenges that could affect the CBT offer as a whole. In addition, a unified infrastructure takes Community-Based Tourism from a local tourism model to a competitive global tourism offer. The CBT Net should not be difficult to implement considering the multi-stakeholder nature that already characterizes the CBT offer, especially considering DASTA's work in being the middleman among many stakeholders. The innovative aspect of the larger network of the CBT Net (C) considers to strengthen the CBT offer by offering a holistic digital platform that leverages the competitiveness of this tourism model for Thailand.

This stratification process provides easier risk deduction in overcoming challenges from a local level, to a regional one, up until at national scale. In addition, it helps understand community needs from different perspectives: whether it is a specific community, a whole area or a necessity that regards the CBT offer as a whole. The CBT Net presents the CBT offer as one consistent identity, one that relates to sustainable and responsible tourism practices and that offers authentic traditional experiences to tourists. Having a digital platform that proposes this tourism model in a competitive and attractive way, might reach international tourists more efficiently. If the CBT acronym might not sell well to visitors yet (Suansri and Yeejaw-haw, 2013), it is because the offer is still unknown. To make it more recognizable, the implementation of a project that advances an organized structure of CBT experiences might just be the simplest solution to showcase the unique offer of CBT.

4.1.4 The actors and their roles

According to Hillebrand (2022), three types of actors can influence an ecosystem. The first set of actors is called *"required business actors"* and involves all those stakeholders that are necessary for the survival of the ecosystem. Generally, this refers to those actors that have the necessary resources for the success of the ecosystem dynamics. This category includes government organizations (central or local level), community groups and service providers (homestays, local guides, transportation, digital services, software developers, etc.). The second set of stakeholders concerns the so-called *"interdependent actors".* They maintain the ecosystem's survival but are not the core of the value proposition. These would include tour operators and travel agencies interested in sustainable tourism, tourists themselves and other actors that can have an impact on the CBT offer. Finally, the last set of actors are those influenced by the value proposition but that have a limited impact on the survival of the ecosystem. These are called *"fringe actors".* In the CBT ecosystem, these overlap with online bloggers, educational institutions and NGOs, among others [Figure 14].

The CBT Net actors involve:
- communities themselves, divided in sub-groups;
- local operators, involving accommodation and service providers, guides, etc.;
- tourists, being the essential players that allow the ecosystem to work by partaking in the CBT experiences;
- non-local operators, which include tour operators, travel agents and NGOs that have a role in supporting the communities and connecting them to tourists;
- DASTA, as the intermediary agent that coordinates communities and stakeholders, as well as being the main actor in providing guidance to community groups in terms of skills building;
- secondary actors.

The engagement and collaboration between actors are essential for the efficient functionality of the ecosystem and its success. We shall now look at each group from a closer perspective.

Communities

Communities are the center of the ecosystemic overview, whether we are talking about a community ecosystem (A), a regional ecosystem (B) or the CBT Net (C). Without communities, the CBT offer would not be possible nor exist. The community group is divided into sub-groups, *<<consisted of several groups of people within the host community that are voluntarily involved in tourism, e.g. women groups, youth groups, food groups, home-stay groups, handicraft groups, and transportation groups>>* (Phanumat, Sangsnit, Mitrchob, Keasang and Noithammaraj, 2015). Thus the CBT Net highlights the role of numerous actors such as homestay providers, tour guides and local transport operators, among others. Each sub-group has the role to focus on different aspects in order to holistically develop the tourism offer to success. They are part of the *"required business actors",* as the community groups are the core of the CBT ecosystems (A) that form the larger CBT Net ecosystem (C).

Local operators

Local operators include both tourism operators and non-tourism operators. They are the providers of products and services useful to make the tourism experience satisfactory and unique. The tourism operators include accommodation or transportation providers, as well as local tour guides. They are part of the *"required business actors",* considering their direct impact on the existence of the CBT offer and the quality of the products and services offered to visitors. The non-tourism operators include restaurants, shops and other businesses that enrich the offer present in the area. These actors are part of *the "interdependent actors".*

Tourists

When it comes to tourists, their contribution to both the real and digital ecosystem is extremely important. In the real ecosystem, their commitment revolves around

the positive enhancement of the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism on communities. In particular, by supporting CBT initiatives, they encourage the generation of tourism and non-tourism-related jobs within the area. In addition by supporting local operators, they make a major contribution to the local economic impact and consequently help improve the locals' life quality. Their involvement has a direct impact on the positive development of the CBT offer as well. The current role of tourists as mere consumers of the tourism offer makes them fit into the *"interdependent actors"* category, as they contribute to the economic impact but they are not direct suppliers of the offer. However, in the vision of the CBT Net, their role becomes that of marketers, which we will explore in more detail in section 4.2.3.

Non-local tourism operators

Non-local tourism operators and travel agents are part of the *"interdependent actors"* category. Their role is that of connecting the communities to the tourists by selling and promoting the CBT initiatives. They have a huge role in facilitating the cooperation between offer and demand, so it is important that they have an understanding of the ecosystemic approach and the sustainability that should entice the CBT offer. In particular, it is important for these operators to adopt a sustainable approach to best fit within the ecosystem.

DASTA

By not having conflicts of interest (Phanumat, Sangsnit, Mitrchob, Keasang and Noithammaraj, 2015) DASTA is able to take an important role in the efficiency of the ecosystemic dynamic. DASTA is the intermediary agent that coordinates between all actors, particularly communities and operators. DASTA also has a role in providing training and skill-building workshops for community members in order to enhance the quality of the CBT offer and assist local people in the management of their resources. By having a guidance role, DASTA fits in the *"required business actors"* category.

Secondary actors

Secondary actors involve a numerous number of stakeholders, ranging from very different backgrounds. For instance, these could include environmental or cultural conservation organizations that are interested in the protection of heritage and natural resources, which is one of the main aspects of CBT. It could also include NGOs that support CBT by providing funding or assistance to local groups.

In addition, secondary actors could also involve academia that contributes to the studying and understanding of CBT and provide innovative models and support in developing the CBT tourism offer towards the future. Lastly, service providers such as marketing agencies or technology assistance could also fit into this category as they are useful actors for the efficiency of the ecosystem dynamics, especially for the creation of a digital platform. They are part of the *"fringe actors"* as their impact does not necessarily affect the ecosystem and they are also not directly influenced by it. Their role could be summed up as a supportive one.

4.2 THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM

The solid innovation of the CBT Net resides in its technological features. In fact, the real ecosystem is taken care of by DASTA, being the main sustainable driver of the Thai tourism industry. Some of the existing projects we analyzed in section 4.1 highlighted some digital mechanisms that elevate the CBT offer, yet the CBT Net takes a step further in the technological coordination. In this section, we will explore how the CBT Net project integrates digital innovation into the CBT offer as a way to create a more approachable and competitive type of tourism.

4.2.1 Technological infrastructure of the CBT Net

In our digital-driven world, the implementation of technological features is necessary to gain a competitive advantage. Therefore, the use of technologies for leveraging the Community-Based Tourism offer is of crucial importance. This is

because the offer is still unknown to many stakeholders, including for the main part tourists themselves. The initiatives are also mostly promoted to a Thai market, leaving a large portion of potential visitors in the shadow. It would be significant to extend the CBT offer to a global audience and foster Thailand's sustainable tourism to lesser-known destinations to an even further extent. When it comes to the CBT Net project, this represents an opportunity to propose the CBT offer to a wider audience in one singular platform. The CBT Net brings together numerous actors, including tourism businesses, tourists, community groups, as well as both tourism and non-tourism operators. Technology becomes the tool to answer the needs of stakeholders, from providing real sustainable tourism to tourists, to supporting community groups in the promotional process, to presenting a more cohesive offer to tourism operators.

