

How to Cite:

Manirojana, P. (2022). Public participation for promote Thai cultural tourism and the development of OTOP Nawatwitee for reduce social equality. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S5), 150–166. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS5.5214>

Public Participation for Promote Thai Cultural Tourism and the Development of OTOP Nawatwitee for Reduce Social Equality

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Abstract---The aim of this study is to investigate the role of public participation to promote One Tambon One Product (OTOP) development and cultural tourism to support social equality in Thailand. To achieve this objective, the relationship between public participation, local community participation, OTOP development, cultural tourism and social equality is examined. Additionally, the mediating role of OTOP development and cultural tourism is examined. Primary data is preferred to examine this relationship which is collected with the help survey questionnaire from Thailand. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used for data analysis. It is found that; public participation is crucial role in OTOP development, cultural tourism, and social equality. Public participation can strengthen the local community development and OTOP development which lead to the cultural tourism and social equality. OTOP development promote cultural tourism which causes to increase social inequality in Thailand.

Keywords---public participation, local community participation, One Tambon One Product (OTOP), cultural tourism, social equality.

Introduction

Social equality is a situation in which all people living in a particular society have equivalent rights, liberties, as well as status, possibly involving various civil rights, freedom of expression, independence, and equal access to all public goods as well as social services. Social equality is the important element of nations (Illøkken et al., 2021) because it has long lasting effects on nations. Equality among the individuals bring prosperity at local and national level. Equal access to various goods and services by all individuals bring the prosperity and resolve several issues. Particularly, equal access to all the individuals causes to increase livelihood opportunities for the local people and lead to resolve chronic poverty

which increase the people welfare. Therefore, social equality has central importance among the nations.

The phenomenon of social equality is also important in Thailand. Along with the other countries, a significant level of social equality is also needed to achieve in Thailand to cope various challenges. Thai people required equal access to all the opportunities (Yiengprugsawan, Kelly, Seubsman, & Sleight, 2010) which is important for the welfare. The level of social equality is low among various countries which are in developing phase. Particularly, income equality is one of the major issues among several countries (de Soysa & Vadlamannati, 2021; Patel et al., 2018). A limited number of people enjoying most of the resources which causes income equality and leading to the deeper poverty and stop the welfare at local level having major effect on the economic development of nations. The countries having less resources for their people are facing the problem of equal distribution of resources. Therefore, the developing countries have less resources for their people which causes to generate the issue of social inequality. Thailand is also a developing country, that is the reason, it is facing social inequality which is causing several other issues such as rise in poverty. Particularly, at various local levels such as villages, the confirmation of a required level of social equality is important. Although, the Thai government is trying to resolve this issue by providing the access to the resources, however, still the required level of social equality is not achieved in certain parts of Thailand which require to develop more strategies.

Thai government has made several strategies to reduce the level of inequality and increase the social equality among communities. The most important step in this regard is the public participation at local level (Bester, 2020; Yao, He, & Bao, 2020). Government in Thailand is participating in various activities at local level to provide support to the people in various activities such as business as well as tourism related activities. The participation of government with local community can promote various initiatives carried out by the people. Therefore, the public participation along with the local community participation is important to foster good initiatives. The mechanism of public participation approach is highlighted in Figure 1.

