

# HOW CAN WE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY SOFT POWER IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES?

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of soft power in community-based tourism within developing countries, emphasizing how local communities can leverage their cultural assets, social cohesion, and shared values to enhance their influence and attractiveness as tourism destinations. The research addresses the critical question of how soft power can be harnessed to promote sustainable tourism development, focusing on the Bang Taboon community in Phetchaburi Province as a case study.

The study's objectives are twofold: first, to identify the elements of soft power that can enhance community-based tourism, and second, to propose a comprehensive methodology for studying soft power within community tourism frameworks.

Employing a qualitative research design, this study utilized Fieldwork, in-depth interviews with community leaders, local business owners, and tourists, alongside with focus group and participatory observations. This approach provided a holistic understanding of the community's role and influence in tourism development.

Findings indicate that the soft power of the Bang Taboon community is rooted in its distinctive local cuisine made from indigenous plants, conservation-oriented products, and natural tourist attractions, all enriched by a vibrant history and unique cultural heritage. The study proposes eight essential steps for harnessing and maximizing this soft power, offering a structured framework for other communities to discover, develop, and utilize their soft power to effectively promote sustainable community-based tourism.

These insights contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism management by highlighting the importance of cultural and social capital in enhancing destination attractiveness and community resilience.

**Keywords:** Soft Power, Community Tourism, Tourism Development, Developing Countries

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