The technological infrastructure of the CBT Net consists of its digital platform and mutual features. Briefly, the key technological elements implemented in the CBT Net would include an interactive map, a visitors' review system, a co-creation section (or UGC section), educational resources, a booking system, an event calendar, virtual tours and a CBT Standard verification.

In particular, the creation of an **interactive map** will provide significant advantages to the concept of the CBT Net, facilitating the experience of tourists in the first place. The functionalities of the map involve filters, combined with geo-tagged content, in order to refine the offer by province, type of tourism (e.g. wellness over ecotourism), accessible offers (e.g. for people with physical disabilities) and type of service (e.g. tourism products, accommodation or transportation services). It could also include virtual tours made by community groups or tourists themselves (more on this later) to spark interest in potential visitors. The use of an interactive map and a geographic information system (GIS) permits to improve the visibility of the CBT initiatives present throughout the country, as well as facilitate the navigation for visitors and tourism operators. It allows them to get a clearer idea of where the CBT communities are located, in which provinces and nearby which other attractions. Moreover, the map might provide the opportunity to digitally visit the communities beforehand. This could

be achieved through the addition of virtual tours, videos, photos and explanations of the activities done by the community groups themselves. This feature will then foster even more the collaboration and participation of the locals in their own tourism resources, allowing them to promote their offer at their own will. Lastly, mapping the businesses of local operators (whether tourism-related like homestays or non-tourism-related like restaurants or shops) will provide clearer information to both independent tourists and tourism operators. The community groups could also add additional information such as contact details, available services, restaurants and homestays owned by community members. This system will allow for easier planning for FIT travelers or for tourism operators. As for the latter, the system will help those who are interested in understanding the CBT offer and get in contact with communities through the B2B approach of the existing *Travel Mart* system. This aspect could be further extended if the platform provides an evaluation of the CBT Standard for operators to have more confidence in what they are choosing — this point will be further discussed in section 4.3.4. In addition, the interactive map feature will also provide local operators with the opportunity to better manage their resources and community groups to improve their offer.

As for the connection with the real ecosystem, the interactive map could show the distinctive Designated Areas in the form of *regional ecosystems* (B), that visitors can digitally explore through the interactive map, until discovering the communities (A) that they are most interested in visiting.

An important feature concerns the possibility of **booking activities and accommodations online**. Being able to access this kind of service opens the CBT offer to FIT travelers, as well as increasing the chances of TOs and travel agencies engaging with the platform and being interested in supporting CBT. A booking system implementation facilitates the functionality for local operators, as well as understanding the availability, capacity and potential of their structures. Also, it will provide more visibility to their products and services, which might have an influence on their revenue stream. Clearly, the implementation of this system should take into consideration the capacity of the products and services offered by

the communities, in order to maintain sustainability. Also, a lot of the accommodations and homestays might have staff with limited English skills, so the existence of a booking system could ease up the process a little bit.

Moreover, considering how LINE is one of the most used applications for businesses in Thailand, the contact information could also add a direct link to the businesses' LINE contact, in order to connect with the local providers for eventual inquiries. This particular contact app is more accessible compared to a phone number as seen in other B2C platforms, which limits the connection with the international audience.

An important feature of the CBT Net should be the integration of the **English language** to be used as lingua franca in order to open the offer to a wider public. This is especially important to target FIT travelers coming from the West who are interested in sustainable and responsible tourism experiences. This is also valid for international stakeholders such as TOs or travel agencies that would like to engage in sustainable tourism. Particularly, this is also important because the CBT offer in Thailand is almost always targeted towards domestic tourism, so the information is mostly available in Thai. Thus, there could be a multi-language assistance system that makes the CBT Net accessible to FIT travelers and international operators by connecting them to community groups and homestay staff in an easier way. This would also enhance the visibility of these accommodations that otherwise might perhaps not obtain acknowledgment, particularly from an international audience.

The CBT Net could also expand a **co-creation** section. This is where the role of the tourists is crucial in the digital ecosystem. In fact, by showcasing **User-Generated Content** visitors could have an impact on other potential tourists and provide reliability on the offer. The impact of the co-creation aspect takes tourists' role to more than just mere consumers. Moreover, tourists should be educated as well on the matter of sustainability and responsible tourism. Yet, this is almost the hardest part. The CBT Net as an online ecosystem might be improved by adding **educational sources** (e.g. in the shape of entertaining videos) to measure the effectiveness of the CBT offer and to inform tourists of their potential impact. It is in fact important to let visitors know how they can support locals in a responsible

way. It will also assess the knowledge of potential areas of risks due to climate change and how the visitors' impact could minimize those effects. In addition, CBT marketing needs to educate the public about the distinctions between CBT and mass tourism, helping them to understand the significance of CBT as a resource conservation and cultural preservation tool for the community (Suansri, 2003). This will draw the right kind of travelers, interested in CBT.

International revisitors could be key actors in the promotion of the CBT Net from a global perspective. Their contribution will not just permit an easier generation of CBT marketing but it will also grant them benefits. In particular, we could think of ways to involve tourists in the CBT Net by awarding them. For instance, a **gamification** process for the CBT Net could intrigue visitors and revisitors to explore newer areas and move their visits to lesser-known destinations. Their contribution revolves around all three dimensions of sustainable tourism: the economic, the environmental and the social. For instance, by engaging in sustainable activities from all three sustainable dimensions (such as sleeping at a homestay, participating in activities that mitigate climate change risks or partaking in a cultural tradition, etc.), they could obtain points that allow them to receive special prizes within the community they are supporting. Perhaps, another mechanism to obtain points would be to engage in UGC videos that promote the initiatives the tourists experienced. This will grant them more benefits and at the same time reduce the promotional weight off communities.

By supporting the CBT initiatives, they are at the same time learning about sustainable tourism and local culture. The following are a few examples of what the special prizes could include:

- exclusive tourism experiences (or discounts on them);
- unique meals from local restaurants (or discounts on them);
- complimentary local products as gifts for their help (community or *OTOP* products);
- free entry at a local festival (or discounted price);
- discounts for future bookings.

This particular involvement of tourists could pose some challenges regarding the centralization of the management of the CBT offer, which would diminish the entire purpose of CBT itself. This is why it is important to ensure that if a similar situation evolves, that the local community groups have the power on the customization of the process and decision on eventual awards. The CBT Net in this case would simply serve as a platform to enhance the visibility of the initiatives and not as a controlling entity. Another potential challenge involves the loss of authenticity of the CBT offer as a mere entertaining activity. In this context, it is crucial that the activities enhance the educational aspect. This means that the activities that involve obtaining points commit to educating the visitor in understanding the purpose of CBT, sustainable tourism and the traditions of the local areas.

An additional important aspect regards the legitimate economic benefits coming from such activities. Those who permit the prizes and provide the activities for points should gain their fair distribution of the revenue, as it would happen with any other CBT initiative. In conclusion, it is important to maintain a balance between the gamification aspect and the CBT principles by allowing the local community groups and local operators to customize the elements and prizes needed for the implementation of this innovative entertaining aspect. It would be crucial for DASTA to implement some training for community members to utilize the gamification feature on the CBT Net appropriately, as well as some help in crafting the most culturally relevant activities and prizes.

An interesting extension to this gamification process is by communities to collaborate with one another to create special prizes if tourists get involved in tourism experiences in both communities. This could further extend the cooperation among regional ecosystems (B) and limit competition between community groups. The gamification process of CBT could be a pilot initiative to promote the offer to a wider audience.

Another feature that could be added regards the implementation of a **review system**. Adding a review system will help potential visitors in their decision-making stage and community groups understand if their offer is satisfactory or not. In fact, tourists' reviews could provide either criticism or

positive feedback, as well as highlight the positive aspects of sustainability within the communities. A review system allows for better management, assurance to newer visitors and benefit non-tourism operators in the long run.

