

UNIVERSITY–COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE PHILOSOPHY OF SUFFICIENCY ECONOMY: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF RAJABHAT UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

Rajabhat Universities are recognized as "Universities for Local Development" and are instrumental in advancing sustainable community development in Thailand. Nevertheless, scant attention has been afforded to the role of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) as a strategic framework for university-community cooperation and local development. Current research on university-community interaction predominantly emphasizes Western contexts, but the incorporation of SEP into university missions and community engagement methods is insufficiently examined. This study seeks to evaluate the strategic function of Rajabhat Universities in promoting university-community engagement via SEP and to investigate the impact of strategic local development initiatives on sustainable community development. This research utilized documentary analysis using theme content examination. Data were gathered from higher education policy documents, strategic plans of Rajabhat Universities, reports on local development projects, and pertinent scholarly publications. SEP functioned as the analytical framework for elucidating university missions and community engagement activities.

The results demonstrate that Rajabhat Universities facilitate sustainable local development through three interrelated functions: knowledge dissemination, community empowerment, and collaborative network formation. The incorporation of SEP into pedagogy, research, and academic services enhances university-community interaction by fostering participatory learning, community-oriented problem-solving, and local creativity. Moreover, strategic local development initiatives function as effective means for implementing SEP principles into sustainable economic, social, and community development results. This study enhances the literature by illustrating the integration of SEP into university missions to fortify university-community collaboration and promote sustainable local development. The results offer practical insights for higher education institutions and politicians aiming to improve community engagement and sustainability-focused development strategies in Thailand.

Keywords: University–Community Engagement; Sufficiency Economy Philosophy; Rajabhat Universities; Local Development; Higher Education

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, higher education institutions are increasingly anticipated to contribute to teaching, research, and social, economic, and community development. Universities are no longer viewed merely as institutions for producing graduates and generating academic knowledge; rather, they are expected to engage with society, address public problems, and support sustainable development (Watson et al., 2011; Benneworth, 2018). This transition signifies the university's mission expansion towards the "third mission," which underscores the institution's greater social responsibility in aligning academic knowledge with community needs and developmental issues (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Trencher et al., 2014).

In this evolving context, University–Community Engagement has emerged as a significant topic in higher education. It denotes collaborative partnerships between institutions and communities involving the exchange of knowledge, resources, and experiences for reciprocal advantage (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). This participation can manifest in several ways, including as community service, community-based learning, local research, and the transmission of knowledge to communities (Fitzgerald et al., 2012; Boyer, 1996). These activities not only bolster community capacity but also augment student learning by allowing students to apply academic information to real-world

contexts, refine problem-solving abilities, and foster social responsibility (Healey et al., 2014). University-community engagement is considered a crucial mechanism for sustainable development as it fosters collaboration among higher education institutions, communities, and various sectors in tackling economic, social, and environmental challenges (Trencher et al., 2014; Málovics et al., 2025).

In Thailand, the desire for universities to contribute to national and local development is notably reflected in the goal of Rajabhat Universities. These institutions are classified as “Universities for Local Development” and are anticipated to connect academic knowledge with community advancement through instruction, research, and scholarly services. This aim aligns with the engaged university paradigm, which underscores the engagement between academic institutions and society to address public issues and bolster local capacity (Watson et al., 2011; Benneworth, 2018). In recent years, strategic initiatives for local development have been advocated as vital means through which Rajabhat Universities collaborate with communities to foster local economic, social, and cultural advancement.

Nonetheless, a disparity persists between the normative expectations of Rajabhat Universities as pivotal entities for local development and the analytical comprehension of how these responsibilities are effectively structured through university-community collaboration. While policies and strategic initiatives highlight the significance of local development, current dialogues frequently articulate institutional objectives rather than elucidate the processes by which institutions amalgamate knowledge, community engagement, and sustainable development practices. This necessitates a more explicit analytical framework to comprehend how Rajabhat Universities convert their missions into community-oriented development activities.

A significant framework for local and community development in Thailand is the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. This ideology underscores balance, moderation, logic, self-sufficiency, knowledge, and ethics as essential pillars for sustainable growth. It has been implemented across multiple sectors of Thai society, encompassing education and higher education. Universities can incorporate this ideology into pedagogy, research, and academic services to foster sustainable community development (Sakkhamduang et al., 2025). Its implementation in school also fosters learning that prioritizes social ideals, communal responsibility, and sustainable development (Mori, 2022).

