

# **A Development of the Interpretation Model to Enhance the Value of Tourism Products of Pha Wai Village, Loei Province, Thailand**

*Warakorn Jainoi*

School of Tourism Development, Maejo University, Thailand

E-mail: warakorn.jainoi@gmail.com

*Parnprae Chaoprayoon*

School of Tourism Development, Maejo University, Thailand

E-mail: Ajmint.chaoprayoon@gmail.com

*Chalermchai Panyadee*

School of Administrative Studies, Maejo University, Thailand

E-mail: Cpanyadee@yahoo.com

*Sanchai Kiatsongchai*

Faculty of Management Science, Loei Rajabhat University, Thailand

E-mail: Sankiat@hotmail.com

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this article aimed to scrutinize the process of developing the interpretation model to enhancing the values of tourism products in Pha Wai village, Puanpu sub-district, Nong Hin district, Loei province. For research methodology, a focus group discussion were conducted with three major target groups. These included officers and tourism-related organizations working for Pha Wai village, community leaders, and members dealing with Phu Pa Pao Eco-Tourism Club. The findings of the study revealed that internal and external factors influencing the development of interpretation model enhanced for the value of tourism products in Pha Wai village were all resulted in the community leaders', communities' and members' requirements, awareness of community-based tourism values, importance of participatory community-based tourism development, as well as academic collaborations with other involved external organizations. In order to better the improvements for this remodeled process, however, the community's participation in developing the interpretation model to enhancing the value of tourism products in Pha Wai village sub-district, Nong Hin district, Loei province was sorted into four major steps: 1) Retrieving and reviving tourism products in Pha Wai village; 2) Establishing the meaning and sign of required tourism products; 3) Selecting an interpretative medium used for upgrading community-based tourism products found in Pha Wai village, and 4) Presenting the interpretation model designed for upgrading valued tourism products in Pha Wai village given to other involved organizations.

**Keywords:** Tourism Product, Interpretation, Participation, Sustainable Tourism, Community-Based Tourism

## Introduction

The incoming numbers of tourists visiting Thailand, according to the expectation of Tourism Department, have increased dramatically and the tourists' travelling behaviors on their mass tourism have changed into their alternative tourism (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011). Besides, the government's importance of sustainable tourism management has not only been promoted for its national development for several years, but also the sustainable development for qualified tourist attractions, potentialities of global tourism competition, tourism-taken benefits, and local economic decentralization must be identified in the government's tourism policies of the 2012 - 2016 National Tourism Development Plan (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011).

In other words, the communities' opportunities in participating in their effective tourism management in relations to their preservation of traditional cultures and local wisdoms, as well as the development and restoration of local environmental natural resources were all provided for Thailand's sustainable tourism growth (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2007).

In fact, policy management plans with emphasis on the principle of philosophy of sufficient economy, as well as proactive national developmental strategies cited in the 11st national social and economic development plan, which were all supported for peaceful communities and sustainable economic growth, were directed by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports in networking collaborations with the Tourism Authority of Thailand in order to be served for internal and external economic changes, communities' self-reliance, and social adaptation. Thus, the communities' collaborative learning management together with their panel discussions on SWOT analysis of such a community's context must be all supported for their community strength and sustainable community development.

Pha Wai village, where their community-based participatory tourism management is directly affected by the community residents' cooperation and their community strengthening, is attracted with wider mountainous areas and sand rock-surrounded hills with its height of 900 meters, as well as visible tourist scenic views. Geographically, it borders with Nam Long cliffs northward; the Nam Naow National Park is seen southward. In the East, Phai cliff, Kra Tae cliff, and Pha Ngam stone garden are all seen, meanwhile Phu Kra Dung is seen in the Southern East. Also, Phu Hor is seen in the West, and Phu Kho is seen in the Northern West. As a result, their community's tourist attractions are benefited from their community-based tourism management found in this village.

