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VIETNAMESE CULTURAL TOURISM - PRACTICAL ISSUES AND IMPROVEMENT OF POLICY DOCUMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Vietnam possesses a rich heritage with over 40.000 historical and cultural relics, nearly 70,000 intangible cultural heritage items inventoried, including 38 UNESCO-listed sites; and a diverse culture of 54 ethnic groups living throughout the country. These heritages are exploited to become cultural products and important cultural resources – a solid foundation for developing cultural tourism into a key economic sector. In practice, Vietnamese localities exploit and promote their cultural resources, including diverse and unique cultural heritage and cultural products, to develop cultural tourism and achieve socio-economic development goals. This study analyzes the practical development of cultural tourism in Vietnam based on an objective analysis and assessment of the influence of local cultural resources. The theoretical framework and model constructed include two independent scales/variables: "Cultural Heritage" (HER) and "Cultural Product" (PRO), and one dependent scale/variable: "Cultural Tourism" (TOUR). The author surveyed 250 managers from various cultural and tourism organizations in three localities in Vietnam: Bac Ninh province (Northern Vietnam), Nghe An province (Central Vietnam), and Dong Thap province (Southern Vietnam) to gather information and analyze the practical exploitation of cultural resources and the development of cultural tourism in these localities. From this, the author concludes with empirical research findings and discusses policy issues related to the preservation, promotion of cultural resources, and development of cultural tourism in Vietnam.

Keywords: Cultural tourism; Cultural resource; Cultural heritage; Cultural product; Vietnam.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Vietnam has advantages in developing cultural tourism based on its vast heritage system and multi-ethnic identity: Over 40,000 historical and cultural relics, nearly 70,000 intangible cultural heritage sites have been inventoried, including 38 UNESCO-listed sites (Sy, P., 2025); the coexistence of 54 ethnic groups creates a rich cultural treasure, providing profound human resources, promoting cultural tourism development, strengthening solidarity, and forming the foundation of national identity (Anh, C., 2024); rich festivals and traditional crafts and diverse regional culinary cultures create a core competitive advantage, helping Vietnamese cultural tourism easily make a strong impression and attract international tourists thanks to its unique cultural identity (PN, 2022).

However, in the context of a world undergoing complex changes, the rapid development of science and technology, globalization, socio-economic changes, and international integration, there is an urgent need to balance preserving national identity with absorbing the best of

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humanity, transforming heritage into endogenous resources for sustainable cultural tourism development, enhancing soft power, and positioning the national brand. Vietnam's development in the process of integration and the technological age also presents these demands; therefore, preserving and promoting cultural values to achieve the goal of developing cultural tourism has become a strategic and ongoing task for each locality.

Many recent studies (Hanh, D.T.H., 2018; VNAT, 2022; Tuyet, D.T., 2025) have analyzed the development trends of cultural tourism and have held scientific discussions on the development of cultural resources as a factor directly influencing and promoting the development of cultural tourism. Within this practical context and trend, the author conducts this research with the goal of identifying, analyzing, objectively evaluating, and contributing to supplementing scientific information and drawing empirical conclusions on cultural tourism in Vietnam.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "cultural tourism" is commonly used to mean human activities aimed at studying and exploring culture. These activities encompass various forms such as researching and learning about performing arts, festivals, and cultural events; visiting historical sites and natural landscapes, etc. Cultural tourism, along with nature tourism, are two of the main forms of tourism pursued by countries to serve their economic and social development goals.

From a cultural research perspective, Anh, T.T. (2014) and Bon, N.V. (2020) explain the meaning of cultural tourism as a type of tourism that exploits tangible and intangible cultural values to meet the needs of tourists for learning, experiencing, and exploring, while contributing to the preservation and promotion of local identity. From an economic research perspective, Lan, N.T.B. (2023) defines cultural tourism as an economic activity that brings economic benefits to the region, combining the exploitation and preservation of the inherent traditional cultural values of the nation. From a state management perspective, Vietnamese law stipulates: Cultural tourism is a type of tourism developed on the basis of exploiting cultural values, contributing to the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values, and honoring new cultural values of humanity (VNA, 2017).

Thus, cultural tourism is approached and studied from many perspectives, but all emphasize the exploitation of the cultural values of the nation to meet people's needs for cultural exploration and enjoyment, and to achieve the goals of preserving, promoting, and honoring cultural values, as well as developing the economy and society of the nation and localities. The scale "Cultural Tourism" (TOUR) is constructed with the following implications: Cultural tourism helps people enhance their understanding of the culture and cultural values of their ethnic group and locality (TOUR1); Cultural tourism gives people the opportunity to experience the culture of their ethnic group and locality through cultural products and services (TOUR2); Cultural tourism helps localities preserve, promote, and honor the cultural values of their ethnic group and develop their economy and society (TOUR3).