While many studies have explored university-community involvement in higher education globally, research specifically addressing the Thai environment, especially Rajabhat Universities, is limited. A significant portion of the current literature highlights models of university-community involvement in Western contexts or other emerging nations (Sugawara et al., 2023; Muwanguzi et al., 2023). Furthermore, insufficient emphasis has been placed on the potential of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy as an analytical framework for comprehending university operations and community engagement in Thailand. This study seeks to examine the strategic function of Rajabhat Universities in fostering University–Community Engagement by integrating the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, and to elucidate the mechanisms by which university missions facilitate sustainable local development.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study the role of Rajabhat universities in promoting community participation.
2. To analyze the integration of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into the university's operations.
3. To study the role of strategic projects for local development in sustainable community development.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. University–Community Engagement Concept

The concept of University–Community Engagement has received widespread attention in the field of higher education. It refers to the collaborative process between universities and communities in exchanging knowledge, resources, and experiences to solve social problems and promote sustainable local development (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Watson et al., 2011). This concept reflects the role of universities as socially responsible institutions that must participate in community development and create a positive social impact (Benneworth, 2018).

University-community engagement can take many forms. One important form is service learning, a learning process that combines classroom learning with community service. Students have the opportunity to apply their academic knowledge to solve real community problems (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Furthermore, community-based research is another form of engagement that emphasizes conducting research in collaboration with the community. To create a body of knowledge that directly meets the needs of the community (Strand et al., 2003).

Another approach is knowledge transfer, which refers to the transfer of knowledge, technology, and innovation from universities to communities or various sectors of society (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). This process enables universities to concretely apply academic knowledge to community and local economic development.

University-community participation benefits both the university and the community. For the university, participation promotes student learning, the development of professional skills, and the creation of knowledge relevant to society (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). At the same time, the community benefits from access to university knowledge, innovation, and resources, supporting sustainable community development and the solution of social problems (Trencher et al., 2014).

3.2. Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy

The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is a development concept that emphasizes balance, sustainability, and adaptability to change. The concept was developed as a guideline for national development and the lives of its people (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2017).

The philosophy of sufficiency economy comprises three key principles: moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. These principles help individuals and societies live and develop in a balanced and sustainable manner (Mongsawad, 2012).

In addition to these three principles, the philosophy of sufficiency economy emphasizes two crucial conditions: knowledge and ethics, which are fundamental to applying its principles to daily life and social development (Mongsawad, 2012).

In the education sector, the sufficiency economy concept is used in curriculum development, teaching methods, and academic services to the community, focusing on creating knowledge that can be applied to sustainable community and social development (Chowdhury et al., 2025). Integrating the philosophy of sufficiency economy into education also promotes learning that emphasizes social values and community responsibility, and sustainable development (Mori, 2022)

3.3. The Role of Higher Education Institutions in Local Development

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in local development, especially in the context of sustainable development. The Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HESD) concept emphasizes the role of universities in creating knowledge, developing student skills, and supporting sustainable social and environmental development (UNESCO, 2022).

Universities can play a role in community development through various activities such as local research, academic services, and building collaborative networks with communities (Benneworth, 2018). University participation with communities facilitates the exchange of knowledge between

academics, students, and communities, which is a key factor in promoting sustainable local development (Málovics et al., 2025).

Furthermore, universities also play a role in creating innovation and transferring technology to communities, which supports the economic and social development of local areas (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000).

3.4. The Role of Rajabhat Universities

Rajabhat universities are higher education institutions that play a significant role in local development in Thailand. Their mission has been defined as... “Universities for Local Development” are responsible for supporting the social, economic, and cultural development of communities in their areas. The policy of Rajabhat Universities emphasizes the integration of teaching, research, and academic services with community development in order to strengthen local communities and promote sustainable regional development (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation [MHESI], 2021). In recent years, Rajabhat Universities have implemented strategic projects for local development aimed at strengthening cooperation between universities and communities, including grassroots economic development, promoting community tourism, and preserving local culture. These projects have reinforced the role of Rajabhat Universities as a key mechanism for sustainable local development.