In addition to the village's outstanding tourist attractions available for tourists' visit, Wat Tham Poh Chai, Wat Tham Pha Kwang, and Wat Pha Wai or Wat Pa Kluai Hom as a central religious center, where its peace, nature, and facilities are all provided for tourists' Dharma meditation practices, and mental relaxation. Not only can be the village's natural surroundings together with the villagers' ways of rustic life acquired for tourists' length of short time or anytime, but also the community leaders' participation in developing Phu Pa Poh forest, as well as planting a variety of distinct plants surrounded among their forest's shadiness and wonderful sceneries are all supported for their community-based sustainable tourism development filled with abundant natural resources.

From literature review, research and interviews with the community leaders, it was found that the community had natural attractions, historical sites, ancient artifacts and ways of lives which can be developed to be community-based tourism. There are group and community leaders who are active and need to develop their community as tourism attraction. This village closely links to other main tourism attractions in Nong Hin district and vicinity. Moreover, Pha Wai community also has beautiful geography, rich natural resources, the village history, legends and beliefs; including, local wisdoms and souvenirs made from local materials. Aforementioned, Pha Wai village is rich of various tourism resources which are

capable to develop as tourism site to serve tourists; and facilities which are developed by supporting agents to ease tourists' access. From the study, the community needs to develop tourism interpretation to add values to their tourism products. The community needs to identify their products' meanings and patterns to interpret their meanings appropriate to the community's context in order to present to local people and tourists to be aware of their tourism products' values.

## **Literature Reviews**

The research titled, 'A Development of the Interpretation Model to Enhance the Value of Tourism Products of Pha Wai Village, Loei Province, Thailand' had the research conceptual framework analyzed from relevant concepts and previous research. The researcher synthesized and presented the contents as a direction in the study as follows:

The community tourism products' searching and meaning identification help local people and tourists understand the values and importance of tourism products which are natural resources, history, art and culture, ways of lives, local wisdoms, and souvenirs. This increases impression and experience to tourists directly and revisit opportunity. Additionally, it can stimulate consciousness of the local people and tourists to be aware of the values of natural resources, history, and art and culture of the community, to enhance tourists' learning and impressions which will affect positive attitudes to obtain cooperation in tourism resource conservation and development sustainably (Department of Tourism, 2016). Besides, the government's policy which promotes the creation of value adding to local wisdoms and culture leads to the search and process to develop the community's identity to create new experience and impression in order to increase revisit opportunity. From the work of Thairoj Puangmanee (2009), the process of development and enhancement on community and cultural tourism from related organizations positively and obviously affects the outstanding of the local arts and culture identity.

The study of semiology and interpretation helps the understanding of the process to create meaning and sign to tourism products of Pha Wai community in order to enhance the awareness of the value of tourism products which will lead to extending time spending at the attractions, tourism learning process, and positive experience and attitudes towards the attractions. Tourism interpretation plays its role as the medium between local people and tourists (message receiver) and the real world by creating indirect experience with the environment. In other words, tourists will learn the social truth through constructed tourism interpretation. Members in the society can also understand other social contexts without direct participation in particular society. Hence, tourism interpretation helps tourists to increasingly understand other social contexts. The process of tourism interpretation process of Pha Wai community vitally needs the locals' participation in making decision, planning, operating, benefit sharing and evaluating via participatory action research method throughout the process to establish understanding and awareness of the tourism products' values leading to appropriate meaning and sign in accordance with Pha Wai village's context.

## **Methods**

**Area of the study:** Pha Wai community, Puan Pu sub-district, Nonghin district, Loei province was selected as a research area because diverse tourism resources such as natural tourism resources, culture, unique way of life, and group-forming for tourism management were all coped with the increased numbers of tourists.

**Content:** Concepts, theories, and related researches reviews including the general contexts of Pha Wai community together with concepts on tourism and community-based tourism, sustainable tourism, and tourism evolution were all reviewed.

