

Mindful Mindsets and Rural Community Characteristics in Promoting Sustainable Rural Tourism and Facilitating the Tangible Implementation of the Circular Economy

Abstract

Purpose—This study aims to examine the role of mindful consumption in promoting rural sustainability, particularly in the context of tourism in Muang Kaen Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand, by establishing a robust circular economy.

Design/methodology/approach—The data were collected through in-depth interviews with 28 informants who are tourism stakeholders regarding sustainable development, i.e., government officers, business owners, community leaders, and community members in Muang Kaen, to achieve the data triangulation. A thematic analysis of the interview data was employed in this data set.

Findings - The findings demonstrate three key themes for driving sustainable community development: a sense of community, leadership, and embodiment. At an individual level, local community members co-create a sense of community through Thainess, which gradually forms the social commitment to caring for neighbors, the community, and the environment. Carefulness also relates to another theme, ‘leadership’ – social capital, which drives mindful behavior among the community members. Both situational and official leaders are key persons in forming a culture of sustainability within the community. Finally, the community can achieve sustainable goals by driving from the individual to the collective level through the embodiment.

Research limitations/implications - This single-case study warrants further examination across different communities to generalize the findings to broader circumstances.

Originality/value - This study has shed light on how rural tourism can drive sustainable development through a Circular Economy and Mindful Consumption.

Paper type – *Research paper*

Keywords – Management, Circular Economy, Mindful Consumption, Collaboration, Community, Rural Tourism

1. Introduction

Thailand’s tourism industry is a crucial economic pillar, celebrated for its vibrant culture and stunning landscapes (Pongsakornrungrasit and Pongsakornrungrasit, 2021). This sector drives significant revenue, creating jobs and stimulating various industries. However, heavy reliance on tourism presents challenges. Economic volatility arises from seasonal tourist influxes and global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, causing severe downturns. Additionally, mass tourism leads to environmental degradation and strains local resources (Benner, 2020; Santos et al., 2023). Thus, tourism management requires knowledge or resources to deal with the dual impact of tourism on Thailand's economy, exploring strategies to enhance benefits and mitigate negative effects, aiming for sustainable growth while preserving environmental and cultural integrity. However, even in some countries, the sustainable development scheme still faces challenges from the different social, cultural, and political values that require different tactics to deal with sustainability (Bascopé, et al., 2019). In line with sustainable tourism, sustainable development requires the integration of three aspects, social, economic, and environmental, to drive sustainability (Marti and Puertas, 2022).

Thailand is one of the middle-income countries that has long struggled to be a higher-income country since the 1960s (Meemon et al., 2022). Many local people in rural areas are the government's target for raising the quality of life in terms of individual household economics and society (ElMassah and Mohieldin, 2020). Several factors contribute to a negative impact, including a rural poverty cycle exacerbated by climate-related shocks that affect mobility (Quiñones et al., 2021). Through the long period of driving the socio-economic, national strategic plan, the traditional economic model, linear economy, and the 'make-use-dispose' model are the key approaches to running 'economic value' (Liakos et al., 2019). Therefore, to drive sustainable development, the National Strategy Secretariat Office 2018 provided the key development guidelines in rural areas by zoning developing rural, agricultural, and industrial areas to focus on sustainable growth, creating eco-friendly water, energy, and food, and improving the paradigm for driving the future of the nation (Chanchitpricha et al., 2021). Community-based or rural tourism is one of the actions that drive sustainable development in the rural area (Naranjo, 2022). Furthermore, the concept of SDG was also integrated into the policy (Khajuria et al., 2022) through the concept of the Bio-Circular-Green Economy (Meiksin, 2020).

With the development of economics and society, natural resources and the environment are gradually deteriorating or becoming insufficient due to unsustainable consumption and resource utilization (Garcia et al., 2021). To mitigate resource depletion, the circular economy (hereafter, CE) has been employed to drive overconsumption and resource scarcity by focusing on economic benefits, environmental impacts, and resource scarcity (Liakos et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2019). However, most of its implementation focuses on industrial lines rather than the economy (Kovacic et al., 2019). Even though CE research is famed for its interdisciplinarity, the data show that a significant fraction is an engineering-based focus (Okorie et al., 2018) or in the tourism industry (Pongsakornrungrasit and Pongsakornrungrasit, 2021; Jirojkul et al., 2021a, 2021b). Additionally, most CE research has focused on the macro and meso levels, with little focus on the micro level (Barreiro-Gen and Lozano, 2020). So far, there needs to be more interest in focusing on CE and mindful tourism in rural tourism, where resources are heavily cycled in the ecosystem through consumption and waste.