Developing the integration of an **event calendar** could minimize the efforts of promotion of smaller local events and festivals within the communities that implement CBT, which would otherwise be unknown to a wider public. The visibility of those events could cater to a broader audience, which could have a better economic impact on the local community's revenue.

Having a list of all events simplifies the process for tourists in discovering unique experiences and plan their visits accordingly. The presence of a specific festival may also intrigue visitors in choosing a particular destination over another, thus assisting the community groups in the marketing process. In addition, if the events are of sustainable nature, they will further prove the point of fostering the CBT offer as a sustainable advancement of the development of the Thai tourism industry. For an even smarter experience, community groups could think of live streaming the events and cooperate with a local guide to assist online viewers interested in obtaining more insights about the festival broadcasted.

Lastly, for a digital ecosystem to survive in the digitalized modern world, it must integrate social engagement into its strategy plan, perhaps in the form of **social media accounts** that advance the CBT offer as a whole. This will provide closer relationships with tourists in the first place, but also with other business stakeholders. This has an important impact in permitting smart tourism throughout the entirety of the customer journey. Moreover, it will provide enhanced visibility to eventual advertisements created by community groups that are promoting their tourism offer. It could also be a platform to share the co-created UGC content made by tourists in the gamification process and inspire other visitors to attempt to do the same as well.

Considering how DASTA is part of the core of the real ecosystem, it is only logical that the integration of the digital ecosystem appears on DASTA's official website, as

part of its *SMART CBT* system. This will directly offer the initiatives of Community-Based Tourism to all stakeholders interested in the matter in a co-shared platform. This would also enhance the image of DASTA as a government organization as well as provide more trust to FIT visitors (Fully Independent travelers) interested in CBT, since the source of information is more reliable.

In addition, considering how The Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) third goal in the 2023-2027 Executive Plan was "*Thrive for excellence: develop TAT to become a High-Performance Organization*", if TAT contributes to the creation of the platform, it will also enhance its image as a supporter of sustainable tourism in the country.

4.3 THE POTENTIAL OF THE CBT NET

The conceptualization of a digital ecosystem for Community-Based Tourism leverages technological integration to provide visibility to sustainable tourism. It approaches the CBT offer as a way to inform promising tourists of the potential experiences they can enjoy in Thailand. The inclination of CBT grants the possibility to extend the Thai tourism image to a more sustainable perception.

In this section, we will analyze its contribution to The Tourism Authority of Thailand's goals for the 2023-2027 period and its impact on some Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, we will consider a SWOT analysis of the CBT Net.

4.3.1 Contribution of the CBT Net to TAT's 2023-2027 goals

The large digital ecosystem approach of the CBT Net could contribute to achieving TAT's 2023-2027 goals. For instance, by promoting authentic and immersive traditional experiences, the CBT offer aims at targeting high-value tourists and involving them in sustainable tourism practices that will benefit the communities. This aspect is closely related to TAT's goal n°1 "*Drive demand: pursue value-based tourism for sustainability*". In particular, the CBT Net creates a unified digital space that visualizes the CBT offer throughout Thailand; this will contribute to the competitiveness of the offer and enhance the possibility of attracting the right

visitors to the country. The CBT Net could also foster CBT marketing to tailor the messages of the advertisements to target high-value visitors and support sustainable tourism. Revisitors would be able to approach the network as an access point to unique traditional experiences, that are certified not-greenwashed, discovering newer sides of Thailand to fall in love with.

When it comes to the 2nd goal "*Shape supply: creating unique destination proposition and elevate industry standard*", the CBT Net elevates the Thai tourism offer by promoting sustainable tourism (CBT) that has an assured sustainable criteria (the CBT Standard). The implementation of the digital ecosystem approach implies a better reputation for the CBT offer and more visibility to tourism experiences located in secondary cities as well. By promoting the CBT offer, this digital platform supports new communities that are interested in participating in the tourism industry. This will allow for the creation of newer products and services that involve CBT and therefore more opportunities to expand the sustainable offer of Thai tourism. Especially leveraging the reputation of Thailand as a sustainable destination could further imply and boost the country's soft power as a consequence. This is because Community-Based Tourism presents Thainess — thus, Thai culture — as a real authentic consumption. Hence, the creation of a digital multi-stakeholder network focusing on Community-Based Tourism aligns with TAT goals and develops the sustainable tourism offer within Thailand both at a local and international level.

Lastly, the ecosystemic approach of the CBT Net fosters partnerships and stakeholder engagement to achieve TAT's goal n°3 "*Thrive for excellence: develop TAT to become a High-Performance Organization*". It will also foster better expertise goals and tourism standards, as well as a better understanding of sustainable tourism dynamics overall. If TAT contributes to the creation and promotion of the CBT Net, it will have a better image as a government organization. The platform could also permit communities and operators to manage their tourism offer and evaluate the steps needed to develop it.

In the analysis of the *Tourism Authority of Thailand 2023-2027 Executive Summary*, as analyzed in section 1.3, two particularly interesting consumer identities were

discovered. TAT found an emerging increase in FIT travelers (Fully-Independent travelers), especially those coming from the West, and also found importance in targeting high-value tourists (TAT, 2021). These two distinct segments might not necessarily overlap, as high-value visitors tend to prefer customized tourism experiences and, hence might rely on tourism operators to take care of their holidays.

Therefore, the CBT Net could be structured to target both segments. FIT travelers might find purpose in the booking system as an easier tool they can utilize to organize their trip. Moreover, it would be easier to obtain specific information and recommendations from the implementation of a review system; this way, tourists can make informed decisions. If the CBT Net also prioritizes the inclusion of the CBT Standard created by DASTA, then this would allow tourists to understand the quality of the offer and so might be willing to pay more for the exclusive CBT experiences.

On the other hand, private tours and personalized itineraries are the epitome of the comfort experience; if we add that to the creation of a sense of belonging and connection to the destination, we could obtain a high-value experience. Presenting a list of local tourism operators or travel agencies that support CBT, could be key to attracting these visitors. This way, high-value tourists who desire a personalized experience could contact those sustainable tourism operators directly and work with them for a tailored trip. Therefore, the CBT Net is also a great tool for all those tourism operators that tailor the best well-fitted offer for their clients.

However, considering how Community-Based Tourism has a self-management approach, it is then the local tourism organization — thus, the community groups — that should analyze the characteristics of the desired target audience, and act consequently.

Perceived authenticity in a brand can lead to increased trust and perceived value among consumers. Therefore, building trust in a brand can boost loyalty, reputation and perceived value through positive word-of-mouth (Intuluck, Srisakun, and Tadawattanawit, 2023). The CBT Net could enhance these principles, by offering a different perceived value on Community-Based Tourism, one that

builds more awareness of this tourism model and that therefore provides more reliability to visitors.

4.3.2 Contribution of the CBT Net to SDG Achievement

Chapter Two focused on the importance of sustainable tourism for minimizing the negative impacts of the industry and maintaining the resources for the sake of future generations. The CBT Net checks the economic side of sustainable development as it supports the CBT initiatives in Thailand by providing a platform that supports the economic development of communities. Considering how CBT initiatives are concentrated in lesser-known destinations, the CBT Net might improve the tourist flows in more remote areas of the country. This will stimulate the economic development of the Thai tourism industry and the communities.