**Terms of Definition:** Context and evolution of tourism refer to environmental surroundings contributed to tourist spots of Pha Wai community; moreover, the components of tourist spots were involved with tourist attractions, cultures, community ways of life, and the process of tourism management in Pha Wai community.

Pha Wai community tourism refers to a tourism, which the Pha Wai community's tourism products were all benefited from natural tourist attractions, historical backgrounds, as well as cultural and traditional aspects, and way of life related to tourism activities in Pha Wai community.

**Key informants:** The key informants used in this study consisted of 3 groups as follows:

1. Staff working for government organizations dealing with the development of interpretation model of valued tourism products in Pha Wai community in networking collaborations with Loei Provincial Tourism and Sports Bureau, Tourism Authority of Thailand (Loei Office), as well as the Office of Sustainable Tourism Administration (Public Organization) Area 5, and Puan Pu Local Administrative Organization.
2. Community leaders of various community clubs, a head of the village, local scholars, and a head of community tourism club dealing with the development of interpretation model of valued tourism products in Pha Wai community.
3. Members of eco-tourism clubs in Pha Wai community. These included public hired car group (E-tack car), food shop and souvenir shop entrepreneur group, local tour guide group, homestay group, and protection volunteer group.

## Research Results

A development of the interpretation model to enhance the value of tourism products of Pha Wai Village, Loei Province aimed at searching and restoring Pha Wai community's tourism products, creating meaning and sign from community's needs to develop Pha Wai community's tourism product interpretation, developing community participation in formulating interpretation model to enhance tourism products' value, and proposing interpretation model to increase tourism products' value of Pha Wai Village, Loei Province. The study revealed that tourism in Pha Wai Village originated by the competent community leader through the systematic development from the villagers' cooperation since 2007 and was developed continuously. As a result, Pha Wai Village's tourism products are various consisting of natural tourism attractions, culture, tradition, ways of lives forming tourism activities and service with unique identity attracting tourists to visit. The researchers, then, summarizes and presents the important topics as follows:

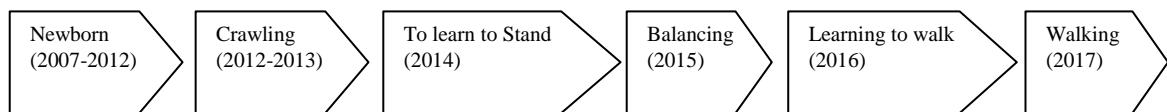
### Discovering and restoring tourism products in Pha Wai village

In order to notify primary information on the community's tourism products, as well as to promote the key informants' importance of Pha Wai community's contexts based on the community-based participatory management, the research findings revealed that observation checklists, interviews, and group discussions conducted with community leaders, leading representatives and members of Pa Pu Pao Eco-tourism Club, as well as other involved governmental organization officers were carried out for data collection. In addition, knowledge on community-based tourism management in relations to the elements of community-based participatory tourism management, databases on tourism products were all trained by the researchers and tourism-related experts.

After that, the participatory community analysis process was used by the lecturers, allowing them to narrate the original story with its historical backgrounds, and points of views, as well as expressing opinions about tourism resources within the community, and organizing information for tourism development, tourism situations, and tourism products.

According to the development of tourism in Pha Wai community, it showed that it could be divided into 6 major periods of tourism development of the community: Phase 1: Pioneering

targeted areas and community preparation in 2007 - 2012; Phase 2: tourists' beginning of travel within the community; Phase 3: Establishing Pa Pu Pao Eco-Tourism Club in 2014; Phase 4: The community's authorized registration on Pa Pu Pao Eco-Tourism Club and the other different organizations' information services on the development of community-based tourism management; Phase 5: The community's effective tourism management and tourists' databases in 2016, and Phase 6: Community-based tourism management in 2017. The researchers had analyzed and proposed tourism evolution of Pha Wai community based on timeline as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Timeline of tourism evolution of Pha Wai community

Also, mini-car tour services (E-tak) with the numbers of 6 - 12 tourists' seats served for tourists' sightseeing in Pa Wai community were mostly preferred for their family group's good relationship.