In cultural tourism, the subjects of cultural tourism are human elements, including those managing, exploiting, and experiencing cultural tourism; the goals of cultural tourism are preserving, promoting, and honoring cultural values and developing socio-economic aspects; the content/forms of cultural tourism include heritage tourism, festival tourism, spiritual tourism, art tourism, and culinary tourism; and the conditions for the formation of cultural

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tourism are cultural values (cultural heritage), which are exploited into cultural products to meet people's needs for cultural exploration and enjoyment. In this study, the author focuses on analyzing cultural heritage and cultural products as factors that both contribute to and directly influence the development of cultural tourism. The research hypothesis is: Cultural heritage (H1) and cultural product (H2) are cultural resources/conditions for the formation and directly influence cultural tourism (Figure 1).

- Firstly, cultural heritage is an important cultural resource, identified as the main raw material for creating cultural tourism products, and directly determines the goals of cultural tourism development at the national and local levels. According to Luu, N.P. (2020) and PN (2025), cultural heritage is a golden resource for tourism development; effectively exploiting cultural heritage to develop cultural tourism is a core strategy to transform spiritual resources into sustainable economic drivers; this reflects the development trend of the heritage economy sector, because when a heritage site is properly awakened, it is not just a simple tourist attraction but creates a multi-layered value chain for society. Subsequently, D.V. (2023) affirms that heritage always contains a mixture of natural and cultural, historical resources; and, heritage economy is economic development from the treasure trove of national heritage resources, which is the crystallization of the achievements of the historical past in building and protecting the country. Or, as Quynh, H. (2026) emphasizes, heritage economy is not limited to the tourism or cultural sector, but has become a knowledge-based, creative, and identity-based economic growth model.

Overall, the studies analyze the role of cultural heritage and the multifaceted benefits of effectively utilizing it. For tourists, cultural heritage provides in-depth tourism products, allowing them to directly experience and interact with local life through activities such as handicrafts, cuisine, and folk art. For communities, cultural heritage creates direct livelihoods, increases income, alleviates poverty, and awakens national pride among local people as they play a role in preserving the heritage. For localities and the nation, cultural heritage generates significant budget revenue, attracts socialized investment, and enhances the national image and brand to the world. Therefore, cultural heritage needs to be introduced and promoted so that people and tourists understand, appreciate, and evaluate its role, significance, and experiences when participating in cultural tourism activities. Each locality and each country needs to effectively carry out the tasks of educating, communicating, exploiting, preserving, and promoting cultural heritage to become important resources for the development of cultural tourism products. The scale "Cultural Heritage" (HER) is designed to imply content linked to the responsibilities of localities in educating, promoting, protecting, and exploiting cultural heritage to achieve the goal of developing cultural tourism: Cultural heritage is promoted, disseminated, and educated to help people and tourists understand and raise awareness of the historical and cultural value and significance of local heritage with the goal of developing cultural tourism (HER1); Cultural heritage is valued by the locality and conservation measures are implemented to maintain cultural resources with the goal of developing cultural tourism (HER2); Cultural heritage is exploited/organized responsibly by the locality to both preserve and promote the value of the heritage with the goal of developing cultural tourism (HER3).

- Secondly, cultural products are also cultural resources and important raw materials for creating cultural tourism products, and directly determine the goals of cultural tourism development at the national and local levels. According to Hung, N.P. (2017) and Hanh, D.T.H.

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(2018), cultural products are exploited from cultural values - cultural heritage, and are introduced and promoted so that people and tourists can learn, feel, evaluate, experience, and enjoy them through cultural tourism activities. Hang, C.T. (2021) and Khanh, N.T. (2023) analyzes and interprets cultural products, including tangible and intangible cultural products (handicrafts, fine arts, art, etc.), as raw materials for creating many cultural tourism products, such as sightseeing and experiential tourism related to historical and cultural relics, traditional craft villages, etc. Therefore, it becomes a resource for cultural tourism exploitation activities, becoming a driving force for the economic and social development of the nation and localities. Thus, each locality needs to responsibly exploit cultural values (planning, investment promotion, trade, etc.) to create a diverse and unique system of cultural products to achieve the goal of developing cultural tourism and the local economy and society. The scale "Cultural product" (PRO) is built with the following implied contents: Localities develop cultural product development plans that are consistent with local cultural characteristics, creating resources for cultural tourism development (PRO1); Localities implement diverse programs to exploit cultural values to build a diverse and unique cultural product system to create resources for cultural tourism development (PRO2); Localities effectively carry out communication and investment promotion activities for local cultural products to promote their value and create resources for cultural tourism development (PRO3).