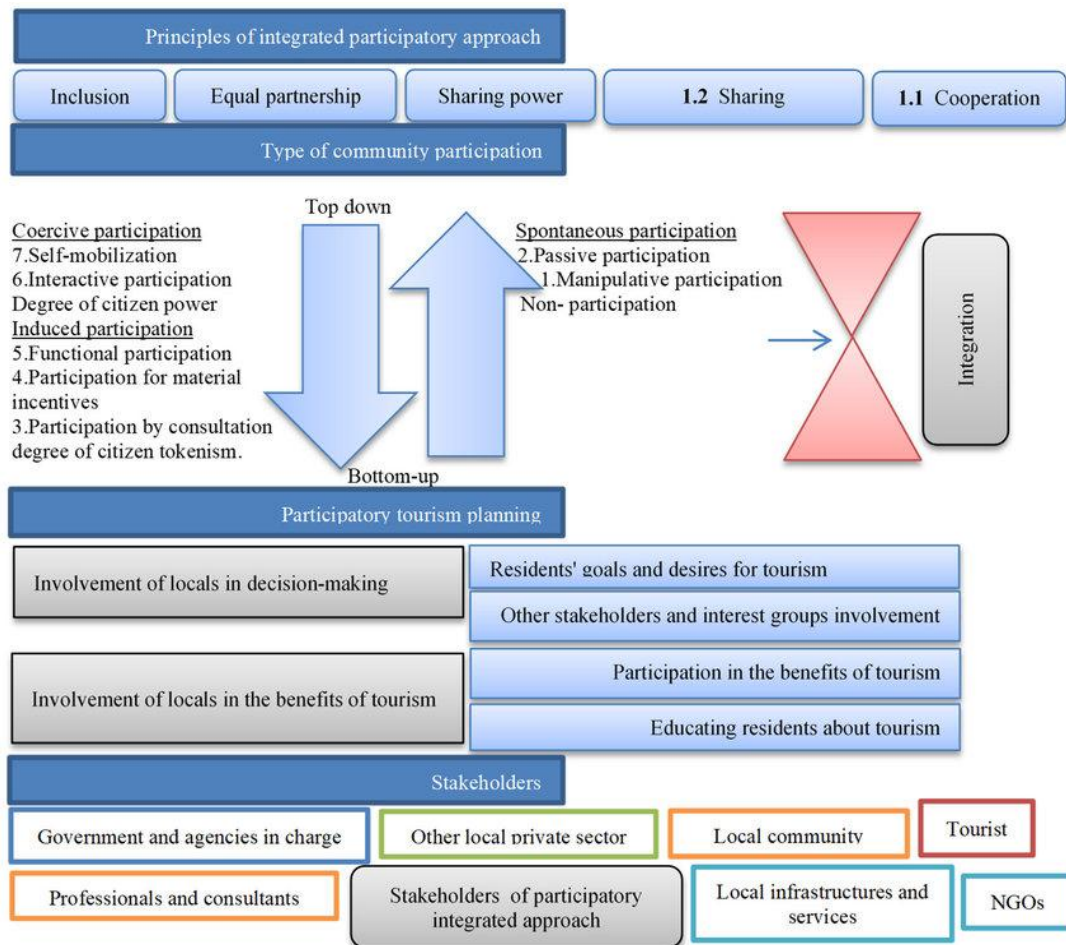


Figure 1. Public Participation Approach
Source: ELADWAY, AZZAM, and AL-HAGLA (2020)

Thus, public participations could be a better tool to enhance social equality by providing equal opportunities and equal access to the resources at local level. The integration between public participation and local community participation in various initiatives lead to the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) development and cultural tourism in Thailand. OTOP facilitates the local entrepreneurship activities among villages (Hoang Thanh, Ta Nhat, Nguyen Dang, Ho, & Lebailly, 2018) and various other parts of the country which may also have relationship with cultural tourism activities. The public orientation towards the local entrepreneurship activities can enhance the cultural tourism activities. The people starting any business activity related to the cultural tourism can get support from the government with the access to the resources. Therefore, public participation at this level facilitates the OTOP development and cultural tourism. The promotion of OTOP development and cultural tourism promote social equality among the communities.

Finally, the purpose of this study is to inspect the role of public participation to promote OTOP development and cultural tourism to support social equality in Thailand. The relationship between public participation, local community participation, OTOP development, cultural tourism and social equality is examined. This is an important relationship, and the role of public participation is important to promote social equality, however, the effect of public participation on social equality is ignored by the previous studies. Public participation is addressed in various studies (Ali, Arifin, Razman, & Ismail, 2018; Lihua, Tianshu, Yuanchao, Sijia, & Zhaoqiang, 2020), however, it is not addressed in relation to the social equality. Therefore, this study is attempted to contribution to the literature by considering this literature gap.