As for the social sustainability impact, the CBT Net intensifies collaboration among stakeholders. In addition, by promoting the CBT initiatives to a wider audience it directly provides social empowerment to the community groups. By letting local people know the importance of a competitive digital offer in smaller destinations, the CBT Net could be a catalyst to improve their quality of life

Lastly, environmental sustainability is managed by the CBT Net because it promotes ecological conservation of the environment and eco-friendly tourism practices. The digital dimension of the CBT Net conducts the plan of educating travelers in understanding CBT and in partaking in responsible eco-friendly tourism practices. In addition, it partners with conservation organizations to mitigate the risks caused by climate change on smaller destinations.

As for the Sustainable Development Goals analyzed in Chapter Two, we shall explore of the CBT Net supports each one accordingly.

The CBT Net answers **SDG n°8** *"DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH"* because it fosters economic growth of local communities by allowing more opportunities to access the tourism market and reach tourists. The interconnection between CBT ecosystems can enhance the skills and knowledge of community groups and their understanding of how to implement sustainable tourism within

their communities. Smaller stakeholders will also gain from the CBT Net as it can allow major growth and support for them as well. This will further facilitate decent working conditions and major income generation than before. In addition, it allows the promotion of the CBT offer and, if successful, predisposes the creation of newer CBT initiatives throughout the country that will enhance the economic growth of smaller destinations.

The CBT Net addresses **SDG n°10** *"REDUCED INEQUALITIES"* because it permits easier market access to those community groups that have reduced skills and would otherwise be more marginalized than other CBT offers. This is because the CBT Net assures a common platform for CBT promotion, so the possibilities for those communities to reach their target markets increase.

In addition, the CBT Net promotes community empowerment, allowing community groups to be in charge of tourism resource management and reduce disparities within the tourism industry. Moreover, the promotion of the diversity of cultural heritage permits to protect the local traditions.

The **SDG n°12** *"RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION"* is acknowledged by the CBT Net because by promoting the CBT offer, it advocates for sustainable and responsible tourism in Thailand. Moreover, the support of CBT initiatives further encourages the safeguarding of the environment, the preservation of cultural heritage and the minimization of the travel impact. If successful, the CBT Net will foster CBT initiatives and further allow the sustainable development of the tourism industry in Thailand. Lastly, through an awareness-raising and educational plan, it could further induce tourists to adopt sustainable behaviors when traveling..

The **SDG n°13** *"CLIMATE ACTION"* is met by pushing on the conservation efforts made by the CBT offer. The CBT Net allows for those achievements to be recognized on a bigger scale. Furthermore, the promotion of the CBT initiatives permits space for eco-friendly means of transportation that tourists can use to reduce their travel impact.

The CBT Net facilitates the achievement of **SDG n°17** *"PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS"* due to the interconnection between numerous stakeholders and CBT ecosystems that would allow the project to exist. The promotion of

multi-stakeholder engagement from a partnership platform allows for more understanding and security in the offer, permitting easier progress towards the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

In conclusion, the CBT Net fosters the sustainable development of the CBT offer and reaches the objectives of the SDGs we analyzed.

4.3.3 SWOT analysis

The CBT Net is a strategic digital ecosystem project that aims at enhancing the potential of the CBT offer as a driver of the sustainable development of the Thai tourism industry. Its technological implementation highlights numerous strategic opportunities to promote Community-Based Tourism and assist community groups in the B2C approach. However, its creation might pose some challenges.

The following is a SWOT analysis of the CBT Net, representing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of this potential digital ecosystem platform.

When it comes to the **strengths** of the CBT Net, we can see that the enhanced collaboration among communities and stakeholders would facilitate knowledge and resource sharing. In addition, the CBT Net fosters the promotion of sustainable tourism, which highlights the protection of local heritage and environmental resources as a direct consequence.

From a technological point of view, the CBT Net enhances the visibility of the CBT offers throughout the country, presenting them in one unique platform. The platform permits the promotion of the CBT offer as a whole across various channels and reaches a larger audience interested in sustainable tourism. This provides empowerment for the local communities as they might gain more benefits due to the increased visibility of their offer, as well as more motivation to improve their tourism products.

Moreover, the co-creation with tourists alleviates marketing pressure on community groups and makes the CBT offer more interactive. This also regards the opportunity to educate travelers on sustainable tourism and CBT without too much effort. In addition, the presence of the CBT Standard assures quality control to both

tourists and operators, allowing for the CBT offer present on the CBT Net to become more attractive.

Lastly, the CBT Net sets clear solutions to the TAT's 2023-2027 goals, as well as answering some of the SDGs that mostly relate to CBT.

When it comes to the **weaknesses**, we could surely consider that the CBT Net requires complex coordination, especially in harmonizing numerous stakeholders, and especially for long-term success. Moreover, the CBT Net calls for a considerate initial investment to provide and test the technological features that it plans to involve. Lastly, there might be marketing challenges regarding the promotion of the many different types of CBT offers (e.g. wellness, ecotourism, homestays etc.), which might create confusion to the general public who does not have a clear idea of what CBT stands for.

There also poses the question of whether a centralized platform diminishes the self-management aspect of CBT. It does not necessarily because it simply provides more visibility to the offer and allows tourists and operators to understand which communities offer real sustainable tourism. In addition, the autonomy of the decision-making process is still within the community group so it does not mean that they must register their offer on the platform at all; they still have control over the initiatives, promotions, products and services that they offer. The CBT Net simply amplifies their voices from a local perspective to a global audience.

However, the CBT Net also presents numerous **opportunities** for Communty-Based Tourism. The technological integration of an existing competitive offer could make it more attractive to visitors and stakeholders, which would result in a greater economic impact for the former and the possibility of newer partnerships with the latter. By this means, the coordinated effort among stakeholders could advance the chances to shape Thailand into a sustainable tourism hub and gain global awareness of Thailand's sustainable achievements. In addition, the wider market expansion might influence target markets of choice, like high-value tourists or foreign visitors interested in sustainable tourism. In addition, the CBT Net fosters tourism towards lesser-known destinations and

secondary cities, perhaps mitigating tourism flows in other crowded destinations. Another opportunity regards the possibility of promoting different kinds of CBT tourism (ecotourism, wellness tourism etc.) in one platform, which could answer the needs and desires of many different types of visitors and tourism operators.

The efforts in promoting sustainable tourism might envision the destination brand and destination image of Thailand as one that is more sustainable. In addition, it might develop both the national brand and regional brands in the process.

Lastly, the CBT Net might be able to target specific visitor segments. First of all, revisitors could be interested in the discovery of a deeper relationship between the destination and find in the CBT Net a practical service to explore secondary cities. In this context, CBT could also expand the concept of Thainess to integrate local traditions and cultures, expanding on the marketable side of CBT, reachable through soft power enhancement. The second target market that the CBT Net could address is the FIT travelers, who can find in the digital platform a cohesive space to understand CBT and an accessible booking system that can make the offer more attractive. To conclude, the CBT Net could entice the high-value market by offering an alternative tourism model and the possibility to contact sustainable tourism operators who can customize trips for these types of tourists.

Lastly, the CBT Net could face some **threats** as well. In particular, the CBT Net might result in a fragmented network, where some communities overshadow others. Perhaps, it might also lead to competition among communities in attracting tourists. It could also result in a conflict of interest among different types of stakeholders, who might not share the same value proposition as others. In this context, DASTA has the duty to find a balance between stakeholders. The right steps to implement would include establishing a platform for representatives of the *community ecosystems* (A) or *regional ecosystems* (B) to meet up with others and discuss potential challenges. For instance, they could coordinate each other's tourism offers to be complementary in order to influence visitors to engage in multiple tourism experiences, or perhaps they could focus on distinct niche markets to not create competition.

In addition, technological barriers and high costs might pose serious challenges to the implementation of the digital ecosystem, which is the core of the innovative process. Arising limits on both funding and skilled human resources could cause the project to not perform well. Thus, the idea of the CBT Net might have a negative impact on the CBT offer in the long run if certain issues arise. The budget challenges could be mitigated by focusing on existing resources like the B2C *CBT Thailand* platform, and integrating the project there.