Therefore, this study has shed light on how rural tourism can drive sustainable development through the circular economy and mindful consumption concepts. This study aims to examine the role of mindful consumption in promoting rural tourism sustainability, particularly in the context of tourism in Muang Kaen Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand, through establishing a robust circular economy. To answer the following research question, 'How circular economy and mindful consumption can drive sustainable development in rural tourism?', a qualitative study was conducted at the Muang Kaen Phattana Municipality or Muang Kaen, Chiang Mai, Thailand, which is an important area that started the path of sustainability and community-based tourism. It was awarded as a Green and Clean city in 2004 (Muang Kaen Phattana Municipality, 2022). This area previously explored community-based organic farming tourism a decade ago, addressing intensive chemical use in agriculture. Today, the community has evolved into a renowned tourist destination through waste-free management practices despite lacking direct prior research on mindful consumption. Insights from interpretive studies on Thai rural communities highlight their minimalistic consumption and self-reliant agricultural lifestyles, mirroring aspects of this community. A pilot study revealed initial evidence of mindful consumption elements, while Pongsakornrungrasit and Pongsakornrungrasit (2021) underscored collaborative efforts among stakeholders to cultivate green cultural behaviors essential for driving practical circular economies. Mishra and Chowdhary's (2024) qualitative research on Mindful Consumption and Tourist Behavior in India emphasized its motivational impact on new-age travelers, complemented by Eck et al. (2023) confirmation that mindfulness

significantly enhances tourist experiences. Moreover, studies by Kocapınar Batmaz and Ergen (2022) and Thiermann and Sheate (2022) indicate that mindfulness training influences consumption perceptions and promotes pro-environmental behaviors, collectively advocating for the integration of mindful consumption practices in tourism contexts.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The research on mindful consumption and the circular economy related to sustainable tourism development is covered in the following section. Section 3 shows the methods, information gathering, and analysis. This section's discussion of qualitative investigation serves as a case of how key informant interviews were used. The findings are presented in Section 4, and the discussion and conclusions, as well as suggestions for managing tourism in rural areas and further research, are presented in Section 5.

2. Literature Review

Tourism is one of the economic pillars that drive the country's wealth, and the government has supported resources to strengthen the industry (Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Pongsakornrungrungsilp, 2021). However, the tourism industry also negatively impacts the nation, such as pollution, social problems, natural resource degeneration, and so on (Pongsakornrungrungsilp et al., 2022). Thus, many scholars (Delgado et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2023) have recently proposed solutions for the industry's negative issues, including sustainable tourism and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Especially in SDGs 11, "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (Jaramillo, 2020, p.99), sustainable community, sustainable development, and social sustainability have been employed to achieve these SDGs goals (Zakari et al., 2022; Moriarty and Honnery, 2020; Salvia et al., 2019).

2.1 Circular Economy

The circular economy drives the global economy and produces resource scarcity (Liakos et al., 2019). While some studies have concluded that the broad grasp of CE principles, particularly in terms of cultural capital, natural capital, and the parasitical extractive or 'rentier' economy, has not been fully examined, the main concepts of CE have not been adequately studied (Webster, 2021). definitions remain ambiguous, such as the demands of stakeholders (Oliveira et al., 2021; Xhaferraj and Bragagni, 2020). Most concentrate on industrial processes rather than the overall economy.

In applying CE to communities, the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in Circular Economy (CE) community development has been underscored in prior research (Eikelenboom and Long, 2023). When examining the societal dimension of CE, it becomes evident that communities play a crucial role in propelling CE initiatives forward. Numerous scholars, including Yandri et al. (2023), Morrow and Davies (2022), Blanchard et al. (2023), Bradley and Persson (2022), Iamtrakul and Chayphong (2022), Piyathanavong et al. (2024), and others, have employed CE as a framework for studying social and cultural contexts within local communities. In doing so, they emphasize the significance of factors such as local traditions, religious practices, and interpersonal relationships as key contributors to the success of sustainable initiatives.

To mitigate resource depletion, the CE has been employed to drive overconsumption and resource scarcity by focusing on economic benefits, environmental impacts, and resource scarcity (Liakos et al., 2019). However, most of its implementation focuses on industrial lines rather than the overall economy. So, the CE concept is the one in which most of the study is focused on business and industry. However, rural community sectors still need more, where resources are heavily cycled in the ecosystem through consumption and waste, and local

stakeholders require collaboration and teamwork. To make sustainable decisions and behaviors in everyday life, all individuals must understand sustainability, awareness, and consciousness of their activities. Local Government Development Municipals frequently play an important role in the development of the entire procedure (Rodrigo-Illarri et al., 2021). Thus, considering the connections within and among sectors, institutions, and local players, a comprehensive approach is required to transition to a more CE.

Rural areas are the government's targets for raising the quality of life regarding individual household economics and society (Meemon et al., 2022). Therefore, to drive sustainable development, the National Strategy Secretariat Office provided the key development guidelines in rural areas by zoning developing rural, agricultural, and industrial areas to focus on sustainable growth, creating eco-friendly water, energy, and food, and improving the paradigm for driving the future of the nation, including the Bio-Circular-Green economic model (Pimoljinda and Hongwiset, 2023). The study of the Circular Economy (CE) faces challenges in the Thai context, and small businesses need the necessary assistance to actively promote the CE concepts (Nobre and Tavares, 2023). Rural tourism is one of the actions that drive sustainable development in rural areas (Naranjo, 2022). However, it is noteworthy that rural tourism has exhibited a relatively slower adoption of circular economy practices despite the significant role of community end-users and consumers (Garcia et al., 2021).

Studies exploring the intersection of tourism and the circular economy have emphasized the potential of rural tourism in promoting sustainable resource use, waste reduction, and local economic resilience. Positive outcomes include adopting eco-friendly practices such as sustainable agriculture and waste-to-resource innovations, benefiting local communities and visitors (Axhami et al., 2023; Cong et al., 2023). However, significant challenges remain, including limited infrastructure (Sørensen & Bærenholdt, 2020), a lack of stakeholder awareness (van Langen et al., 2021), and difficulties implementing circular models in areas with low economic and technological capacity. Rodríguez et al. (2020) further note the lack of evidence and knowledge on transitioning to a circular economy model in the tourism sector. Success in rural tourism hinges on education, investment, and community engagement.