Literature Review

Public Participation

The collaboration between the government bodies with public as well as private sector is the important activity which has important outcomes for the people. The participation of government in different activities to facilitate people lead to the better results in terms of welfare. The collaboration of government with the people in different entrepreneurship related activities can enhance the activities. The approach of public participation is linked with the tourism activities in Thailand, government bodies in Thailand promoting the participation to promote tourism. Experiential, creative and participatory activities related to tourism is concentrated on sustainability, promotes the well-being of the local community, cultivates a holistic, understated approach, achievement of quality and is grounded on the collaboration as well as partnership. Cultural tourism in Thailand has significant importance for tourism industry (Polnyotee & Leruksa, 2019) which is connected with public participation. This study proposed that, public participation relates to the OTOP development and cultural tourism activities. Further, OTOP and cultural tourism (Pranee, Boonying, & Suchookorn, 2020) increases the social equality. Therefore, this study proposed a relationship between public participation, local community participation, OTOP development, cultural tourism, and social equality which is hilighted in Figure 2.

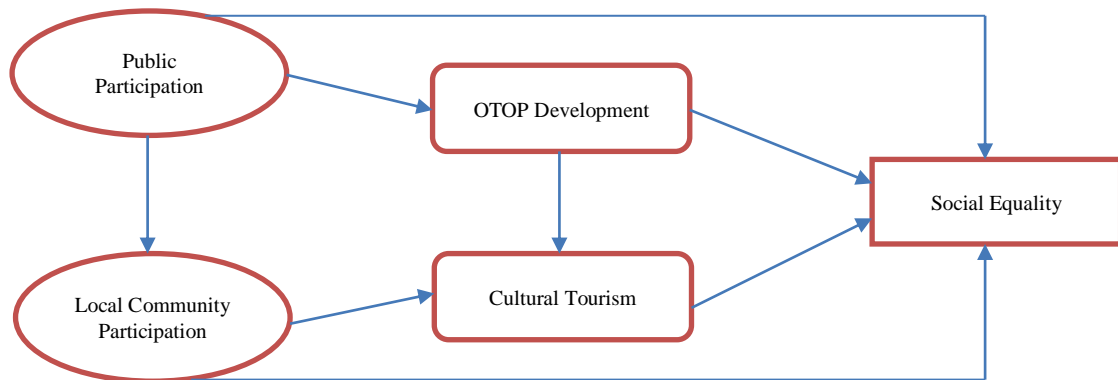


Figure 2. Framework of the study showing the relationship between public participation, local community participation, OTOP development, cultural tourism, and social equality

Local Community Development

A local community can be described as a group of networking people residing in a same location. Globally, it is often used to indicate a group that is formed around various common values and is recognized with social unity within a shared geographical location, usually in social units bigger than a household. Local community development is the way in which people have more resources and better decision-making power in various aspects of life. Majorly it is based on the economic development of people in which they face less issues related to the economic activities having better livelihood opportunities. Community development has major importance for the nations as it has long term effect on the welfare of community as well as economy. Several previous studies have identified the importance of community development (Motilewa et al., 2018), however, it is not addressed in relation to the public participation and social equality.

Public participation has important relationship with community development at local level. While working on public participatory approach, government support the people initiatives by providing various resources. The support of government to the people by providing various resources lead to the social equality among societies. As the social equality is based on the equal distribution of various resources among the people (Di Maio, Graf, & Wilson, 2019). It also involves the distribution of equal opportunities for business as well as other activities along with the access to the resources. Public participation facilitates the local community participation which has important contribution to social equality. The collaboration between government and private sector in rural areas lead to the community development and causes social equality. Therefore, there is an important connection between public participation and community development (Phukamchanoad & Girdwichai, 2019) which promote equality among people. Hence, following hypotheses are proposed;

Hypothesis 1. Public participation has significant effect on local community participation.

Hypothesis 2. Public participation has significant effect on social equality.

Hypothesis 3. Local community participation has significant effect on social equality.

Hypothesis 4. Local community participation has significant effect on cultural tourism.