Thus, cultural heritage and cultural products are important resources for the development of cultural tourism in each country and locality. Through a comprehensive review, the author has developed a theoretical framework for assessing the impact of cultural heritage and cultural products on cultural tourism. The theoretical model includes two independent variables: "Cultural heritage" (HER) and "Cultural product" (PRO), and one dependent variable: "Cultural tourism" (TOUR). The scales consist of nine observed variables, designed by the author as nine questions in a survey questionnaire and measured using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - Neutral; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Theoretical framework

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	**Cultural heritage**	**HER**					
1	Cultural heritage is promoted, disseminated, and educated to help people and tourists understand and raise awareness of the historical and cultural value and significance of local heritage to develop cultural tourism	HER1					
2	Cultural heritage is valued by the locality and conservation measures are implemented to maintain cultural resources to develop cultural tourism	HER2					
3	Cultural heritage is exploited/organized responsibly by the locality to both preserve and promote the value of the heritage to develop cultural tourism	HER3					
II	**Cultural product**	**PRO**					

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No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
4	Localities develop cultural product development plans that are consistent with local cultural characteristics, creating resources for cultural tourism development	PRO1					
5	Localities implement diverse programs to exploit cultural values to build a diverse and unique cultural product system to create resources for cultural tourism development	PRO2					
6	Localities effectively carry out communication and investment promotion activities for local cultural products to promote their value and create resources for cultural tourism development	PRO3					
III	**Cultural tourism**	**TOUR**					
7	Cultural tourism helps people enhance their understanding of the culture and cultural values of their ethnic group and locality	TOUR1					
8	Cultural tourism gives people the opportunity to experience the culture of their ethnic group and locality through cultural products and services	TOUR2					
9	Cultural tourism helps localities preserve, promote, and honor the cultural values of their ethnic group and develop their economy and society	TOUR3					

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

Research model

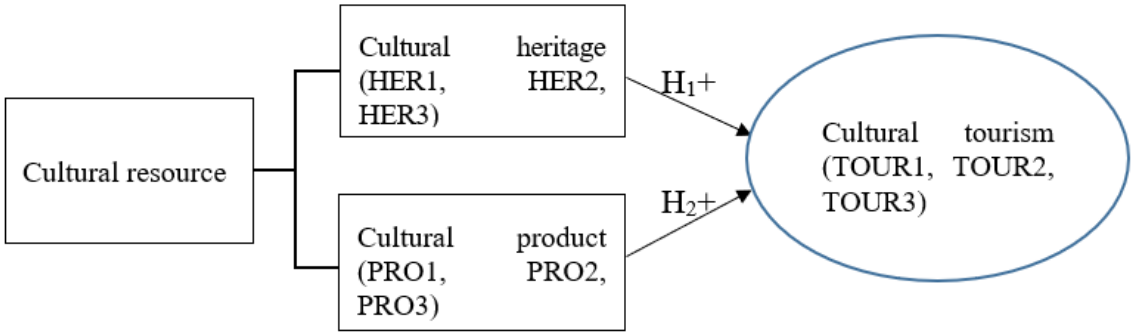


Figure 1. Research model

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

To conduct this study, the author used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method was implemented through the collection and analysis of secondary data to build a theoretical framework and model (Table 1, Figure 1). The quantitative method was implemented through the survey, collection, and analysis of primary data.

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This study uses exploratory factor analysis and correlation analysis techniques to test the theoretical model and hypotheses. According to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), in quantitative research, the minimum sample size required for exploratory factor analysis and correlation analysis for the 3-scale, 9-observed variable model in this study is N = 9*5 = 45.

In fact, the author conducted a formal survey with a sample size of N = 250 (N > 45) of managers from various cultural and tourism organizations in three localities in Vietnam: Bac Ninh province (Northern Vietnam), Nghe An province (Central Vietnam), and Dong Thap province (Southern Vietnam), ensuring the reliability and feasibility of the survey research. The survey was conducted with the consent of the respondents, and the results showed that 250 out of 250 responses were valid, achieving a 100% valid response rate.

4.0 RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data of 250 survey responses collected, the author conducted a Cronbach's Alpha test to determine the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model. According to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), a scale has reliability when it reaches a Cronbach's Alpha value > 0.6; an observed variable has reliability when it reaches a Corrected Item-Total Correlation value > 0.3. The statistical results in Table 2 show that all 3 scales and 9 observed variables have reliability when they reach the aforementioned test values.