2.2 Mindful Consumption

A mindful mindset, i.e., care for nature, self, and community, is recommended by Sheth et al. (2011) for driving mindful behavior (Kumar et al., 2023). This is the reason why people are concerned about sustainability. Sheth et al. (2011) launched the original concept as a blend of Caring and Temperance that incorporates elements of daily living. Other scholars have shown these elements are four components set as a mindful mindset concept (including attitudes, values, and expectations): the Value of the community (Kaur and Luchs, 2021), the Value of natural resources (Kılıç, 2020), the Value of tourism to a community (Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Pongsakornrungrungsilp, 2023), and Personal mindset different from originality. There are six components to mindful behavior (including acquisitive, repetitive, and aspirational consumption). These factors include Behavioral control, Behavior modifications, Thinking modifications, Perception of the right mindset, Value creation behavior, Decisions about travel/activities, and Travel convenience (Jirojkul et al., 2021a). Mindfulness is associated with bio-spheric and altruistic values (but not egoistic values), and these values influence the relationship between mindfulness and two types of sustainable consumption: socially conscious consumption and frugal consumption (Kaur and Luchs, 2021; My-Quyen et al., 2020; Richter and Hunecke, 2020).

Mindful consumption is a growing idea that describes how consumers' mindful mindsets (such as self-care, environmental stewardship, and community stewardship) influence their behavior (Bhattacharya et al., 2021). Most mindful consumption mindset findings start with individuals being aware of care at their level before caring for others, society, and the environment. Being mindful requires caring about (Milne et al., 2020) and being conscious of how our consumer choices affect our well-being and the well-being of others, both at an individual and community level, encompassing social, economic, and environmental aspects. Mindful consumption involves deliberately selecting sustainable and ethical products that align with our values (Haider et al., 2022). Empathy plays a crucial role in motivating us to consider the social and environmental consequences of our actions on others (Milne et al., 2020).

Mindful consumption has numerous community benefits. For instance, individuals with higher mindfulness tend to reduce food waste (Olavarria-Key et al., 2021), cut unnecessary resource use (Dhandra, 2019), and make eco-conscious purchases (Chammas and Yehya, 2020), thereby curbing pollution and benefiting community health. It also fosters social cohesion and cooperation (Khawngern et al., 2021), promoting sustainable community practices. Communities practicing mindful consumption are more efficient in sustainable development, supported by studies in community tourism emphasizing its role in environmentally friendly progress (Pongsakornrangsilp and Pongsakornrungsilp, 2021).

The intersection of tourism and mindful consumption (MC) remains an underexplored research area, despite its potential to enhance environmental and community well-being by promoting economic value, cultural preservation, and self-esteem (Jirojkul et al., 2021). Bagaria and Nirmala (2023) note the lack of academic attention to the relationship between MC and tourism, especially regarding social and economic sustainability. Although higher mindfulness levels are linked to sustainable behavior, there is limited understanding of how mindfulness at both individual and organizational levels contributes to a sustainable economy, particularly within rural tourism and circular economy frameworks. Mindset plays a crucial role in shaping consumption choices, with consumers' predispositions influencing their engagement with circular consumption systems, which are critical for product flow (Gomes et al., 2024). Despite its importance, research on how mindset drives circular economy sustainability still needs to be completed (Kim, 2021), highlighting the need for further investigation in this area.

Based on the literature review, we propose the following propositions

Proposition 1: Circular Economy initiatives within communities emerge from community members' mindful consumption practices.

Proposition 2: Mindful consumption practices are established in rural communities as this process's foundational core social norms.

3. Method

This qualitative research delves into the role of a CE and mindful consumption in promoting sustainable tourism in rural Thailand. The study analyses the social reality and explores underlying phenomena related to rural tourism. It also allows researchers to gather rich and in-depth data to understand how a circular economy and mindful consumption can drive sustainable development in rural tourism. This qualitative study investigates the sustainability of Muang Kaen rural tourism, employing empirical investigation to explore this contemporary phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Phengsarakate and Chamaratana, 2021). On-site data collection occurred during specific periods, including the "Nhaw Nee Tee Muang Kaen" [Celebrating this Winter at Muang Kaen] flower festival every December, cultural street events between February and March, and trail and rafting activities along the Mae Ngad and Ping rivers.

Participant and non-participant observations were conducted often to collect data from natural settings. After visiting and meeting with the local community, researchers identified purposively informants and invited them to participate in the project. To comprehend the context, Muang Kaen tourism activities were gathered through project and organizational annual reports. Researchers conducted in-depth, non-structured interviews with 28 key informants representing various stakeholders involved in sustainable community development, including government officials, business owners, community leaders, and local community members. Interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes each, yielded rich and detailed data. Researchers categorized the informants into four distinct groups: government officials (GO), business owners and employees (BO), community leaders and members (CM), and locals (LC), totaling 28 interviews for the case study (Table 1). Data were transcribed during the interviews to allow researchers to understand the contexts and demonstrate all details from the field. The analysis utilizes the principles of mindful consumption and the CE to identify sustainable management strategies.