Lastly, despite the gamification process having the potential to involve tourists as co-creators of the CBT Net, it might also commercialize the CBT offer in a negative light.

To conclude, the concept of a digital ecosystem like the one of the CBT Net surely presents potential positive outcomes, that could take the CBT offer from a local niche experience to a competitive tourism experience that could reach global markets. However, while it presents strengths and opportunities, these are counterbalanced by potential threats and a few weaknesses that should be addressed nonetheless. If DASTA, the communities and the main stakeholders are ready and willing to work together to maintain a sustainable balance and a common vision, perhaps the development of a digital ecosystemic platform could be possible in the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on everything analyzed in the past chapters, we have considered how destination image can enhance tourism reputation, how sustainable tourism — and in particular Community-Based Tourism — can provide a framework for achieving TAT's goals, how Thainess can generate attraction in particular towards non-Thai tourists, and lastly, how the implementation of a digital ecosystem platform proposes CBT from a local tourism model to a globally attractive offer.

Theoretical frameworks on destination image and branding provided an understanding of how competitiveness requires strategic planning. When we think about the possibility of reshaping Thailand's brand image as that of a sustainable

tourism hub, the marketing of sustainable tourism should be first in the action plan. The Tourism Authority of Thailand has worked on the *Thainess-experience* as a marketing strategy in the past decade. Particularly, Thainess has been used as a soft power asset to create images of what Thailand reflects. Scraping from the original nationalist idea of Thainess, in tourism-promotion this concept highlights numerous elements of culture that have shaped Thailand into the worldwide appreciated destination it is, despite limiting it a bit to stereotypes. In addition, the concept of the *'Five Fs'* (food, fight, film, festival and fashion) is further shaping the projected image of Thailand, luring potential visitors in the discovery of these five elements by engaging in tourism experiences. This vision might induce tourists to visit the country, however we might question the kind of flows that it attracts. In fact, we might wonder if at surface these assets provide additional benefits to the long-term goals of TAT. *The Tourism Authority of Thailand's 2023-2027 Executive Summary* stated multiple times that the country should switch towards alternative tourism that could bring high-value visitors to Thailand. When it comes to the *'Five Fs'*, it is hard to confirm whether those elements provide the appropriate target audience for the destination. This means that the destination could take into account the possibility of extending its offer towards different kinds of tourism models, that are by nature addressing sustainable development. For instance, Community-Based Tourism enables the possibility of extending tourism flows to secondary cities while maintaining a sustainability approach.

Thai soft power, and the concept of Thainess in particular, could take advantage of the potential of Community-Based Tourism as a sustainable tourism model to foster sustainable tourism and the promotion of off-the-beaten-path destinations. Community-Based Tourism could promote authentic experiences to foreigners, permitting those who would like to discover more about the destination to do so sustainably. In addition, it could answer TAT's goals of leveraging and promoting tourism to high-value tourists and expanding to newer markets.

Combining local experience-based offers with Thainess might boost the relationship with visitors and improve the possibility of re-visit intention, especially to secondary cities. In addition, these kinds of aspects might resonate with domestic tourism as well, leveraging on the fact that Thais can discover more

about their own country — as in, Thais discovering extended Thainess. If tourists are attracted to the idea of Thainess, then extending it to CBT promotion might persuade visitors to explore secondary destinations in a quest to discover more genuine forms of Thainess. Thainess simply turns into the umbrella concept that is needed to approach tourists in their journey to come upon local authenticity. It symbolizes a mechanism to affiliate those loyal visitors who are interested in deepening the relationship between themselves and the country. Basically, Community-Based Tourism takes emotional engagement into a sustainable dimension.

When it comes to marketing, after analyzing two recent promotional campaigns by TAT, we encountered two particularly interesting emerging soft power assets: nature and connection with people. These two could partake in the interconnection between Community-Based Tourism and soft power as elements to persuade visitors to explore CBT initiatives. In particular, ecotourism CBT could integrate the nature aspect, while culturally engaging experience-based activities fit the second one. Overall, these two emerging features could just boost the environmental and social sustainability of secondary trails, while collaterally influencing the economic dimension as well. Therefore, the Tourism Authority of Thailand could take advantage of these elements as a mechanism to attract interested tourists to CBT initiatives, while at the same time not distancing too much from the usual marketing campaigns they already produce. In particular, the only thing to pay attention to is the sustainability focus, implying that the viewers should understand how CBT differs from other mass-tourism-like experiences that might engage with the same assets.

In the last chapter, we also delved into the concept of the CBT Net.
By analyzing existing digital platforms on Community-Based Tourism, we observed a gap in the B2C approach, which is often managed by tourism operators instead. However, the opportunity of conceiving a platform that proposes the CBT offer to a wider audience could be the strategic solution to frame the projected image of Thailand as that of a more sustainable destination.

The proposal of the CBT Net introduces the development of a project that aims at creating a unique and strong space to promote the CBT tourism offer. The CBT Net works as a digital ecosystem that puts greater emphasis on stakeholders' involvement, which could permit us to take the interconnection to a different level. The creation of a dynamic platform aims at strengthening the ties and engaging in the support of local ecosystems as well. Moreover, the CBT Net digital ecosystem also leverages the key role of tourists, especially re-visitors, to enhance the competitive advantage of the CBT offer for the Thai tourism industry overall.

In particular, because of how the CBT management is structured in Thailand (with community groups and DASTA offices spread around the country), the CBT Net project makes it easier to promote the CBT offer as a whole. This platform model permits to create an easier vision of CBT initiatives within Thailand, while at the same time assisting community groups with the promotional aspect.

For tourists, this provides more reliability on the real sustainability of the tourism experiences. In particular, having a well-structured model that presents easier access to the CBT offer, CBT itself might become more attractive. For instance, having a direct booking system or an extended mapping design makes it more convenient for visitors to engage with the CBT initiatives and have reliability on them.

The roles of the ecosystem actors also play a big role in the digital network. In particular, communities maintain a key position as the managers of the tourism experiences and organizers of the offer on the platform, as well as providing the resources needed to maintain the products and services updated. Local operators should ensure the quality of the services they provide. For instance, if they are accommodation providers, they should provide updated availability. Other tourism operators should reply to feedback to maintain a professional image and obtain more trust. Moreover, by integrating contact details they enable major cooperation with non-local operators who wish to get in touch with them.

In addition, they are able to get in more direct contact with tourists thanks to the booking system, the review system and the gamification aspect. Lastly, tourists clearly maintain a key role as the demand side. They cooperate within the digital

ecosystem by providing reviews and feedback on CBT products and local services. They also have a co-creator role in the promotion of CBT tourism while partaking in the gamification process. This last point could be effective because it is innovative, promotes collaboration and fosters co-creation. It can help build inter-cooperation between community groups of one region ('*regional ecosystems (B)*') or stakeholders, to increase tourists' satisfaction and obtain more positive impacts overall.

Ensuring the quality of the CBT offer is a task well executed by DASTA, especially since the implementation of the CBT Standard as analyzed in section 2.2.3, which works as an evaluation of the sustainability of CBT initiatives. Other than being a certified self-assessment tool, the CBT Standard is a matter that might interest tourists and tourism operators as well. In particular, the verification of sustainable criteria of the CBT offer provides more reliability to FIT travelers and tourism operators interested in working with communities. This is because the CBT Standard created by DASTA, and acknowledged by the GSTC as a *'GSTC-Recognized Standard'*, is a great point of reference for the quality of the CBT initiatives. This allows the building of stronger relationships between stakeholders and communities based on the reliability of the offer's sustainability. More operators could be interested in engaging with CBT if the offer presents itself as a reliable source of sustainable tourism. The stakeholders would have no doubts about greenwashing if the platform presented the concept of the CBT Standard, which certifies that the tourism products are in fact sustainable.