3.5 Integrating the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and University–Community Engagement for Sustainable Local Development

Recent discourse on higher education and sustainable development has increasingly highlighted the role of universities as proactive agents in tackling social, economic, and environmental issues through partnership with communities (Benneworth, 2018; Trencher et al., 2014). From this viewpoint, University–Community Engagement encompasses not just information transfer but also collaborative learning, co-creation of knowledge, and the advancement of local innovation that addresses community needs (Watson et al., 2011; Hall, 2022).

The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (SEP) is acknowledged as a people-centered development framework that emphasizes moderation, rationality, resilience, knowledge, and morality as essential pillars of sustainable development (Mongsawad, 2012). Recent studies underscore the ongoing significance of SEP in enhancing community resilience, sustainable livelihoods, and human development in Thailand (Sakkhamduang et al., 2025). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2024) underscores that SEP offers a crucial foundation for community empowerment and the promotion of sustainable development objectives via participative and locally anchored development strategies.

Despite their shared objectives for sustainable development, community empowerment, and social involvement, University–Community Engagement and SEP have frequently been addressed independently in the literature. Research on university engagement predominantly emphasizes institutional functions, community collaborations, and knowledge transfer processes (Benneworth, 2018; Sugawara et al., 2023; Muwanguzi et al., 2023), whereas investigations into SEP primarily scrutinize its implementation in education, community advancement, and public policy (Sakkhamduang et al., 2025; Mori, 2022). As a result, little focus has been placed on comprehending how SEP might serve as an analytical framework to elucidate the mechanisms by which universities interact with communities and foster sustainable local development.

This disparity is especially pronounced within the framework of Rajabhat Universities in Thailand. Despite being designated as “Universities for Local Development,” present research hardly elucidates the integration of university missions, community engagement, and SEP principles into actionable development methods. Furthermore, there exists a poor analytical comprehension of how strategic local development initiatives convert SEP ideals into community-oriented development results. Consequently, the amalgamation of University–Community Engagement and the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy offers a significant analytical framework for comprehending the strategic function of Rajabhat Universities in sustainable local development. This comprehensive viewpoint indicates that

SEP can function both as a developmental philosophy and as a framework that influences institution missions, community involvement strategies, and collaborative development initiatives. Universities can serve as intermediaries that link academic knowledge, community engagement, and sustainable development objectives within local contexts.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research framework describes the relationship between key concepts linking the roles of higher education institutions, particularly Rajabhat universities, and sustainable local development, within the framework of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. This philosophy is a crucial guideline for social and community development in Thailand. The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy comprises important principles such as moderation, rationality, and self-reliance, along with conditions related to knowledge and morality. These principles serve as a fundamental framework for guiding university operations towards balanced and sustainable development.

Within this framework, universities can integrate the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into their core missions: teaching, research, and academic service. This integration enhances the connection between education and university operations and the community and social context. Furthermore, integrating the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into university missions creates knowledge that meets local needs and promotes student learning, enabling them to apply knowledge to solve community problems concretely. When universities integrate the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into their core missions, it strengthens University-Community Engagement. This is a collaborative process between the university and the community for the exchange of knowledge, resources, and experiences to jointly develop the community and solve social problems. This engagement can occur through various activities, such as providing academic services to the community. Local research and community-based learning foster strong relationships between universities and communities.

The outcome of university-community engagement within the framework of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is the promotion of sustainable local development, encompassing economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Such university operations strengthen community capacity, promote grassroots economic development, and build long-term social resilience. Therefore, this research framework reflects the hierarchical relationship between the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, its integration into the university's mission, university-community engagement, and the outcome of sustainable local development.