Table 1 Key Informant Information

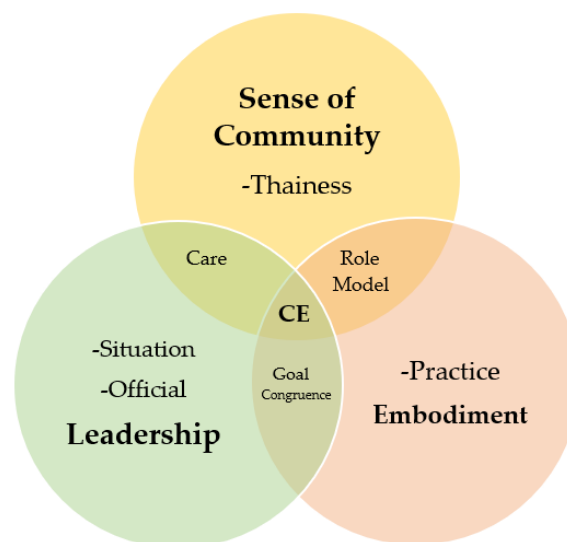
Code	Key Informant Criteria	No. Key Informants	Code and Position
GO	Government officials and Heads of organization members, participants must have a minimum of 2 years of experience working in government roles related to management within the area before data collection.	6	GO1 Head of Organization GO2 Officer GO3 Head of Department GO4 Officer GO5 Trainee GO6 Politician
BO	Business Owner and employees, participants must have at least 6 months of experience in businesses related to tourism within the study area before data collection,	8	BO1 Business Owner BO2 Business Owner BO3 Café Owner BO4 Restaurant Staff BO5 Grocery Shop Owner BO6 Rural merchandiser BO7 Barista BO8 Café Owner
CM	Local community leader (Kam-Nun, or Phu-Yai Ban) Team leaders or group members, and village chiefs, must have at least 2 years of leadership experience relevant to the area before data collection.	5	CM1 Tourism Community Leader CM2 Tourism Team Member CM3 Concept Farm Owner CM4 Tourism Team Member CM5 Former Rural Leader
LC	Farmer or local resident, residents of the Muang Kaen area in Mae Taeng District, Chiang Mai Province. They should have lived or worked in the area for more than 3 years before data collection.	9	LC1 Grocery shop/Farmer LC2 Farmer LC3 Farmer LC4 Farmer LC5 Farmer LC6 Farmer LC7 Farmer LC8 Farmer LC9 Farmer

Source(s): Table by authors

Mobile sound recording applications captured interviews, and transcriptions were meticulously created for comprehensive documentation. The researcher conducted multiple readings of transcripts to identify initial themes and patterns, followed by coding meaningful units to reveal emerging themes. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis, focusing on recurring themes and patterns. Researchers utilized an iterative process during the analysis, ensuring the reliability and validity of the results by repeatedly reading the transcripts and categorizing the data accordingly. The review triangulation method ensured verification, incorporating diverse perspectives from key informants. To enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, different lenses from authors were employed during the data analysis to triangulate the findings.

4. Result

This study demonstrates that CE and mindful consumption support sustainable development in the context of rural tourism. As mentioned in Figure 1, The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process began with open, line-by-line initial coding, where segments of data were assigned descriptive labels to capture key concepts. These initial codes were then refined and grouped into broader, more abstract themes through final coding, reflecting deeper insights into the phenomenon under study. During the initial coding phase, key concepts related to “caring for other” and “cultural practices of Thainess”, “situation and official leadership behaviors” and “waste management practices”, “embodiment of sustainable knowledge practice” and “intergenerational knowledge transfer”. These codes were generated from specific participant quotes reflecting their experiences with tourism, social practices, and waste management. The findings of this inquiry will be further discussed in the next sections. The findings of this inquiry will be further discussed in the next sections.



Source(s): Figure by authors

Figure 1. Sustainable Development Model in Rural Tourism

4.1 Driving ‘Thainess’ through a Sense of Community

A sense of community links to the internal sensation of belonging, connection, and mutual support that individuals encounter inside a certain group, neighborhood, or social setting.

Members of the Muang Kaen share spiritual ideas and Buddhist values, establishing a cooperative and sharing community with a cohesive attitude. Community development through tourism revealed that the cultural aspects are an important part of bonding the community members, as seen by the Muang Kaen Winter Flower Festival and Cultural Walking Street's success in the following example.

'Thai-Khien' Cultural Street, Ban Chor La, has performances as one of the highlights that attract people. There are performances three or four sets of performances. We have a significant participation in the community together. Everyone is wholehearted and fully committed. we are proud of being a part of the great 'Tai Khien and Tai Yai' community in Ban Chor Lae" (CM1)

Through the interviews, it is apparent that the villagers share a collective direction, with a common identity, values, beliefs, and interests deeply rooted in their cultural practices of 'Thainess'. This, coupled with enhancing their economic and sustainable well-being through tourism, fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity within the community. The dynamics of interpersonal relationships, communication, and the sharing of ideas, experiences, and values among people are all included in social interaction.