In addition, the visibility of the CBT Standard in relation to a similar project advances the idea of a sustainable tourism offer, which consequently promotes the image of both DASTA and TAT as advocates of shaping Thailand into a sustainable tourism hub. Community-Based Tourism can then become a more acknowledged offer and increase the competitiveness of its products and services.

Clearly, this thesis advances some limits. In particular, the methodology consists solely of a theoretical nature, therefore providing gaps in the application of the project proposal. The lack of data, practical application or case studies does not

permit to explore the relevant potential applicability of the CBT Net. The relevance of CBT to Thainess also poses some limits, as applying a wider concept to smaller traditional experiences might diminish them — no matter how flexible the concept of Thainess is.

In addition, there is limited research on the impact of a digital B2C platform regarding CBT in Thailand, therefore this issue poses some limits on the potential implementation of the CBT Net. The qualitative data does not permit clear insights into whether or not the system is suitable for the promotion of the CBT model.

Moreover, limited knowledge and limited resources might provide limits to the research and coherence of information. In addition, potential policy plans the author is unaware of could also interfere with the applicability of the project.

Therefore, while this research inspects problems and tries to apply solutions, the lack of practical results limits it to possible conclusions. Thus, it is difficult to provide a full spectrum to understand the true potential of a digital ecosystem platform to enhance the competitiveness of sustainable tourism in Thailand overall.

However, the CBT Net could be understood as a blueprint for engaging with the B2C system in an interconnected way. Future directions should be explored thoughtfully in order to maintain the sustainable essence of CBT and mitigate the negative impacts of a digital platform to present the CBT model and offer. In addition to becoming a strategic extension of the model, the CBT Net could address the needs of high-value visitors and potential FIT tourists as well, making it stay ahead of the competition.

Nevertheless, Community-Based Tourism if proposed strategically, might enhance the competitiveness of the country overall. The structured nature of CBT and the existence of the CBT Standard make it a one-of-a-kind model that ensures sustainable tourism development to be effectively competitive. If The Tourism Authority of Thailand is interested in elevating its offer to the high-value market, fostering sustainable tourism development and rebranding its reputation as that of a sustainable tourism hub, then Community-Based Tourism presents itself as the competitive advantage needed to implement those long-term objectives.

Community-Based Tourism enhances the image of Thailand as a vibrant and culturally rich destination. Showcasing the country as a dense composition of cultures, local traditions and unique tourism experiences, can influence visitors in the discovery of lesser-known destinations and support responsible tourism. This will not only improve the general image of the destination, but it could also raise its status as a sustainable destination, contributing to more competitiveness of the tourism industry. The potential of the Community-Based Tourism offer for Thailand has an incredibly important opportunity to enhance the image of the destination as that of a certified sustainable tourism hub.

In conclusion, the strategic potential of CBT in Thailand illustrates how local tourism models could expand to achieve global impact, highlighting the pathway from local roots to global achievements.

REFERENCES

- Alves de Abreu L., da Conceição Walkowski M., Costa Perinotto A.R. and Fragoso da Fonseca J. (2024). *Community-Based Tourism and Best Practices with the Sustainable Development Goals*. Adm. Sci.
- ASEAN Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. (2024). *Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plan 2023–2027.* (https://ce.acsdsd.org/knowledge/thailands-national-economic-and-social-development-plan-2023-2027/#:~:text=Thailand%27s%20National%20Economic%20and%20Social%20Development%20Plan%202023%E2%80%932027,-January%2022%2C%202024&text=Thailand%27s%20National%20Economic%20and%20Social%20Development%20Plan%202023%E2%80%932027%20(NESCD,)%20and%20low%2Dcarbon%20society) Last accessed: 8th of March 2024.

- Bangkok Post. (2023). *Green tourism on the rise*. Bangkok Post. (https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/2662108/green-tourism-on-the-rise) Last accessed: 20th of March 2024.

- Barman P. (2023). *Ethnicity, Identity and Power: A Study on Contemporary Thailand.* Anudhyan: An International Journal of Social Sciences.

- Beerli A. and Martín J. (2004). *Factors influencing destination image*. Elsevier Ltd.

- Biswas R. (2023). *Thailand's tourism sector drives economic recovery.* S&P Global Market Intelligence. (https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/mi/research-analysis/thailands-tourism-sector-drives-economic-recovery-mar23.html) Last accessed: 7th of February 2024.

- Boonratana R. (2011). *Sustaining and Marketing Community-Based Tourism: Some Observations and Lessons Learned From Thailand*. ABAC Journal.

- Bramwell B. and Rawding, L. (1996). *Tourism marketing images of industrial cities.* Annals of Tourism Research.

- Butler R.W. (1980). *The Tourism Area Life Cycle: Conceptual And Theoretical Issues.*

- Byrd E. T. (2007). *Stakeholders in Sustainable Tourism Development and their Roles: applying Stakeholder Theory to Sustainable Tourism Development.* Tourism Review.

- Campos A.C. and Almeida S. (2022). *Global Perspectives on Strategic Storytelling in Destination Marketing.* Advances in Hospitality, Tourism, and the Services Industry (AHTSI).

- Casado Claro M.F., Saacedra-Serrano M.C.C and Huguet J.P. (2023). *Tourism as a Soft Power Tool. The Role of Public Diplomacy in Japan's Country and Destination Branding*. Journal of tourism, sustainability and well-being

- Chatkaewnapanon Y. and Lee T.J., (2022). *Planning Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in the Context of Thailand: Community, Development, and the Foresight Tools*. Sustainability

- Choi S.S. (2016). *A Study on Effect of Tourism Storytelling of Tourism Destination Brand Value and Tourist Behavioral Intentions.* Indian Journal of Science and Technology.
- Darwish A. and Burns P. (2019). *Tourist destination reputation: an empirical definition.* Tourism Recreation Research.
- DASTA (2021). *DASTA at a glance.* (https://www.dasta.or.th/en/article/656) Last accessed: 15th of March 2024.
- DASTA (2019). *Criteria for Thailand's Community-Based Tourism Development.* National Tourism Policy Committee.
- De Las Heras-Pedrosa C., Iglesias-Sánchez P.P., Millán-Celis E. and Jambrino-Maldonado C. (2020). *Importance of Social Media in the Image Formation of Tourist Destinations from the Stakeholders' Perspective.* Sustainability.
- Destination Mekong (2020). *First Mekong Hero announced at Destination Mekong Summit* (https://www.destinationmekong.com/tag/thailand-community-based-tourism-institute-cbt-i/) Last accessed: 18th of March 2024
- First Strategic Insight, (2021). *Pivotal role for tourism: interview with Yuthasak Supasorn*
- Forbes. (2022). *Unique Selling Propositions: What It Is, Why You Need One And How To Write Your Own.* (https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/07/21/unique-selling-propositions-what-it-is-why-you-need-one-and-how-to-write-your-own/) Last accessed: 24th of February 2024.
- Forbes. (2023a). *Thailand: Riding The Growth Momentum.* (https://forbesasiacustom.com/thailand-riding-the-growth-momentum/) Last accessed: 9th of February 2024
- Forbes. (2023b). *Thailand's Path To Responsible Tourism.* (https://forbesasiacustom.com/thailands-path-to-responsible-tourism/) Last accessed: 9th of February 2024.
- Gartner W. C. (1994)*. Image formation process.* Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing.