Databases on tourism products found in Pha Wai community could be sorted into five major elements shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** Elements of tourism products of Pha Wai community

**1. Attraction:** Tourist attractions with cultural identities and ways of rustic life were mostly found in Pha Wai community; moreover, the community residents' Northeastern lifestyles, communication with their dialectic expressions, sticky rice-preferred consumption, establishment of Pa Pu Pao eco-tourism management, as well as their religious activities in temples, their beliefs in ancestries, and unique tourist attractions were all provided for their community-based tourism management. Tourists attractions in Pha Wai community were detailed as follows.

**Phu Pa Po** was a cloudy mountain with a height of about 900 meters and an altitude of about 900 meters above sea levels, overlooking Phu Ho in Phu Luang district. Like Fuji volcano in Japan, other mountainous areas with its beautiful views near this mountain such as Phu Ho (Fuji Loei), Phu Kradueng, Phu Luang, Phu Pha Chit, Phu Pha Man, Phu Hin Rong Kla, and Hin Pha Ngam Garden could be all seen; moreover, four 200-meter-scenic spots were mostly

found in Phu Ho. While touching with its beauty, photo-taking sites were facilitated in different scenic views, and Pu Ho in Loei city could be seen clearly when the sunrise and sunset appeared.

**Wat Pa Sukjai or Huai Hom Temple** is a temple built by Luang Pho Saeng, away from the village along the agricultural road that the villagers have prepared about 5 kilometers, and it is located on highland areas, driving with a high-powered four-wheel car. Also, and mini-cars (E-tak) used for villagers' farming work. Along the route of traveling to wat Pa Sukjai, you will see the beautiful scenic views of Phu Ho, Phu Kradueng, another villages, and shady rubber gardens.

**Tham Pha Kwang** is a temple that caves are used for practice meditation for monks, located on a high-hill cliff, and only two monks stay there. Pha Kwang cave is located on high cliffs. In this cave, water streams are found in a small deep cave, the cave's four-meter entrance with sloping areas can be seen; otherwise, stalagmites can be seen along the cave's tracks. Also, this tranquilized cave is used for monks' meditation practices.

**Wat Pho Chai**, located within the village, is considered a temple that is the villagers' mind center. Geographically, rubbers are planted near some areas of the mountain temple, and this ancient temple with its age of more than 70 years was founded by Luang Pu Boonmee, who is, at present, an abbot of this temple. Within the temple, it is so-called "Ngeong Cave", which is named by the first explorer, is changed into "Pho Chai Cave". Also, the Buddha statue respected by villagers is enshrined inside this cave.

**Wickerwork**, which is considered a local wisdom in Pha Wai community, has been done by grandparents. In addition, household utilities such as swings, flaps, and sticky rice baskets are all made for general purposes.

For weaving work, it is a handicraft work that all Isaan women have to weave because it represents to women's weaving practices trained from their family. It is also hoped that the women's cotton weaving was done for their family and ritual ceremonies, which included their ordination, marriage, etc. However, the vast numbers of cottons in Pha Wai community are needed for their plantation from May to June, and six months, particularly in November are spent for their cotton plantation. During their harvesting time, ripe cottons will be harvested for weaving; otherwise, both cotton threads and seeds are solarized, and were finally spined, and dyed for next weaving procedures. In aspects of bamboo handicrafts, beautiful bamboo-made money-saving boxes and colorful glasses are made for tourists' souvenirs. Besides, Rishi tea products are made of herbs that are mostly found in rock crevices in Pha Wai community, and Rishi tea is also supplemented for local doctors' energy. Also, Rishi tea is a product that villagers bring their local wisdom to create added values for herbs found in their community. In the product, there will be a mixture of 2 herbal types, including Rishi tea and Oiy Sam Suan tea, which are well-known as "Licorice".