OTOP Development

OTOP is a local entrepreneurship incentive program intended by Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra during his 2001-2006 Thai Rak Thai government. OTOP is the program which developed to promote locally made products of each of Thailand's 7,255 tambons. People made various products at local level which help them to earn money to fulfill their daily routine activities such as food experience and shelter. Government support towards these products and service help them to get success in these activities which has positive role in welfare of community. As highlighted by previous studies that OTOP has positive influence on local community (Phukamchanoad & Girdwichai, 2019; Wattanametha, Wongkamhaengharn, Nitmee, Saepu, & Ariyakuare, 2018).

Public participation has significant effect on the OTOP. Both the public participation and OTOP has relationship with each other's because both are the programs based on government. Public participation supports the programs started by the government under OTOP program. Participation of government is also aimed to facilities business activities of local people and OTOP is also the program which support locally made products and services. Therefore, both the OTOP program and public participation are on the same page having influence on the local people welfare. OTOP is the rural development policy which has key importance to influence the people welfare (Akasarakul, Cooharajanane, & Lipikom, 2017) with the help of public participation.

Hypothesis 5. Public participation has significant effect on OTOP development.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is kind of tourism that permits the tourist to contribute to local cultural initiatives, like festivals as well as rituals. Consequently, the tourist from various countries can enjoy a genuine cultural exchange with the people of certain area. The activities related to the cultural intention help the visitors to learn a new tradition, discover, experience new culture, and consume the tangible along with the intangible cultural attractions/products/services in a tourism destination. In Thailand, cultural tourism has significant importance because (Wongsawat & Deebhijarn, 2019) it has handsome contribution to the tourism industry. It is one of the important types of tourism which has positive role to enhance economic activity at national and local level. Cultural tourism allows the local people to start various business activities related to the cultural tourism and generate income. Therefore, it is important type of tourism which facilitate people by reducing the poverty and increase the livelihood through income generating activities. Thus, along with the other countries, cultural tourism has key importance for the nations.

OTOP has relationship with the tourism (Picharchannarong, 2005). Because OTOP objective is to facilitates locally made products as well services. The locally made products and services help to design the better culture. The products of a specific area help portray the picture of cultural. Therefore, development of OTOP in any area causes to increase the importance of cultural activities. Entrepreneurship activities promoted by OTOP has the potential to promote cultural activities. Therefore, in Thailand, OTOP has special importance for cultural tourism promotion. As the Thai government always tried to promote tourism activities, therefore, the government also focuses on OTOP programs to enhance cultural tourism. The increase in the participation of cultural tourism in the tourism industry increase the importance of government towards OTOP projects to enhance the business activities of a specific region which can lead to the cultural tourism. The relationship between cultural tourism and OTOP is highlighted in previous studies. OTOP is also based on the cultural models (Huong, Thuy, & Phuong Linh, 2020) which has significant influence on cultural tourism. Hence, it is hypothesized that;

Hypothesis 6. OTOP development has significant effect on cultural tourism.

Social Equality

Social equality is based on the concept that all people living in a specific area should have equal rights (Di Maio et al., 2019; Illøkken et al., 2021; Wongkaluang & Srisorn, 2021). To enjoy equal rights by all people is required better level of social equality. Furthermore, social equality is the autonomy, and equal access to various public goods and services. Difference between the services and goods for specific community lead to the inequality in the society which has negative effect on the people. Among the nations, social equality is important to achieve because it is important to promote inclusive social as well as economic growth. Therefore, the availability of equal opportunities as well as to reduce the inequalities is important to empower the people living in a specific area.

Social equality is influenced by both the OTOP development and cultural tourism activities. OTOP development is based on the government interventions which causes to provide equal access to the people. The OTOP development facilities all people equally for the development of entrepreneurship activities. Therefore, OTOP reduces the inequality at local level and lead to the social equality. Similarly, cultural tourism also helps to reduce social inequality because cultural tourism provides various opportunities for the people to enhance income generating activities. Increase in the level of income reduces the income equality. As income inequality is the a major part of social inequality (Bai et al., 2020; Patel et al., 2018). Therefore, both the OTOP development and cultural tourism lead to the social equality. Hence, following hypotheses are proposed;

Hypothesis 7. OTOP development has significant effect on social equality.

Hypothesis 8. Cultural tourism has significant effect on social equality.