- Gato M., Dias Á., Pereira L., da Costa R.L. and Gonçalves R. (2022). Mar*keting Communication and Creative Tourism: An Analysis of the Local Destination Management Organization.* Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market and Complexity.
- Giampiccoli A. and Saayman M. (2018). *Community-based tourism development model and community participation.* African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure.
- Giannopoulos A., Piha L. and Avlonitis G. (2011). *"Desti–Nation Branding": what for? From the notions of tourism and nation branding to an integrated framework.*
- GSTC. (2018). *The Criteria for Thailand's Community-Based Tourism Development is now a GSTC-Recognized Standard.* (https://www.gstcouncil.org/the-criteria-for-thailands-community-based-tourism-development-is-now-a-gstc-recognized-standard/) Last accessed: 18th of March 2024.
- GSTC. *What can you do to travel responsibly?* (https://www.gstcouncil.org/for-travelers/) Last accessed: 26th of February 2024.
- GSTC. *What is Sustainable Tourism?* (https://www.gstcouncil.org/what-is-sustainable-tourism/) Last accessed: 20th of February 2024.
- Gurunathan A. and Lakshmi K.S. (2023). *Wellness Tourism in Post Covid-19 Scenario – Challenges and Opportunities.* European Chemical Bulletin.
- Hanna S. and Rowley J. (2011). *Towards a strategic place brand-management model.* Journal of Marketing Management.
- Head J. (2023). *Chinese tourists are returning - but not to Thailand.* BBC. (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67305693) Last accessed: 28th of February 2024.
- Henkel R., Henkel P., Argusa W., Argusa J. and Tanner J. (2006). *Thailand as a Tourist Destination: Perceptions of International Visitors and Thai Resident.* Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research.

- Hillebrand B. (2022). *An ecosystem perspective on tourism: The implications for tourism organizations.* Wiley.

- Ibrahim E.E. and Gill J. (2005). *A positioning strategy for a tourist destination, based on analysis of customers' perceptions and satisfactions.* Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

- Intuluck, W., Srisakun, C. and Tadawattanawit, S. (2023). *The Mediating Role of Perceived Value, Brand Awareness, and Brand Loyalty in Tourism Revisit Intention among High-Quality Tourists in Thailand.* Thammasat Review.

- Jocuns A. (2020). *Aroi Mai? The Multimodality of Thainess in Thai Tourism Videos.* De Gruyter Mouton.

- Kayoko I. (2010). *Theories and Models on Thai Tourism.* Japanese Journal of Human Geography.

- Kladou S., Kavaratzis M., Rigopoulou I. and Salonika E. (2016). *The role of brand elements in destination branding.* Journal of Destination Marketing & Management.

- Ledesma F., Navarro, M. and Pérez-Rodríguez, J. (2005). *Return to tourist destination. Is it reputation, after all?* Applied Economics.

- Margarisová K. and Vokáčová, L. (2016). *Regional Branding: Building Brand Value.* Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Et Silviculturae Mendelianae Brunensis.

- Matlovičová K. and Kolesárová J. (2012). *Destination image and possibilities of its formation: a case study of the image of Thailand as a tourist destination perceived by Slovaks.*

- McDowall S. and Wang Y. (2009). *An Analysis of International Tourism Development in Thailand: 1994–2007.* Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research.

- Med Pearls. (2023). *Slow Tourism, a sustainable and meaningful way to travel.* (https://www.enicbcmed.eu/med-pearls-article-slow-tourism-sustainable-and-meaningful-way-travel) Last accessed: 3rd of March 2024.

- MEDUSA Project. (2023). *What is adventure tourism and why is it more sustainable?*

(https://www.enicbcmed.eu/medusa-whats-adventure-tourism-and-why-it-more-sustainable) Last accessed: 3rd of March 2024.

- Museum Siam Official website.
(https://www.museumsiam.org/exhibition-detail.php?CONID=2545&CID=203) Last accessed: 16th of April 2024.

- Nguyen T.A.T. (2013). *One Village One Product (OVOP) in Japan to One Tambon One Product (OTOP) in Thailand: Lessons for Grass Root Development in Developing Countries.* Journal of Social and Development Sciences.

- Nye J.S. Jr. (2004). *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics.* PublicAffairs.

- Ooi C.S. (2015). *Soft power, tourism.* Springer International Publishing Switzerland

- Osborne M. (2016). *Southeast Asia: an introductory history.* Allen & Unwin

- Ozkan, B. I., & Boylu, Y. (2021). *A Study on the Use of Tourism as a Soft Power Instrument in International Relations.* Journal of Tourismology

- Pathak S and Ahmad M.M. (2018). *Role of government in flood disaster recovery for SMEs in Pathumthani province, Thailand.* Springer Nature

- Phanumat W., Sangsnit N., Mitrchob C., Keasang S. and Noithammaraj P. (2015). *A multi-stakeholder participatory approach in community-based tourism development: a case study from Thailand.* WIT Transactions on Ecology and The Environment.

- Pike S. and Mason R. (2011) *Destination competitiveness through the lens of brand positioning: the case of Australia's Sunshine Coast.* Current Issues in Tourism

- Pop N.A., Baba c.a., Năstase Anysz R. and Tohanean D., (2020). *National branding strategy and its effects on business and tourism.* Sciendo

- Prado F. and Trad. N. (2012). *Managing the reputation of places.* Reputation Institute

- Redden G.F., (2007). *The textuality of tourism and the ontology of resource: An amazing Thai case study* (pp. 93-104). Ashgate Publishing Limited

- REVFINE (2024). *Sustainable Tourism Guide: What is, Why Important, Examples and More.*

(https://www.revfine.com/sustainable-tourism/#ecotourism) Last accessed: 27th of February 2024.

- Rezk D. and Rosario K., (2019). *Does Tourism Foster Economic Growth in Thailand?* Jönköping University

- Rungchavalnont (2022). *Community-Based Tourism: Empowering Local Champions for Sustainable Tourism in Thailand.* UNDP (https://www.undp.org/thailand/blog/community-based-tourism-empowering-local-champions-sustainable-tourism-thailand) Last accessed: 21st of March 2024

- Sadq Z.M., Othman B. and Khorsheed R.K., (2019). *The impact of tourism marketing in enhancing competitive capabilities.* African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure

- Strangio S., (2023). *Thailand on Track to Meet Tourism Target for 2023, Government Says.* THE DIPLOMAT (https://thediplomat.com/2023/12/thailand-on-track-to-meet-tourism-target-for-2023-government-says/) Last accessed: 1st of March 2024

- Suansri P. (2003). *Community Based Tourism Handbook.* (Responsible Ecological Social Tour-REST) Mild Publishing

- Suansri P. and Yeejaw-haw S. (2013). *COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM (CBT) STANDARD HANDBOOK.* The National Research Council of Thailand and the Thailand Research Fund

- Suksutdhi T and Boonyanmethaporn W. (2022). *An exploratory factor analysis of Thainess experience-centric service construction for boutique hotel guests.* GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites

- Sustainability Leader United (2019). Potjana Suansri on How to Succeed with Community-Based Tourism (https://sustainability-leaders.com/potjana-suansri-interview/) Last accessed: 15th of May 2024

- TAT News (2023). *TAT premiers 'Meaningful Relationship' advertising film to the world.* (https://www.tatnews.org/2023/11/tat-premiers-meaningful-relationship-advertising-film-to-the-world/) Last accessed: 18th of April 2024

- TAT NEWS (2022). *Thailand ends COVID-19 Emergency Decree on 30 September 2022* ([Thailand ends COVID-19 Emergency Decree on 30 September 2022 - TAT Newsroom](#)) Last accessed: 16th of March 2024

- Thailand Public Financial Management Report 2012. *Central-Local Government Relations in Thailand*. World Bank

- Thaizer. *AMAZING THAILAND: IT BEGINS WITH THE PEOPLE* (https://www.thaizer.com/amazing-thailand-it-begins-with-the-people/) Last accessed: 20th of February 2024

- Thananusak T. and Suriyankietkaew S. (2023). *Unpacking Key Sustainability Drivers for Sustainable Social Enterprises: A Community-Based Tourism Perspective.* Sustainability

- The Nation (2024). *Thai cinema's soft power surge: Laughter, scares, and global influence* (https://www.nationthailand.com/life/entertainment/40036782) Last accessed: 10th of April 2024

- Thiumsak T., Ruangkanjanases A. (2016). *Factors Influencing International Visitors to Revisit Bangkok, Thailand*. Journal of Economics, Business and Management.