**Local foods:** Lam is a cooked food using a wooden barrel, and the main ingredients of this food contain some parts of meat, eel, animal parts, etc. In other words, chili paste with no sliced vegetables, and drinking water is mixed for cooking whereas fermented fish sauce, salt, and some different vegetables such as sweet basil (Manglak), acacia pennata (Cha-om), Limnophila geoffrayi (Phak Khayaeng), etc. are used for seasonings. Subsequently, mix them all together in bamboo tubes, and grill it for a while. Finally, it will be served with hot sticky rice. As "Mok" is a food that contains meat used as the main ingredients. Small fish, frog babies, different kinds of fish, frogs, bull frogs, chickens, etc. are mostly cooked for it, "Om" is a local food of the Isan people, which is mixed with meats and different kinds of vegetables. Fresh chilies, onions, and sliced lemon grasses are all pounded roughly; otherwise, animal parts such as fish, frogs, beefs, and different vegetables such as gourds, mushrooms, egg plants, long beans, pumpkins, pumpkin flowers, moringa flower, cucumber flower, etc. are used for the main ingredients.

**2. Accessibilities:** Before you reach Nong Hin district with distance of 1 kilometer, concrete-made and paved roads of highway no.201 are both facilitated from Loei city to Pha Wai community, which is about 45 kilometers faraway from Loei city. Then, turn right along the route no. 3029, and there will be a direct uphill route that is not very steep you can see. Also, private cars or rental cars are mostly preferred for their visit because no buses are all provided for transport services.

**3. Amenities:**

- 1) Public utilities such as electrical use, regional waterworks services, mobile phone services from Truemove, AIS / one - 2 - call, and DTAC / Happy, community radios, as well as public health services and life safety, community volunteers, fire engines, as well as medical services from Nong Hin Hospital and Poun Pu Hospital are all provided for tourists' public utility purposes.
- 2) A tourist center with car parking lots, which is built in three square kilometers (rais), includes service centers, shops, restaurants, toilets, and parking lots for tourists to switch to mini-cars (E-Tak) for travelling services.
- 3) Restaurants with parking lots together with tourist centers, which are facilitated for tourists' visit, include local restaurants, fast food shops, and drinks stores. Beside, food-cooking services organized by housewives are supported for students' and university students' meals, and both the visitors', and tourists' contacts with these restaurants and reservation are mostly found.
- 4) Bamboo-made souvenirs sold in shops such as money-saving boxes, toys, food carriers, etc. are designed and created for tourists' sales distribution.

**4. Accommodations:** There are two types of accommodations for tourists visiting Pha Wai community. These include 14 accommodations with 99 rooms (13 resorts and 1 homestay) in Baan Pha Wai Homestay and Phu Pa Po communities, which have been organized by 20 community members. Also, it is about not more than 10 kilometers far from these communities.

**5. Activities:** Tourism activities in Pha Wai community are activities that involved with tourists' amusement, excitement, challenges, and adventures; otherwise, some tourists' new learning experiences related to villagers' ways of rustic life, local wisdom, as well as their daily life must be all supported for community-based tourism activities. Furthermore, touching natural surroundings and villagers' ways of rustic life can be travelled by driving mini-cars (E-tak), in which the tourists' tour programs can be divided into two major routes: sightseeing the beauty of Po Pa Po mountain and Pha Wai community's route. Also, homestay tourism activities, which is a tourism that has learned the culture and way of life between tourists and homeowners. During their visit, tourists have an opportunity to experience their true lifestyle of the local people, joining in villagers' activities related to their way of life, and acquiring their cultural awareness and relationship between human beings and their natural resources, as well as learning their local wisdoms.

From the study of tourism products of Pha Wai community, however, it was stated that the villagers' better understandings and values of tourism products should be all enhanced for their sustainable development and conservation of tourism resources within their community.