The above section of the study proposed the direct effect. It includes the direct effect of public participation on social equality, OTOP development and local community participation. The effect of local community participation on cultural tourism and social equality. Similarly, the direct effect of OTOP development and cultural tourism is developed on social equality. The current section developed the indirect hypotheses based on the mediation effect of OTOP development and cultural tourism. The indirect effect is proposed with the help of Baron and Kenny (1986) instructions. The first indirect effect of OTOP development is considered between public participation and social equality. The second indirect effect of cultural tourism is considered between local community participation and social equality. The hypotheses are as follows;

Hypothesis 9. OTOP development mediates the relationship between public participation and social equality.

Hypothesis 10. Cultural tourism mediates the relationship between local community participation and social equality.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study design is based on the nature of the study along with the consideration of research objective. This study examined the relationship between public participation, local community participation, OTOP development, cultural tourism and social equality. The nature of this relationship is grounded on primary data. This relationship is better assessed through primary data which could be

quantitative or qualitative. Several previous studies on social equality, OTOP and cultural tourism also used primary data. Therefore, by assessing the nature of the study and by considering the previous studies, quantitative approach is selected in this study which is based on survey questionnaire. Additionally, cross-sectional research design is followed to collect data from respondents by using a survey questionnaire.

Questionnaire and Data Collection

This study designed a questionnaire to collect data from respondents to examine the effect of public participation on social equality including local community participation, OTOP development and cultural tourism. For this purpose, the scale items are designed to develop a questionnaire. Likert scale is used for this study to collect the data (Van Laerhoven et al., 2004). The questionnaire was developed based on three sections. The first section was based on data collection related to the general information of respondents and second section was based on the scale items related to the social equality and finally, third and last section is based on the scale items related to the public participation, local community participation, OTOP development and cultural tourism. Finally, this study distributed 400 questionnaires among the employees working in publication participation programs and OTOP programs. Local communities in Thailand where the publication participation programs and OTOP programs are working was considered to collect the data. Finally, 210 questionnaires were received and used in data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of this study is started with the help of statistical tool; namely, Smart PLS. Smart PLS is important statistical tool which is designed to examine the relationship between variables (Hair et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2012; Niaz et al., 2020). Generally, it is used to examine the relationship based on primary data. Therefore, data collected through questionnaire is analyzed by using Smart PLS. First, confirmatory factor analysis is used to examine the factor loadings, reliability along with the validity. The current study considered 0.5 as minimum level to retain the scale items. Factor loadings are given in Table 1 which shows that factor loadings are achieved by the scale items. The first requirement of internal item consistency is achieved by the study which shows that all the items are above minimum level to retain the items.