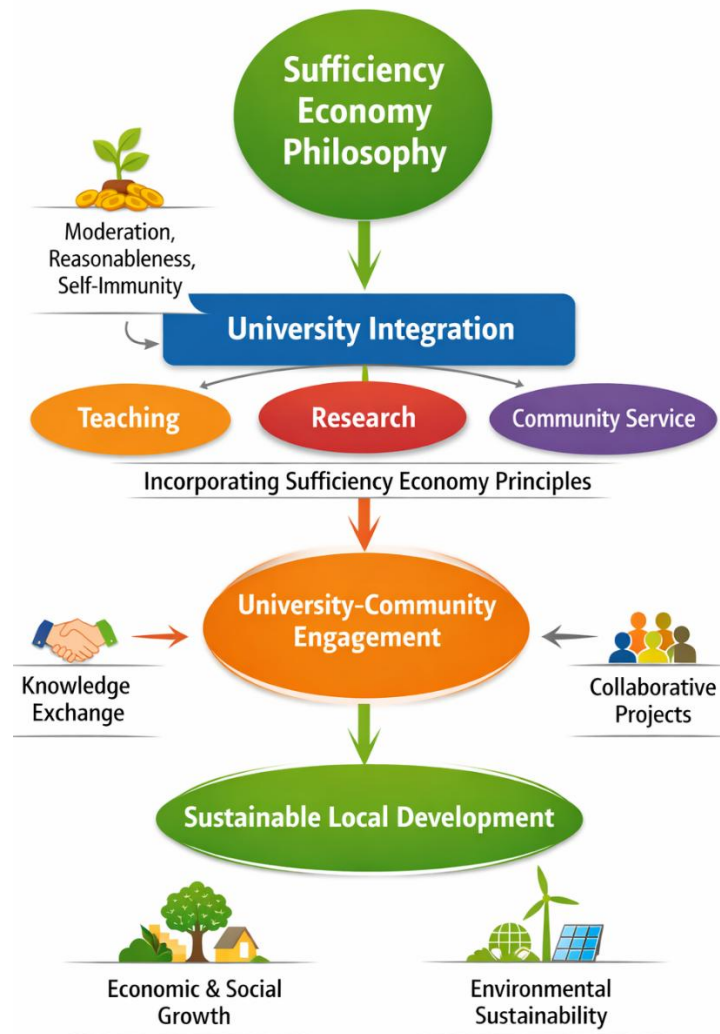


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative documentary methodology to investigate the strategic function of Rajabhat Universities in fostering University–Community Engagement via the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (SEP). Documentary research is especially appropriate for examining policy directions, institutional tactics, and development mechanisms, as it facilitates systematic examination and interpretation of pertinent existing documents related to the research issue. The research employed thematic content analysis to discern patterns, themes, and interconnections among notions about university-community involvement, the incorporation of SEP into university missions, and sustainable local development. This study aimed to elucidate how Rajabhat Universities implement their local development mission and how the SEP serves as a framework for community participation and sustainable development.

5.2 Data Sources and Document Selection

The document population comprised policy documents, strategy plans, project reports, and academic publications pertaining to higher education, local development, university-community involvement, and the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy in Thailand.

Documents were obtained from four primary sources: (1) National higher education policy documents, encompassing policies and development plans released by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, together with other government organizations. Strategic plans and development frameworks of Rajabhat Universities that delineate institutional missions and local development initiatives. Reports on strategic local development initiatives executed by Rajabhat Universities. Scholarly books, research articles, and academic publications related to University–Community Engagement, sustainable development, higher education, and the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. Document selection was predicated on three criteria: pertinence to the study objectives, reliability of the source, and timeliness of information. Emphasis was placed on official policy papers, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed scholarly publications pertinent to the study issue.

5.3 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection involved a comprehensive evaluation of documentation sources acquired from academic databases, government repositories, university publications, and publicly available institutional papers. The collection process had three parts. Initially, pertinent papers were found utilizing keywords associated with University–Community Engagement, Rajabhat Universities, local development, and the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. Subsequently, documents were evaluated based on the predetermined selection criteria. Third, pertinent documents were examined and categorized based on their relation to the study's aims and conceptual framework. The gathered materials were classified as policy documents, strategic plans, project reports, and academic literature to enable systematic analysis.

5.4 Data Analysis

The research utilized theme content analysis as the principal analytical method. The analysis was performed in four consecutive stages. Initially, all chosen texts were meticulously examined to acquire a thorough understanding of their content and context. Secondly, pertinent information concerning university missions, community participation, SEP integration, local development initiatives, and developmental outcomes was found and categorized. Third, coded data were classified into thematic groups based on similarities and conceptual linkages. The principal topics identified in the investigation encompassed knowledge transfer, community capacity enhancement, collaborative network formation, integration of SEP into university objectives, and strategies for sustainable local development. The topics were ultimately analyzed and integrated to elucidate the strategic function of Rajabhat Universities in fostering University–Community Engagement via the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. The analysis concentrated on elucidating the connections between university missions, community engagement, and sustainable local development results. To improve analytical rigor, findings from various document formats were compared and cross-validated by document triangulation. This procedure facilitated uniformity and reliability in the analysis of results.

6. RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1. *The Role of Rajabhat Universities in Local Development*

Document analysis revealed that Rajabhat universities play a significant role in driving local development through the implementation of their higher education institution missions: teaching, research, and academic services. These activities are linked to university-community engagement. Such activities promote community capacity building, knowledge transfer, and the creation of collaborative networks between universities and various sectors of society, which are crucial factors in supporting sustainable local development (Watson et al., 2011; Benneworth, 2018).

6.1.1 Knowledge Transfer

The study found that one of the key roles of Rajabhat universities in local development is knowledge transfer from the university to the community through teaching, research, and academic service activities. This knowledge transfer enables communities to access knowledge, technology, and innovations developed by the universities. This leads to the development of community capacity and the effective solution of local problems (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000).

Furthermore, knowledge transfer can also occur through service learning activities and community-based research, which provide opportunities for students and researchers to work with communities to solve real-world problems. This results in continuous knowledge exchange between universities and communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Fitzgerald et al., 2012). Several studies indicate that such university participation promotes student learning and enables communities to concretely apply knowledge to local development (Healey et al., 2014).

6.1.2 Community Capacity Building

The research also found that Rajabhat universities play a significant role in community capacity building through knowledge transfer, training, and joint project development with communities. Such activities enable communities to develop skills, knowledge, and capabilities in managing their own resources sustainably.

University-community participation fosters a collaborative learning process among academics, students, and community members. This strengthens communities and supports economic, social, and environmental development at the local level (Sugawara et al, 2023; Málovics et al., 2025). Furthermore, collaborative activities between universities and communities promote the development of skills among community members, such as community product development, community tourism development, and sustainable natural resource management.

In the Thai context, applying the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as a guideline for community development also fosters balance in development, emphasizing moderate, rational, and resilient development (Mongsawad, 2012), which aligns with the concept of sustainable development that focuses on simultaneous economic, social, and environmental development (Mettathamrong et al., 2023).

6.1.3 Building Collaborative Networks

Another important role of Rajabhat universities in local development is the creation of collaborative networks between universities, communities, government agencies, the private sector, and civil society organizations. Such networks promote the exchange of resources, knowledge, and experiences among various sectors of society, a crucial factor in supporting sustainable local development (Williamson et al., 2016).

Several studies indicate that... Collaboration between universities and communities enhances the effectiveness of solving social problems and promotes local innovation (Noel et al., 2019). Furthermore, collaborative networks enable universities to effectively apply academic knowledge to community development and empower communities to participate in determining their own development direction (Hall, 2022).

Therefore, the document analysis reflects that Rajabhat universities play a crucial role in local development through knowledge transfer, community capacity building, and the creation of collaborative networks among various sectors of society. This is a key mechanism for promoting sustainable local development.

6.2. Integration of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy into University Activities

Document analysis revealed that Rajabhat Universities have integrated the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (PSE) into their core missions: teaching, research, and academic service, to support sustainable local development. This integration reflects the application of the Sufficiency Economy concept, emphasizing moderation, rationality, and resilience, to educational and community development (Mongsawad, 2012; Mettathamrong et al., 2023). This approach aligns with the concept of higher

education institutions playing a role in social and community development through knowledge creation and knowledge transfer (Watson et al., 2011; Benneworth, 2018).

6.2.1 Integration in Teaching and Learning

The study found that integrating the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy into teaching and learning is a key approach used by Rajabhat Universities to develop learners with the knowledge, skills, and attributes appropriate for social and community development. This type of teaching and learning often emphasizes learning linked to the community context, such as community-based learning. (Community-based learning) and experiential learning enable students to apply classroom knowledge to solve community problems in a concrete way (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Healey et al., 2014).

Integrating the philosophy of sufficiency economy into teaching also promotes the development of learners' characteristics in terms of social responsibility, rational thinking, and awareness of the importance of sustainable development (Chowdhury et al., 2025). Furthermore, this type of learning creates a connection between the university and the community, which is a key factor in promoting university-social participation (Sugawara et al, 2023).

6.2.2 Community-Based Research

The document analysis also revealed that Rajabhat universities play a significant role in conducting community-based research, a research process that emphasizes community participation in defining research issues and applying research results to local development. This type of research helps create knowledge that meets community needs. and promotes sustainable solutions to community problems (Strand et al., 2003; Hall, 2022).