**Meaning and signs of required tourism products in Pha Wai community**

The creation of signs and meaning on tourism in Pha Wai community was identified for its self-local identities along with tourism products, which presented their villagers' and tourists' easy-to-understand signs and meaning of tourism products. As a results, it directly affected their new learning experiences and better understandings of tourism products, and their values of tourism products in Pha Wai community; moreover, the signs and meaning of tourism products focusing on their local identities of tourism products were mostly supported for their community's contexts and requirements were detailed as follows.

**Signs and meaning on natural tourism resources:** Like the geographic features of Fuji volcano in Japan, the sign of Phu Pa Po was used for tourism distribution points that were mostly preferred for tourists' visit and sightseeing its scenic views and good atmospheres. In addition to the statement "Visit on Pu Pa Po, and you can explore around three different countries you can touch", it was stated that "Phu Ho" or Fuji mountain in Loei city could be seen when tourists trekked in the 4<sup>th</sup> tourism point, and Pha Ngam stone cliffs, which was so-called Kung Ming city in China, could be also seen.

**Signs and meaning on ways of local life:** Homestay-based tourism was remarked for the creation of signs and meaning of Pha Wai community, represented the villagers' ways of rustic life that could be learned by tourists and outsiders. Furthermore, the villagers' better understandings of local identities with their ways of life were all perceived for tourists' tourism services. In fact, tourists' activities based on the villagers' ways of local life included bamboo basketry, weaving, and seasonal pellet-cutting; otherwise, area-based tourism activities such as visit on Pu Pa Po, mini-car (E-tak) services, etc. were all resulted in the villagers' learning, experiences, intercultural exchange, as well as their awareness and self-responsibilities in tourism.

### **Community-based participatory process served for the interpretation model of valued tourism products in Pha Wai community**

The process of community-based participatory management should be implicated for the development of the interpretation model of tourism products in Pha Wai community, Puan Pu sub-district, Nong Hin district, Loei province. Additionally, panel discussions on the development of community-based tourism management in Pha Wai community were all needed for the governmental organizations', community leaders', leading representatives', Pu Pa Po eco-tourism club members' and community residents' working cooperation and decision-making on their community beneficiaries.

According to the development of the interpretation model of tourism products in Pha Wai community, Puan Pu sub-district, Nong Hin district, Loei province, it showed that the Pha Wai community's participatory process were all resulted from their community's working cooperation, as well as the community residents' concentration on tourism situations, their participation in community activities, their establishment of networking group. Furthermore, the Pu Pa Po eco-tourism club members' cooperation on their tourism activities must be all needed for their community's required contexts. In order to sustain and as well as to be served for the community's required and contexts, however, all the aspects of participatory processes in relations to its planning management, and on-site supervision and follow-up were all implemented for the development of the interpretation model of tourism products in Pha Wai community, Puan Pu sub-district, Nong Hin district, Loei province. Also, the Pha Wai community's participatory process could be divided into five major steps: Step 1 on initializing its development; Step 2 on planning; Step 3 on Organizing; Step 4 on beneficiaries, and Step 5 on project evaluation.