Thainess is an important community component profoundly ingrained in familial relationships and communal support within the context of Muang Kaen and contributes to fostering social harmony. It is a framework that governs attitudes, behaviors, and cohabitation inside the Thai family. For example, young people or children listen to their elders' recommendations. One person stated,

"...like I teach my children. Whatever is good, do it. Wherever it is bad, don't do it. If you know it's spicy, don't eat it. There's nothing wrong with it" (BO5)

As seen from this example, parents' and grandparents' roles comprise the transmission of knowledge and guidance between generations, acting as a preventative mechanism for failures and behaviors that directly influence social behavior.

Other important aspects of Thainess characteristics are the subjective ideals of respect and graciousness, often known as "Kreng Jai" (no disturbing prevention to others) (Khirikoekkong et al., 2023; Vora and Kainzbauer, 2020), which were established in rural society, the pursuit of social harmony—an illustration from the interview concerning waste management.

"There are no people who secretly put garbage in until it overflows. (The blue bag - author) if we put a lot of it in and stuff it in, we will sympathize with the garbage collector when he comes to lift the garbage into the car because it is big. (LC4)

Following an interview with LC4, it was discovered that locals sympathize with or show concern for waste collectors, owing to the labor involved in lifting heavy or polluted rubbish bags or those containing rotten water. The idea leads to the practice of trash segregation to alleviate the issues facing waste collectors.

Thus, within the context of Muang Kaen, it can be claimed that it is associated with combining thoughts such as Social Structure, Buddhist and spiritually influenced beliefs, the characteristic of respect and graciousness known as "Kreng Jai," the promotion of social harmony, moral systems, as well as political and historical influences. This thorough investigation has resulted in a better understanding of Thainess in this region.

4.2 Driving the Mindful Behavior through Leadership

Leadership is an individual action that shows vision, skilled communication, the ability to influence and guide others, responsibility for making important decisions, and relationships with team members and villagers to achieve objectives and create a positive and productive environment within their teams or organizations. Leaders in Muang Kaen can be identified by the two ways listed below.

Situational Leaders are persons with better knowledge or abilities of a profession who are recognized by other community members as social capital. The following quote is from one situation leader who undertakes the responsibility to actively engage and execute tasks to ensure the success of the activities. Another action of situation leadership is community mobilization, which involves gathering people with similar interests to ask for government support.

"So it's better just to do it. There is no need to build a place; we have electricity lighting the way, ... work can be done quickly. There are points to improve; there are steps 1, 2, 3, 4, ... that follow. People disagree we listen, we have meetings every time, and there are solutions, differing until we find an answer that satisfies the villagers. If they have something to say, we gather and discuss it. It has been many meetings like this" (CM1)

Naturally, emerging people or situational leaders typically have defined objectives and actively seek collaboration to the extent of their capacities. In this case study, the leader has invited participants with various skills and resources to join and discuss their sources. The leader's duties include organizing resources, encouraging teamwork, and fulfilling the goals that have been set.

Official Leaders are local government officers who run the Muang Kaen community's planned activities or projects. This leadership style frequently works in the background, establishing projects and policies specific to the local area. The chosen community leaders tasked with creating various projects for the community display an open attitude toward community criticism. Nevertheless, their ideas and ideologies greatly impact their actions and behaviors. In an interview, a visionary leader is portrayed as someone who creates regulations and sets an example by establishing waste-sourcing procedures and encouraging organic waste management at work.

"... he also has existing projects, such as separating wet garbage to make compost. For example, in the Muang Kaen office, leftover food scraps are not drained. ... for example, rinse soup and pour it around the base of trees, using leaves as mulch. He encourages staff and Muang Kaen members to do the same or mix it with water to make plant organic fertilizers..." (GO3)

Leadership is significantly related to an organization's goal for several important reasons, leading by the example of GO3. In addition, policies often seek help from the situation leader, which makes work more efficient and effective. Mindful leaders recognize the long-term benefits of sustainable consumption, including cost savings, reduced environmental impact, and enhanced brand reputation. They focus on the enduring success of their organizations, which is closely tied to responsible consumption practices. The ideas behind mindful consumption are interconnected with reducing waste and environmental impacts through CE principles. Fundamentally, in this case, local official leaders have set a good example by protecting the environment and adopting trash separation. The community's trash separation policies have benefited from their effective initiatives. We truly are advantaged to have leaders who recognize the importance of protecting the environment. Additionally, there is an

opportunity to enhance advanced waste management techniques, such as improving trash categorization for simpler disposal.

In summary, leadership's significant relationship with mindful consumption lies in its ability to drive change, influence behaviors, and shape the culture and direction of organizations. Leaders who prioritize and promote mindful consumption can create a ripple effect, encouraging individuals and businesses to make more responsible and sustainable choices.

4.3 Bonding all community members through Embodiments

Embodiment is the connection of neural functioning with behavior and cognition. Individual embodiment is influenced in Muang Kaen, and it has a foundation in kinship society during the lifetimes of the rural inhabitants. This is consistent with socio-cultural embodiment, sensorimotor and perceptual embodiment, metaphorical and linguistic embodiment, and others. The key finding from the informant is that the process of embodiment in rural areas involves the practice of mindful consumption in the community to support CE.