Research for local communities that integrates the Sufficiency Economy concept often focuses on grassroots economic development, community product development, natural resource management, and community tourism development, which helps strengthen the economy and society at the local level (Mettathamrong et al., 2023). Furthermore, conducting research in collaboration with communities promotes a shared learning process among researchers, students, and community members, which is a key factor in creating innovations for local development (Noel et al., 2019).

6.2.3 Academic Services

Another important role of Rajabhat Universities in integrating the philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy is academic services to society. This is a crucial mechanism for transferring knowledge and technology from the university to the community. Academic services of this nature are often conducted through various activities such as training, consultation, community capacity building, and support for community economic development.

Academic services that integrate the Sufficiency Economy concept promote community development in various dimensions, such as community product development, natural resource management, and community tourism development. This aligns with the concept of sustainable development (Trencher et al., 2014; Málovics et al., 2025).

Furthermore, academic service helps build strong relationships between the university and the community by providing opportunities for community participation in the development of various university activities. This is a crucial factor in promoting University–Community Engagement and sustainable local development (Benneworth, 2018).

Therefore, the document analysis reflects that integrating the philosophy of sufficiency economy into the activities of Rajabhat Universities, including teaching, research, and academic service, plays a significant role in promoting university-community participation and is a key mechanism in supporting sustainable local development.

6.3. University-Community Engagement

Document analysis reveals that University-Community Engagement (UCI) is a crucial mechanism for connecting the role of Rajabhat universities with sustainable local development. This engagement occurs through collaboration between universities, communities, government agencies, the

private sector, and civil society organizations to jointly develop projects, activities, and innovations that meet the needs of local communities (Watson et al., 2011; Benneworth et al., 2017). The concept of university-community engagement reflects the university's role as a socially responsible institution with the duty to apply academic knowledge to solve problems and develop communities sustainably (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

6.3.1 Community Collaborative Project Development

The study found that Rajabhat universities play a significant role in developing community collaborative projects. These projects typically arise from collaboration between academics, students, and community members to identify issues and development approaches appropriate to the local context. Implementing community collaborative projects promotes public participation in the development process. This enables the university's operations to truly respond to the needs of the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Hall, 2022).

Such collaborative projects often encompass a variety of activities such as community economic development, local product development, community tourism promotion, and natural resource management, which strengthen communities and promote sustainable local development (Noel et al., 2019). Furthermore, collaborative projects with communities provide students with opportunities to learn from real-world experiences and develop skills in working with communities and society (Healey et al., 2014).

6.3.2 Local Innovation

Another important role of Rajabhat universities in community engagement is local innovation. Universities can utilize their research capabilities and academic knowledge to develop technologies, innovations, and solutions appropriate to the community context. Such innovations support local economic and social development and promote the efficient use of local resources (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000).

Several studies indicate that... Collaboration between universities and communities fosters social innovation, which is innovation aimed at solving social problems and improving the quality of life for people in communities (Trencher et al., 2014; Málovics et al., 2025). In the Thai context, local innovation may encompass the development of community products, the development of natural resource management systems, or the development of community tourism, all of which play a crucial role in strengthening the grassroots economy.

6.3.3 Collaborative Learning Between Universities and Communities

The study also found that participation between universities and communities promotes mutual learning among academics, students, and community members, a key process in creating knowledge relevant to the social context. This collaborative learning enables universities to gain a deeper understanding of community problems and needs, and allows communities greater access to university knowledge and resources (Strand et al., 2003).

Furthermore, collaborative learning promotes participatory knowledge creation, allowing communities to play a role in creating knowledge and determining their own development direction (Hall, 2022). This process strengthens community resilience. And it supports sustainable long-term local development.

In summary, the document analysis reflects that university-community engagement in the context of Rajabhat Universities plays a crucial role in developing joint community projects, creating local innovations, and promoting collaborative learning between universities and communities. These are all important mechanisms for supporting sustainable local development.

6.4 Strategic Local Development Projects as Mechanisms for Sustainable Community Development

Analysis of documents reveals that strategic local development initiatives executed by Rajabhat Universities serve as crucial instruments for actualizing the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy

(SEP) in community development endeavors. These programs create operational environments in which universities, communities, local administrative bodies, and other stakeholders jointly tackle local economic, social, and environmental issues. The findings indicate that strategic projects function not just as development initiatives but also as institutional mechanisms linking university mandates to sustained local development results.