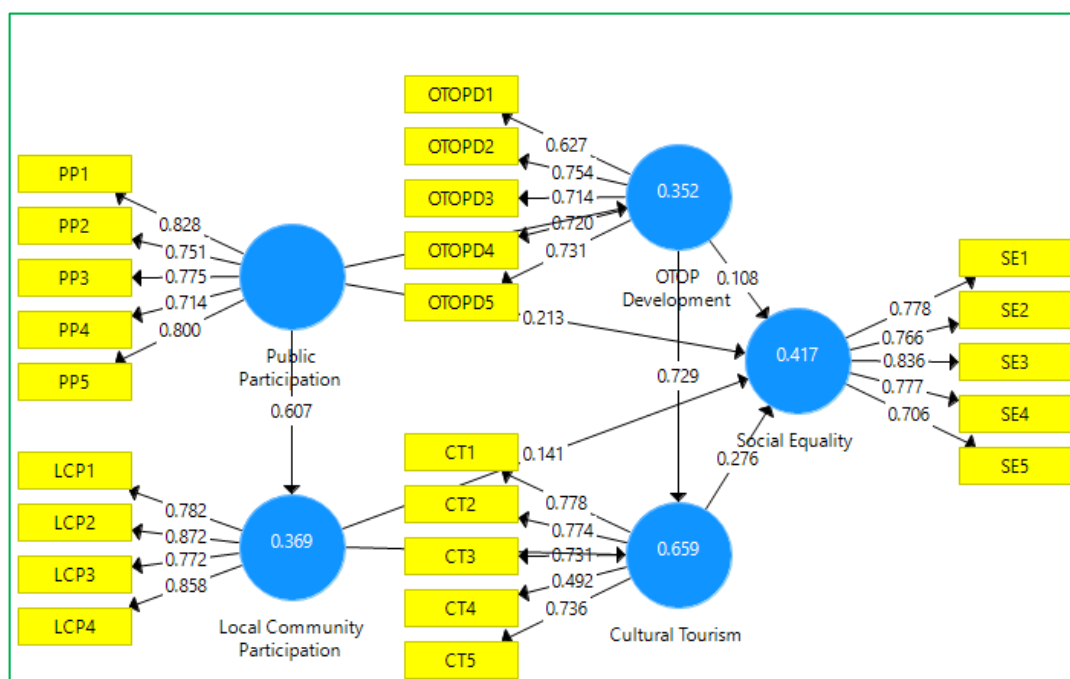


Figure 3. Measurement Model

Note: PP = Public Participation, LCP = Local Community Participation, OTOPD = OTOP Development, CT = Cultural Tourism, SE = Social Equality

Table 1
Reliability and Validity

Variables	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Cultural Tourism	CT1	0.77	0.748	0.833	0.505
	CT2	0.764			
	CT3	0.737			
	CT4	0.507			
	CT5	0.74			
Local Community Participation	LCP1	0.766	0.84	0.892	0.675
	LCP2	0.884			
	LCP3	0.758			
	LCP4	0.871			
OTOP Development	OTOPD1	0.621	0.754	0.836	0.505
	OTOPD2	0.745			
	OTOPD3	0.722			
	OTOPD4	0.723			
	OTOPD5	0.735			
Public Participation	PP1	0.826	0.833	0.841	0.672
	PP2	0.746			

	PP3	0.77			
	PP4	0.72			
	PP5	0.806			
Social Equality	SE1	0.76	0.832	0.822	0.6
	SE2	0.78			
	SE3	0.84			
	SE4	0.754			
	SE5	0.734			

Note: PP = Public Participation, LCP = Local Community Participation, OTOPD = OTOP Development, CT = Cultural Tourism, SE = Social Equality

Along with the factor loadings this study also addressed the composite reliability (CR). The results in Table 1 shows that all the variables have CR above 0.7. Furthermore, this study also examined average variance extracted (AVE) to examine external consistency. Results shows that, CR is above 0.7 and AVE is above 0.5 for public participation, local community participation, OTOP development, cultural tourism, and social equality. In addition to this, it is also important to address discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Cross-loadings are given in Table 2 which shows that the current study have achieved discriminant validity.

Table 2
HTMT

	Cultural Tourism	Local Community Participation	OTOP Development	Public Participation	Social Equality
Cultural Tourism					
Local Community Participation	0.818				
OTOP Development	0.506	0.632			
Public Participation	0.863	0.715	0.741		
Social Equality	0.742	0.611	0.699	0.655	

Table 3
Cross-Loadings

	Cultural Tourism	Local Community Participation	OTOP Development	Public Participation	Social Equality
CT1	0.77	0.433	0.629	0.388	0.42
CT2	0.764	0.511	0.729	0.475	0.513
CT3	0.737	0.539	0.578	0.551	0.418
CT4	0.507	0.368	0.401	0.433	0.284
CT5	0.74	0.421	0.472	0.578	0.427
LCP1	0.56	0.766	0.604	0.398	0.317

LCP2	0.558	0.884	0.654	0.556	0.398
LCP3	0.48	0.758	0.524	0.449	0.482
LCP4	0.538	0.871	0.642	0.579	0.475
OTOPD1	0.511	0.539	0.621	0.401	0.395
OTOPD2	0.538	0.596	0.745	0.426	0.476
OTOPD3	0.658	0.54	0.722	0.299	0.314
OTOPD4	0.59	0.542	0.723	0.496	0.38
OTOPD5	0.565	0.413	0.735	0.475	0.395
PP1	0.605	0.565	0.541	0.826	0.509
PP2	0.412	0.406	0.412	0.746	0.402
PP3	0.459	0.427	0.416	0.77	0.496
PP4	0.554	0.499	0.459	0.72	0.3
PP5	0.577	0.453	0.451	0.806	0.41
SE1	0.497	0.517	0.502	0.424	0.76
SE2	0.441	0.34	0.393	0.447	0.78
SE3	0.477	0.428	0.441	0.462	0.84
SE4	0.504	0.496	0.476	0.379	0.754
SE5	0.37	0.206	0.323	0.409	0.734