The practice of embodiment application relates to waste management in the Muang Kaen community with community participation. Muang Kaen has launched a project to make the community aware of the responsibility for quality waste management by reducing plastic bags and containers. Plastic bags should be washed thoroughly for an efficient waste disposal process. This project has a campaign for villagers to bring dirtied single-use plastic bags that have been cleaned and dried. They can barter 10 pieces of cleaned plastic bags with fresh farm eggs instead. After completing this project for one year, the community still runs the routine of sorting waste according to this method until now.

"... in our household, we sort the waste ourselves because it can be sold and transferred for money..." (LC1)

"... I've rinsed them (dirtied plastic-author) and rolled them up using rubber bands. We wash them first because it causes bad smell ... previously, we collected soaked single plastic bags for eggs ..." (BO6)

As the LC1 and BO6 mentioned, participating in the waste-for-eggs project has become a yearly routine for the villagers. This practice can be analyzed using the principles of embodied practice, and it commences with villagers' engagement in the waste-for-eggs initiative, which addresses waste issues. The emphasis, repetitive participation action for a year, and integration of waste management knowledge through perception and Muang Kaen learning lead to adaptive behaviors, and contextual learning capability. However, the Muang Kaen authority does not directly provide feedback and reflective observation to the community, as Gelsomini et al. (2020) argued, which is essential in the embodied practice process in long-term participation in community knowledge embodiment.

Interestingly, non-participating households in the waste-for-egg project still follow practices similar to those involved, such as segregating food waste for composting and using it as local animal farm feed. They buy blue plastic bags to contain household plastic waste. This household plastic waste is also washed, dried, and then placed in blue bags, a practice similar to households participating in that project. This might reflect the essence of Thainess, where there is a sense of communal understanding. If someone does something unusual or incorrect, it becomes widely known. Therefore, everyone tries to emulate each other.

Finally, three overarching themes were identified through the final coding process and were analyzed (1) "Driving 'Thainess' through a Sense of Community," which captures the cultural practices and mutual support that bind the community together (2) "Driving the Mindful Behavior through Leadership" reflecting the role of leaders in driving collective action and

sustainable mindfulness practices and (3) “Bonding all community members through embodiments” which highlights the community's mindful behaviors in waste management and environmental.

4.4 The Integration of Sense of Community, Leadership, and Embodiment in Driving Sustainability

The data were synthesized by alternating between data and the concepts of mindful consumption and circular economy to understand the role of mindful consumption in driving sustainability and CE in rural tourism.

Care From Individuals to Society

Care is a product of integration between a sense of community and leadership. The specific behaviors can be seen in waste management. Community members prioritize washing food waste bags before disposal, observing a group of elderly individuals who habitually clean and tightly roll them before discarding them. Additionally, a case grilled banana sweet vendor endeavors to collect her clients' leftover bamboo sticks for fuel for cooking stoves, considering the waste collectors who might otherwise get hurt by these sticks.

“...Vegetable waste is given to fish...I don't put dirtied food trash in the garbage bag before cleaning. Why? If we put it when the garbage collector picks it up and it breaks, it will get dirty. ... bamboo sticks for grilled bananas that you throw away, I'll take them home and use them for fuel cooking stoves... the garbage collector didn't see that there was a stick inside that could hurt his hand. I will be feeling sensitive and sorry for him...” (BO6)

The habit of considering the impact of one's actions on others aligns with Cognitive Empathy, reflecting the capacity to comprehend and interpret the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes, fostering a deep understanding of diverse perspectives. Such habits manifest in compassionate and altruistic behaviors within rural communities, where individuals willingly engage in proactive and supportive efforts to alleviate others' suffering, driven by a genuine concern for their well-being. This encompasses social sensitivity and ethical contemplation as individuals responsively navigate social and emotional cues, fostering a nurturing environment that cultivates mutual understanding and harmony.

The community's sense of care is intricately linked to familial and communal bonds, where families and close-knit communities collaborate to care for all kin members, grounded in a profound sense of kinship. Examining Thai rural society's communal ethos reveals that consumption behaviors are shaped by interlinked principles and beliefs, evidenced by cognitive empathy, compassion, altruism, ethical deliberation, and social sensitivity. These intrinsic characteristics influence views within the community. External factors, such as family practices emphasizing reciprocal care between generations, exemplified by the concept of filial or “Katan-yu,” further underscore the distinctive features of Thai culture, shaping mindful consumption practices and imprinting on the community's CE.

Congruence of Community Goals

The study discovered that in the Muang Kaen community, the results of the Top-down strategy frequently depend on cooperation from the situation leader, who is the one who convinces and pushes the villagers to cooperate to achieve success. Another point is that inherent community leaders (situational leadership) encourage individuals with similar goals to initiate their projects or, at times, seek government assistance through a grassroots strategy. Alternatively, they can address issues that require resolution within the community, allowing for their development

and improvement, eventually achieving harmony. When formal leaders aim to conduct activities in a shared direction or have a vision they wish to foster collectively, this signifies a coordinated endeavor with a singular output target and distinct purpose.

“...The committee is ready, the villagers are ready, and there are leaders who are ready, with aligned thinking, making it a successful endeavor, making it better and better...” (CM1)

The interviewee, CM1, highlights a strong dedication to good communication with all involved organizations, including the working committee, the village group, and the governmental sector providing essential background support. To ensure the success of tourism activities that align with a shared vision like a previously successful event, this commitment entails the interchange of ideas and aims through consensus-building. Such participation is a model instance of the individual's significant contribution, illuminating the different advantages and difficulties for all parties concerned.