Table 2. Statistical results and testing results of the scales

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Cultural heritage (HER)	HER1	250	1	5	4.14	.694	.778	HER1 = .518
	HER2	250	1	5	4.18	.623		HER2 = .543
	HER3	250	1	5	4.11	.701		HER3 = .605
2. Cultural product (PRO)	PRO1	250	1	5	4.09	.733	.712	PRO1 = .521
	PRO2	250	1	5	3.99	.679		PRO2 = .516
	PRO3	250	1	5	4.06	.721		PRO3 = .485
3. Cultural tourism (TOUR)	TOUR1	250	1	5	4.12	.698	.747	TOUR1 = .561
	TOUR2	250	1	5	4.08	.683		TOUR2 = .542
	TOUR3	250	1	5	4.17	.656		TOUR3 = .589
Valid N (listwise)		250						

Source: Author's survey results

Table 2 data shows that observations on the scales "Cultural heritage" (HER), "Cultural product" (PRO), and "Cultural tourism" (TOUR) are all rated at mean > 3.99 and mean ≤ 4.18, which are statistically significant according to the Likert scale (1-5), initially confirming the suitability of the theoretical model and the survey dataset.

The dependent variable "Cultural tourism" (TOUR) has high observed values: Mean (TOUR1) = 4.12, Mean (TOUR2) = 4.08, Mean (TOUR3) = 4.17, contributing to evidence that cultural tourism activities in Vietnam are being exploited by localities for socio-economic development

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goals. Accordingly, cultural tourism activities exploited by localities have helped people improve their understanding of the culture and cultural values of the nation and the locality; given people the opportunity to experience the culture of the nation and the locality through cultural products and services; and helped localities preserve, promote, and honor the cultural values of the nation and develop the economy and society.

The independent scales/variables "Cultural heritage" (HER) and "Cultural product" (PRO) show differences in observed values. The "Cultural heritage" (HER) scale has higher observed values: Mean (HER1) = 4.14, Mean (HER2) = 4.18, Mean (HER3) = 4.11, further demonstrating that cultural heritage is an important cultural resource helping localities achieve their cultural tourism development goals. Accordingly, localities that successfully implement the promotion, dissemination, and education of cultural heritage to help people and tourists understand and raise awareness of the historical and cultural value and significance of heritage; identify the value and implement conservation measures for cultural heritage to maintain and responsibly exploit/organize exploitation of heritage for the purpose of developing cultural tourism.

However, the "Cultural product" (PRO) scale shows lower observed values: Mean (PRO1) = 4.09, Mean (PRO2) = 3.99, Mean (PRO3) = 4.06. This demonstrates that localities are developing cultural product development plans that align with local cultural characteristics, conducting communication activities, and promoting investment in local cultural products to maximize their value and create resources for cultural tourism development. Nevertheless, the development of diverse cultural products has not yet met expectations; many localities have not effectively implemented diverse programs to exploit cultural values and build a diverse and unique cultural product system to create resources for cultural tourism development. This is one of the limitations that needs to be addressed promptly, and is also one of the reasons why the exploitation of cultural products has not been effective in maximizing the advantages of cultural resources for the development of local cultural tourism.

The reliability test results of the scales and observed variables serve as the basis for further analysis. The author conducted exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation to preliminarily assess the unidimensionality, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scales, providing further basis for drawing research conclusions about the suitability of the theoretical model. The results of the exploratory factor analysis are shown in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.733
Bartlett's Test of PROhericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3671.886
	df	36
	Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings

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	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.417	37.963	37.963	3.417	37.963	37.963	3.144	34.938	34.938
2	3.061	34.016	71.979	3.061	34.016	71.979	2.933	32.590	67.528
3	1.116	12.399	84.378	1.116	12.399	84.378	1.516	16.849	84.378
4	.510	5.663	90.041						
5	.481	5.345	95.385						
6	.157	1.745	97.130						
7	.131	1.456	98.586						
8	.089	.990	99.576						
9	.038	.424	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

Source: Author's survey results

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix[a]				
Scales	Observed variables	Component		
		1	2	3
Cultural heritage (HER)	HER1	.816		
	HER2	.873		
	HER3	.842		
Cultural product (PRO)	PRO1		.836	
	PRO2		.829	
	PRO3		.847	
Cultural tourism (TOUR)	TOUR1			.854
	TOUR2			.862
	TOUR3			.856
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.				