- Thomsen S.N., (2014). *Tourist agency launches new slogan for Thailand: Amazing Thailand. It begins with the people.* ScandAsia (https://scandasia.com/tourist-agency-launches-new-slogan-thailand-amazing-thailand-begins-people/) Last accessed: 18th of February 2024

- TIES (2015) *What is ecotourism?* (https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/) Last accessed: 3rd of March 2024

- Tosun, C. (2000) *Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries*. Tourism Management.

- Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). *About TAT* (https://www.tat.or.th/en/about-tat/history) Last accessed: 29th of February 2024

- Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), (2021). *Executive Summary TAT Corporate plan 2023-2027*

- Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), (2017). *The Second National Tourism Development Plan (2017 - 2021)*

- Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), (2023). *'Visit Thailand Year 2023: Amazing New Chapters' showcased at ITB Berlin 2023.* (https://www.tatnews.org/2023/03/visit-thailand-year-2023-amazing-new-chapters-showcased-at-itb-berlin-2023/) Last accessed: 3rd of March 2024

- Tourism Authority of Thailand Statistics: available at https://www.mots.go.th/more_news_new.php?cid=411

- TRAVEL WEEKLY ASIA, (2023). *These are the top markets for Thailand tourism in 2023* (https://www.travelweekly-asia.com/Destination-Travel/These-are-the-top-markets-for-Thailand-tourism-in-2023) Last accessed: 21st of February 2024

- Trupp A., (2011). *Exhibiting the 'Other' Then and Now: 'Human Zoos' in Southern China and Thailand.* ASEAS

- Tuohino A. (2002). *Lake Tourism Project Publications No.1: Destination Image of Finland: Survey of Tourism Professional's Attitudes*

- United Nations (UN), (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*

- United Nations (UN), (2023). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition. Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet*

- United Nations (UN). *The 17 Goals* (https://sdgs.un.org/goals). Last accessed: 13th of March 2024

- United Nations (UN), (2020a). *Decent work and Economic growth: why it matters* (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/8_Why-It-Matters-2020.pdf)

- United Nations (UN), (2020b). *Reduced inequalities: why it matters?* (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/10_Why-It-Matters-2020.pdf)

- United Nations (UN), (2020c). *Responsible consumption and production: why it matters?* (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/12_Why-It-Matters-2020.pdf)
- United Nations (UN), (2020d). *Climate action: why it matters?* (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/13_Why-It-Matters-2020.pdf)
- United Nations (UN), (2020e). *Partnerships: why they matter?* (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/17_Why-It-Matters-2020.pdf)
- UNDP (2023). *Home Stay, Sustainable Tourism* (https://www.undp.org/acceleratorlabs/blog/home-stay-sustainable-tourism) Last accessed: 3rd of March 2024
- UNESCO (2023). *Songkran in Thailand, traditional Thai New Year festival* (https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/songkran-in-thailand-traditional-thai-new-year-festival-01719) Last accessed: 10th of April 2024
- UNWTO. *Glossary of tourism terms* (https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms) Last accessed: 12th of February 2024
- UNWTO. *Resource Efficiency in Tourism* (https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/resource-efficiency-in-tourism) Last accessed: 20th of February 2024
- UNWTO. *Sustainable development* (https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development) last accessed: 21st of February 2024
- UNWTO (2023). *Tourism's Importance for Growth Highlighted in World Economic Outlook Report* (https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-s-importance-for-growth-highlighted-in-world-economic-outlook-report) Last accessed: 8th of March 2024
- UNWTO. *Tourism in the 2030 Agenda* (https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda) Last accessed: 15th of March 2024

- UNWTO (2017). *Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030.*

- UNWTO (2019). *UNWTO Guidelines for Institutional Strengthening of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)–Preparing DMOs for New Challenges*. World Tourism Organization: Madrid, Spain. (https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284420841) Last accessed: 7th of February 2024

- Ushakov D., Ermilova M. and Andreeva E., (2018). *Destination Branding as a Tool for Sustainable Tourism Development (the Case of Bangkok, Thailand).* Espacios

- Valieva, J. (2018). *Cultural Soft Power of Korea*. Journal of History Culture and Art Research

- Wang Z., Udomwong P., Fy J. and Onpium P. (2023). *Destination image: A review from 2012 to 2023.* Cogent Social Sciences

- Widjaja, Yunni, Khalifa, Gamal, Abuelhassan, Abuelhassan. (2019). *THE EFFECT OF DESTINATION REPUTATION ON THE REVISIT INTENTION TO HALAL TOURISM DESTINATION OF JAKARTA.* International Journal of Business, Economics and Law.

- World Economic Forum (WTO), (2019). *The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019*

- Yen N.T.H., Quynh N.T.T., Dinh T.D., Mai T.T.H., Duyen N.T.H., Hong P.N. and Duc B.M. (2024). *The Impact of Destination Quality and Image on Tourists' Loyalty.* Journal of Law and Sustainable Development.

- Yodsurang P., Kiatthanawat A., Sanoamuang P., Kraseain A. and Pinijvarasin W. (2022). Community-based tourism and heritage consumption in Thailand: An upside-down classification based on heritage consumption. Cogent Social Sciences.

- Yuan F. and Vui C.N., (2023). *The Influence of Destination Image on Tourists' Behavioural Intentions: Explore How Tourists' Perceptions of a Destination Affect Their Intentions to Visit, Revisit, or Recommend It to Others.* Journal of Advanced Zoology

- ZAWYA (2023). Thailand to focus on high-value, sustainable tourism. (https://www.zawya.com/en/business/travel-and-tourism/thailand-to-foc us-on-high-value-sustainable-tourism-y2toyub4) Last accessed: 20th of March 2024
- ZeeZest.com (2023). *Visit Thailand 2023: A Campaign Boosting High Value And Sustainable Tourism* (https://zeezest.com/travel/visit-thailand-2023-a-campaign-boosting-high -value-and-sustainable-tourism-3185) Last accessed: 11th of April 2024

OTHER REFERENCES

- *'Meaningful relationships'* promotional video (available on Youtube: https://youtu.be/aX26BitIcHs)
- *'Come travel, I want to meet you'* promotional video (available on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2KLfYr-UiQ)
- *CBT-I* platform: http://www.cbt-i.or.th
- *The Thailand Village Academy* platform: https://www.thailandvillageacademy.com/
- *CBT Travel Mart* platform: https://smartcbt.dasta.or.th/en/travel-mart
- The *CBT Thailand* platform: https://cbtthailand.dasta.or.th/webapp/

IMAGES REFERENCES

- **Figure 1.** Map of Thailand. (UN) (*https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/thailand-region-map.htm*)
- **Figure 2.** Amazing Thailand logo. (Tourism Authority of Thailand) (https://www.tourismthailand.org/home)
- **Figure 3.** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations Organization (2015) (https://sdgs.un.org/goals)
- **Figure 4.** Community-Based Tourism. UNDP (2022) (https://www.undp.org/thailand/blog/community-based-tourism-empowe ring-local-champions-sustainable-tourism-thailand)

TABLE REFERENCES