In summary, goal congruence is about aligning stakeholders' interests and objectives with broader sustainability goals, whether related to mindful consumption or CE. When these goals are in harmony, they promote responsible resource management and sustainable practices within organizations and society.

Role Model through the Collective Interaction

Usually, the senior member of the family acts as a role model by controlling the use of plastic bags and sorting debris. They impart this wisdom to younger family members orally and through warnings and lessons. The significance of the traditional household model has decreased due to the generational divide caused by the transformative decade's cultural shift. As a result, some younger demographic groups need help in obtaining schooling. This investigation shows that families have mentors who serve as role models, and communities also look up to and learn from one another. This procedure promotes community cohesion by highlighting the significance of information sharing, hands-on involvement, and reciprocal modeling in molding particular behaviors.

“... But, in the house, if we don't do it, we will be warned by the old people or our parents why we don't keep the trash in a proper place ... parents are strict, and they show me how to change the LED (save energy – author) light instead of the old one ...” (BO7)

According to BO7, role models play an important societal function by offering inspiration and motivation for personal endeavors. In cultures marked by mutual dependency, role models significantly impact sustaining embodied practices, particularly among the younger generation, whereas adults naturally engage in self-embodied activities. Role models can also help CE by providing guidance and support for mindful consumption, supporting personal development, and resulting in a better environment with less waste or garbage.

5. Discussion

To respond to Garcia et al.'s (2021) call for adopting CE practices in the rural community, this study has shed light on how rural tourism can drive sustainable development through CE and mindful consumption. This study focused on investigating the role of mindful consumption in driving sustainability and CE in the rural tourism practices of the Muang Kaen community in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The traces of the past reveal a series of developments and man-made resources aimed at fostering tourism and entrepreneurship in the original rural agricultural community. The success of these endeavors has earned this small community a renowned reputation, attracting a continuous influx of tourists and experiencing annual growth. We found

that government agencies must have the manpower, facilities, knowledge, and participatory regulation, which was also echoed by Pesce et al. (2020). Modern ideas focus on developing new commercial tourism businesses, recognizing the need to transform traditional culture. Both trends aim to improve the local economy's prosperity and can develop cultural preservation sustainably through stakeholder collaborative efforts (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2021).

However, the government or associated government agencies have not yet discovered evidence indicating the presence of circular design processes (Danvers et al., 2023) (aimed at reducing environmentally harmful activities) that support activities from both community and tourism-related activities, as well as activities arising from capitalism development accordance with Yasni et al., (2023). Our study advocates that policies and programs that support such activities should be developed into comprehensive plans, and numerous actions that exemplify these concepts should be implemented, which aligns with the view of Tleuken et al. (2022). For instance, consideration should also be given to adopting legislation or regulations that govern communal activities (Kumar et al., 2023). The government's or relevant government agencies' implementation of the 3Rs idea is an acceptable and effective step that has received recognition from residents. Our study shows positive evidence of community waste management methods such as sorting waste for sale, donating or composting, and emphasizing waste disposal quality. However, challenges remain for the younger generation, who have restricted educational options, highlighted by Mykkänen and Repo (2021). Our study shows that some elderly people in Muang Kaen are still unwilling to change their behavior, i.e., they fail to comply with standard accepted practices, and hence, they don't pass circular practices wisdom to the younger generation, who often follow their elders. As a result, the uptake of circular practices is low in this region. This is in contrast with the findings of Neves and Marques (2022), who indicate a trend among young people to reduce the use of take-make-waste products has grown significantly. Our study shows that both groups continue to engage in unacceptable waste management behavior.

In terms of sharing society and economy, Muang Kaen lacks any tangible evidence, as they are deficient in planning and policies. In contrast, Marjamaa et al. (2021) showed that local municipalities fostered innovation, environmental solutions, and business by providing platforms for external companies, etc. On the other hand, Muang Kaen has been engaged in continuous collaborations with external organizations, primarily between government entities (Pesce et al., 2020). However, what needs to be added is cooperation between the government and the private sector, consistent with Kurniawan et al. (2021), which showcases the state collaboration with private companies to transfer bulky waste to drop-off facilities in Germany. As well as collaboration among different private entities. Such partnerships would significantly strengthen the private sector and drive the development of robust community foundations, empowering residents to independently pursue small-scale businesses that are relevant to their needs. Consistent with Khalid et al. (2019), community empowerment is considered a prerequisite for community support for tourism (business sector). The role of community leaders is always crucial in local communities. When community members know and understand the circular economy (CE), they can effectively apply it to promote circular design. Although current activities in circular design may need to be completed, there is a specific focus on the principles of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle (3Rs) only. Community members exhibit favorable behaviors related to the 3Rs. Communities need to gain additional knowledge in waste categorization responsible for local municipalities (Dagilienė et al., 2021) and efficient management of different types of waste, enabling them to transform trash into suitable new upcycled materials for new products.