Note: PP = Public Participation, LCP = Local Community Participation, OTOPD = OTOP Development, CT = Cultural Tourism, SE = Social Equality

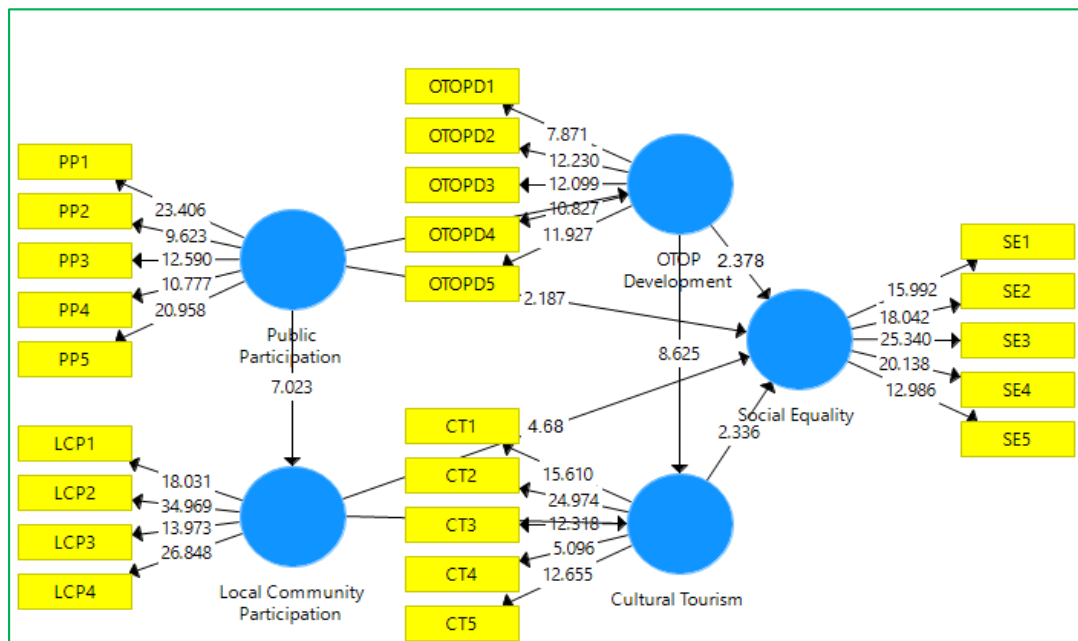


Figure 4. Structural Model

Note: PP = Public Participation, LCP = Local Community Participation, OTOPD = OTOP Development, CT = Cultural Tourism, SE = Social Equality

PLS structural model is presented in Figure 3. The results of PLS structural model are presented in Table 3. Direct effect is examined by considering the t-value and beta value (Hair et al., 2014; Hair, et al., 2013). T-value examined the significance of the study and beta value examined the relationship direction. The hypotheses in this study are examined by considering the 1.64 as minimum threshold level of t-value. Analysis statistics shows that public participation has significant effect on social equality. It also has significant effect on OTOP development in Thailand. Similarly, local community participation has significant effect on social equality and cultural tourism. Additionally, OTOP and cultural tourism has significant relationship with social equality. Furthermore, the significant relationship is found between public participation and local community participation. Finally, OTOP development has significant effect on cultural tourism.