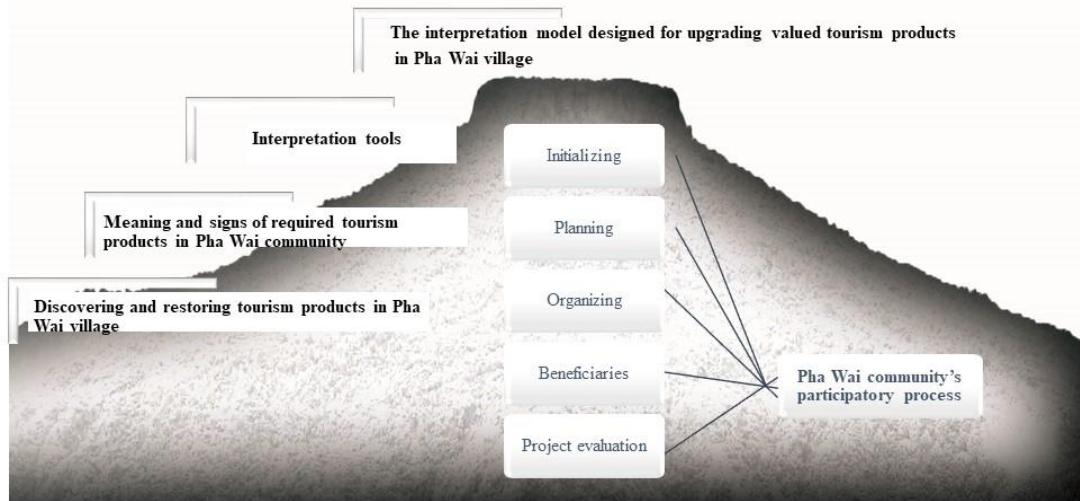
### **Presentation for the interpretation model of valued tourism products in Pha Wai community, Pounpu sub-district, Hong Hin district, Loei province**

Internal and external factors on the development of the interpretation model of valued tourism products in Pha Wai community, Puan Pu sub-district, Nong Hin district, Loei province were all affected by the community leaders', Pu Pa Po eco-tourism club members', and community's requirements, awareness, and importance of community-based tourism development, working collaborations with other different external organizations.

As the procedures for the development of the interpretation model of valued tourism products in Pha Wai community compared with the success of conquering the top of a mountain were sorted into four major steps:

- 1) In terms of beginning of climbing hills, discovering and reviving tourism products in Pha Wai community was presented for tourists' better understandings of health, and climbing equipment.
- 2) In terms of climbing hillsides, creative signs and meaning of tourism products in the community was used for SWOT analysis; moreover, the major purposes of tourism products of Pha Wai community were to convey its meaning of tourism products, to establish the values of tourism products, as well as to be guidelines for tourists' safe trips.
- 3) In terms of climbing along hillsides, interpretation tools used for visitors or tourists traveling in the Pha Wai community must be supported for decreasing the length of visit, and safety.
- 4) In terms of conquering the peaks, the community's participation in discovering and reviving tourism products, as well as analyzing the development and situations of tourism in Pha Wai community, selecting techniques and tools used for tourists' better interpretation of tourism products should be mostly implicated for the sustainable development of community-based tourism management in Pha Wai community.

Overall, the community's participatory process in discovering and reviving tourism products, as well as analyzing the development and situations of tourism in Pha Wai community, selecting techniques and tools used for tourists' better interpretation of tourism products, in working collaborations with other different organizations, should be implicated for the sustainable development of community-based tourism management in Pha Wai community, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 3:** A process related to the development of interpretation model designed for the values of tourism products in Pha Wai village, Poun Pu sub-district, Nong Hin district, Loei province

## Conclusion and Discussion

The interpretation model to enhance the value of tourism products of Pha Wai Village, Loei Province revealed that the importance of the community-based tourism is based on the value of the history of ways of lives, collective culture from the past, and the tourism resources. However, the socio-economic within the community always change positively and negatively. Whenever the community deteriorates, conservation and restoration will be the means to resurrect the community's value. In addition, tourism interpretation also creates a learning center to enhance tourists' experience which will increase incomes into the community. The interpretation model to enhance the value of tourism products of Pha Wai

Village starts from searching and restoring the community tourism products, analyzing tourism development and situation, creating meaning and sign of the community tourism products, selecting appropriate techniques and tools to interpret to tourists, and implementing the interpretation leading to sustainable development. The model of interpretation of tourism product of Pha Wai Village stimulates and activate tourists' needs to experience the product; thus, helps increase tourism products' value and generates incomes. Besides, when local people learn and understand the concept of tourism interpretation to enhance tourism products' value, it results in implanting the concept of development as well as the conservation by the community. The aforementioned process can be applied to other communities in order to propose their tourism products' values.

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