Mindful consumption is closely linked to CE principles to minimize waste and reduce environmental impacts (Chen et al., 2021). An economy prioritizing sustainable purchasing

habits can be established by encouraging active participation and social responsibility within the community. This contributes to personal growth through mindful decision-making and fosters stronger connections, empathy, and care for the community, society, and the natural environment, according to Dhandra (2019). Ultimately, it paves the way for the development of a more sustainable and supportive society. By sustaining traditional beliefs and values, our study also contributes to the resilience of local families. It affects the behavior of future generations, similar to Kurniawan et al. (2021), who reported a cultural approach to CE development in Indonesia. It can be communicated to the community that rural areas embracing mindful consumption can significantly contribute to the advancement of the CE, particularly when there is an understanding of CE principles. There's a big connection between income, cutting expenses, and environmental issues. The case study highlights rural dwellers' need for change by showing how even little changes in income and expenses significantly influence their financial well-being. As they adopt a sustainable attitude, it becomes second nature to them and produces positive CE results. Promoting sustainable consumption practices and awareness-raising techniques can help people change spending habits.

In rural communities, mindful consumption practices are formed as fundamental social values that sustain the CE, with three main ideas of leadership, embodiment, and a sense of community, all supporting the growth of mindful consumption in rural communities in Thailand. The mindful mindset emphasizes self-care and caring for others and the environment and originates from a caring mindset. It facilitates decision-making and consumption. The importance of Care in the context of the CE is highlighted by a recent study (Pla-Julián and Guevara, 2019). According to Pongsakornrungrasit and Pongsakornrungrasit (2021), goal congruence among stakeholders is a prerequisite for green culture, and leadership congruence in the Muang Kaen community results from the cooperation of situation leaders and official leaders. Ultimately, the presence of an extended family-like group and role models impart waste knowledge to younger family members verbally through warnings or lessons impact embodiment significantly.

This study explores tourism and future-oriented perspectives, particularly in how communities act as unique showcases that attract tourists to visit, purchase goods and services, and participate in local activities. Such engagement leads to resource consumption and, in some cases, unsustainable practices. One critical factor contributing to this issue is a lack of mindfulness in consumption, compounded by insufficient knowledge, technology, management systems, and weak legal frameworks, all of which exacerbate the problem. This study affirms that if local communities and residents adopt mindfulness, they can better support the circular economy (Jirojkul et al. 2021). A strong sense of community, where members care for one another, aligned with shared sustainability goals under official leadership, has a positive local impact. Moreover, the embodiment of sustainable practices, with family members serving as role models, is integral to fostering mindfulness within the community. Thus, communities facing limitations in resources, workforce, and technology should prioritize developing a mindset that fosters sustainable practices as a foundation for long-term growth. This research suggests that cultivating a mindful mindset among leaders may shape policies that enhance the mutual understanding between communities and visitors, leading to a respectful and sustainable coexistence.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the role of mindful consumption in promoting rural sustainability, particularly in the context of tourism in Muang Kaen, through establishing a robust CE as a closed-loop system. The conclusion underlines the importance of local inhabitants' strength

and resilience in community-oriented tourism, particularly in developing nations with limited resources, financial restrictions, and insufficient access to technology. Communities that adopt a mindful attitude, trying to reduce environmental damage, are more likely to achieve sustainable development. This strategy is becoming increasingly relevant as global patterns alter under the impact of modern capitalism. Strong local leadership, sustainable practices, and mutual understanding among locals and tourists will be critical to long-term tourism success and resilience. We show that the development of CE in rural communities, while essential for sustainable tourism, demands careful planning, implementation, and control, given its novelty in these settings. Communities embracing mindful consumption, rooted in cultural concepts, exhibit successful and sustained CE activities. However, this success hinges on the government and villagers acquiring knowledge and understanding of CE components. In line with the aim, our study underscores the importance of integrating 'Mindful Consumption' to avoid reliance solely on waste management practices. Thus, the two propositions proposed earlier were found to be true. Neglect-conscious consumption may impede the establishment of a CE, potentially reverting to a linear economy. Resource leakage from the system highlights the need for adaptable consumption practices. Discussion on practical implications suggests that rural tourism leaders interested in developing CE can apply MC to encourage sufficiency in consumption and reduce waste from overconsumption. The pay-as-you-use principle, where individuals who consume more pay more and those who consume less pay less, contributes to establishing sustainable consumption patterns among tourists. Additionally, both individual mindfulness and social factors drive the success of CE initiatives. Sustaining these efforts requires recognizing the importance of transferring knowledge within families and across generations, as this intergenerational exchange directly influences future planning and development strategies for CE communities.

This study has implications for both practitioners and policymakers. The findings are quite helpful for practitioners as they emphasize care, goal congruence, and familial role modeling as critical factors for successful mindful consumption in rural community tourism. This suggests that guiding tourist behavior becomes pivotal for responsible consumption management. This study's findings will likely benefit other similar rural regions of Thailand or other parts of the world. Future implications for sustainable rural tourism depend on maintaining Thai rural identity and characteristics, encouraging intergenerational practice and knowledge sharing, and encouraging cooperation between government and community leaders. By acting as facilitators, both kinds of leaders make sure that these behaviors continue in time. Thus, policymakers should design policies that encourage all stakeholders to work together and engage in circular practices.

However, the study's findings are based on qualitative data (interviews) and thus have associated limitations of the qualitative research. Future studies, therefore, should focus on gathering empirical evidence from different tourism regions in Thailand and beyond and employ a mixed-methods approach to triangulate the findings. Future studies should also investigate how external knowledge collaboration can improve local circular economy management. This includes addressing government knowledge gaps and enhancing community waste separation and reuse practices.

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