Table 4
Direct Effect

	Beta	Mean	SD	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
Cultural Tourism -> Social Equality	0.276	0.291	0.118	2.336	0.01	Supported
Local Community Participation -> Cultural Tourism	0.107	0.106	0.064	1.645	0.049	Supported
Local Community Participation -> Social Equality	0.141	0.145	0.03	4.68	0	Supported
OTOP Development -> Cultural Tourism	0.729	0.735	0.085	8.625	0	Supported
OTOP Development -> Social Equality	0.108	0.081	0.045	2.378	0.01	Supported
Public Participation -> Local Community Participation	0.607	0.614	0.086	7.023	0	Supported
Public Participation -> OTOP Development	0.593	0.607	0.083	7.113	0	Supported
Public Participation -> Social Equality	0.213	0.225	0.097	2.187	0.015	Supported

Finally, after the assessment of direct effect, the current study also examined the indirect effect. Therefore, the mediation effect of OTOP development and cultural tourism is examined in the current study which is reported in Table 4. Along with the direct effect, indirect effect is also considered with the help of observing t-value and beta value (Henseler et al., 2009) which is recommended by previous studies. First, the mediation effect of OTOP development is addressed between public participation and social equality. This mediation effect is significant as the t-value is 2.99. It shows that, OTOP development reflect the positive effect of public participation on social equality. The mediation effect of cultural tourism between local community participation and social equality is insignificant.

Table 5
Indirect Effect

	Beta	Mean	SD	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
Public Participation -> Local Community Participation -> Cultural Tourism	0.065	0.067	0.054	1.196	0.116	Supported
Public Participation -> OTOP Development -> Cultural Tourism	0.433	0.448	0.088	4.922	0	
Local Community Participation - > Cultural Tourism -> Social Equality	0.03	0.029	0.011	2.99	0	
Public Participation -> Local Community Participation -> Cultural Tourism -> Social Equality	0.018	0.019	0.017	1.041	0.149	
OTOP Development -> Cultural Tourism -> Social Equality	0.201	0.215	0.094	2.15	0.016	Not Supported
Public Participation -> OTOP Development -> Cultural Tourism -> Social Equality	0.12	0.13	0.06	1.987	0.024	
Public Participation -> Local Community Participation -> Social Equality	0.086	0.087	0.082	1.042	0.149	
Public Participation -> OTOP Development -> Social Equality	0.064	0.048	0.109	0.588	0.279	

Moreover, the current study addressed the Predictive Relevance (Q^2) to examine the quality of the model. According to literature, quality of model can be achieved if the Predictive Relevance (Q^2) is higher than zero. Table 5 shows that Predictive Relevance (Q^2) for social equality is 0.223. Therefore, this study attained the minimum level of model quality.

Table 6
Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1 - \text{SSE}/\text{SSO})$
Cultural Tourism	765	533.632	0.302
Local Community Participation	612	474.682	0.224
OTOP Development	765	646.217	0.155
Public Participation	765	765	
Social Equality	765	594.357	0.223

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of public participation to promote OTOP development and cultural tourism to support social equality in Thailand. For this purpose, questionnaires were designed, and data were collected from Thailand which was analyzed through statistical tool. Findings of the study provided important insights for the literature and practices to enhance social equality. Public participation has crucial role in OTOP development, cultural tourism, and social equality. Increase in public participation increase the social equality directly and indirectly. Similarly, local community participation also has similar role to promote social equality. Public participation can strengthen the local community development and OTOP development which lead to the cultural tourism and social equality. As results of the study shows that publication participation increases the OTOP development which lead to the cultural tourism promotion. OTOP development promote cultural tourism which causes to increase social inequality in Thailand. Therefore, public participation has the potential to promote OTOP development and cultural tourism which lead to the increase in social equality.

Implications of the Study

The current study considered the relationship between public participation, local community participation, OTOP development, cultural tourism, and social equality which is one of the most unique relationships and not considered by the previous studies. Number of previous investigations of public participation has not considered the role of public participation in social equality. As social equality is one of the challenges for nations, therefore, the contribution of this study to promote social equality has major importance for theory along with the practice. Additionally, the development OTOP along with cultural tourism is not considered in relation to the public participation and social equality. Similarly, this study has key role practically, because the results of this study leading to make important strategies to enhance social equality. This study recommended the practitioners to promote public participation along with the OTOP and cultural tourism to enhance social equality.

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