Source: Author's survey results

In quantitative research, according to Hair, J.F. et al. (2009), exploratory factor analysis was performed appropriately on the dataset through the following values: $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1$; Bartlett's test had an observed significance level Sig. < 0.05; Eigenvalue ≥ 1; Total Variance Explained ≥ 50%; Factor Loading ≥ 0.5. Data from Tables 3 and 4 show:

- The KMO = 0.733 > 0.5 confirms that exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for the dataset; the Bartlett test has an observed significance level of Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05, indicating that the observed variables are linearly correlated with the representative factor. The Total Variance Explained with Cumulative % = 84.378% > 50% (Table 3) shows that 84.378% of the variation in the representative factors is explained by the observed variables; all observed

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variables have Factor Loading > 0.5 (Table 4), indicating that the observed variables are statistically significant. The initial theoretical research model is consistent with the survey research.

- The observed variables were extracted into 3 factors corresponding to the 3 original factors with Eigenvalues > 1 (Table 3), further confirming the suitability of the theoretical model. The original theoretical model was retained, consisting of: 2 independent variables "Cultural heritage" (HER), "Cultural product" (PRO) and 1 dependent variable "Cultural tourism" (TOUR), with a total of 9 observed variables of good statistical significance, allowing for correlation analysis to examine the relationship between the scales in the model. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 5, which forms the basis for the author's research conclusions.

Table 5. Correlation analysis results of the scales

Correlations				
		HER	PRO	TOUR
Cultural heritage (HER)	Pearson Correlation	1	.482**	.551**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	250	250	250
Cultural product (PRO)	Pearson Correlation	.482**	1	.494**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	250	250	250
Cultural tourism (TOUR)	Pearson Correlation	.551**	.494**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	250	250	250
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Author's survey results

Table 5 of the survey data shows that the correlation coefficients of the scales reached a value of $0 < r < 1$, indicating a positive correlation between the two independent scales/variables "Cultural heritage" (HER), "Cultural product" (PRO) and the one dependent scale/variable "Cultural tourism" (TOUR); hypotheses H1 and H2 are accepted; the initial theoretical model is confirmed to fit the survey dataset. Based on the r values [r (HER) = .551 and r (PRO) = .494], it can be concluded that the correlation levels of the independent and dependent variables, in decreasing order, are: "Cultural heritage" (HER), "Cultural product" (PRO).

Statistical results, analysis, and validation of Tables 2 and 5 show a similarity in the level of evaluation of survey opinions regarding the scales and observed variables in the model. From this, the author has a basis to conclude the empirical study on cultural tourism in Vietnam:

- Firstly, cultural tourism activities in Vietnam are exploited by localities for economic and social development goals. Accordingly, these cultural tourism activities have helped people enhance their understanding of the culture and cultural values of their nation and locality;

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provided people with opportunities to experience national and local culture through cultural products and services; and helped localities preserve, promote, and honor the cultural values of the nation and develop their economy and society.

- Secondly, cultural heritage is a crucial cultural resource that helps localities achieve their goals of developing cultural tourism. Accordingly, localities that effectively implement promotional, communication, and educational activities about cultural heritage will help people and tourists understand and raise awareness of the historical and cultural value and significance of the heritage; identify its value and implement conservation measures to maintain and responsibly utilize/organize the exploitation of the heritage for the purpose of developing cultural tourism.

- Thirdly, localities should develop cultural product development plans that align with their local cultural characteristics, and carry out communication and investment promotion activities for local cultural products to maximize their value and create resources for cultural tourism development. However, the development of diverse cultural products has not yet met expectations; consequently, many localities have not effectively implemented diverse programs to exploit cultural values to build a diverse and unique system of cultural products to create resources for cultural tourism development.

The lack of diversity in cultural products is one of the limitations that needs to be addressed promptly, and is also one of the reasons why the exploitation of cultural products has not been effective in maximizing the advantages of cultural resources for the development of local cultural tourism. This study discusses the policy issue of focusing on developing a diverse and unique system of cultural products to become a direct resource for creating cultural tourism products.

- Solution 1. Vietnamese localities should proactively develop and implement policies to promote diverse, unique, and high-quality cultural products that are consistent with the cultural heritage and culture of the local communities, in order to meet the needs of locals and tourists for cultural exploration, discovery, and enjoyment.

- Solution 2. Vietnamese localities should implement policies to encourage people, households, and communities to develop cultural products; cooperate and link together to develop diverse, unique, high-quality cultural products that are suitable to the cultural heritage and culture of the local communities, in order to meet the needs of people and tourists for cultural exploration, discovery, and enjoyment.

The above policy solutions are significant in promoting the autonomy of each locality, becoming an endogenous resource for each locality to develop cultural tourism. Because, when localities are self-sufficient in diverse and unique cultural products, they will be proactive in securing raw materials to create many cultural tourism products, becoming a strength for economic and social development.

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