The analysis indicates that smart local development initiatives typically prioritize community engagement, local resource usage, and capacity building. These attributes embody fundamental concepts of SEP, notably moderation, reasonableness, and self-reliance, which promote development strategies tailored to local circumstances and community requirements (Mongsawad, 2012). Universities enhance information transfer, offer academic assistance, and foster collaborative learning initiatives that bolster community resilience and stimulate local innovation through such projects.

A consistent theme observed in project materials is the incorporation of teaching, research, and academic services with community development initiatives. Numerous strategic initiatives concentrate on community product development, local entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism, and natural resource management. In these programs, students, scholars, and community members collaboratively engage in problem identification, planning, implementation, and assessment procedures. This collaborative methodology embodies the principle of community-engaged universities, wherein knowledge is co-created through interaction between universities and communities, rather than being conveyed through a unidirectional process (Watson et al., 2011; Hall, 2022).

The results indicate that strategic projects enhance community capacity by fortifying local knowledge systems, refining community management abilities, and promoting participatory decision-making. These results align with research indicating that university-community involvement fosters sustainable development when institutions serve as facilitators of collaborative learning and local innovation (Benneworth, 2018; Trencher et al., 2014). Furthermore, project execution frequently fosters the establishment of collaborative networks among universities, local governments, civil society organizations, and community groups, thereby augmenting long-term sustainability and collective problem-solving capabilities.

From an analytical standpoint, the findings indicate that SEP serves both as a normative development philosophy and as an operational framework directing university-community involvement practices. Rajabhat Universities incorporate SEP concepts into their institutional objectives and community development initiatives through strategic local development projects, thereby establishing effective routes to sustainable local development. This relationship illustrates how universities function as intermediates between academic knowledge, community engagement, and sustainability-focused development methods within local contexts.

6.5 Rajabhat University for Local Development Project as an Illustrative Case

Document analysis reveals that the Rajabhat University for Local Development Project exemplifies how Rajabhat Universities implement their mission as "Universities for Local Development" via community engagement and the incorporation of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (SEP). The project was initiated as a strategic tool to enhance collaboration between institutions and local communities, while fostering sustainable economic, social, and cultural growth.

The project underscores the amalgamation of pedagogy, research, and academic services within community development initiatives. Universities enable knowledge transfer and community-based problem-solving through collaborative projects that involve academics, students, community leaders, local administration bodies, and civil society groups. Common activities encompass community product development, the encouragement of local entrepreneurship, community-based tourism, and the management of natural resources. These programs empower communities to integrate academic knowledge with local wisdom to tackle development concerns.

The results indicate that the initiative embodies essential tenets of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, specifically moderation, reasonableness, and self-reliance (Mongsawad, 2012). Project implementation prioritizes community capacity building, participatory learning, and sustainable resource utilization over mere economic gain. This method enhances community resilience and fosters sustainable local development.

Additionally, the initiative fosters collaborative learning between universities and communities via cooperative planning, execution, and assessment processes. This partnership exemplifies University–Community Engagement, highlighting reciprocal knowledge exchange and the co-creation of solutions to societal issues (Watson et al., 2011). The project facilitates the establishment of collaborative networks among universities, local governments, community organizations, and other stakeholders, thereby augmenting the sustainability of development projects.

The analysis indicates that the Rajabhat University for Local Development Project serves as an effective framework for institutions to convert institutional missions into community-oriented development practices. This illustrates how the incorporation of SEP into university operations can enhance university-community involvement and promote sustainable local development. This study exemplifies the strategic function of Rajabhat Universities as intermediates linking academic knowledge, community engagement, and sustainability-focused development within local contexts (Benneworth, 2018; Trencher et al., 2014).



Figure 2 Rajabhat University Engagement Model for Sustainable Local Development (RUESLD Model)

7. DISCUSSION

This study's findings indicate that Rajabhat Universities are pivotal in fostering sustainable local development by integrating the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (SEP) with University-Community Engagement. Rajabhat Universities serve not merely as institutions for teaching and research, but as intermediaries that link academic knowledge, community engagement, and local development initiatives. This discovery reinforces the notion of the engaged university, highlighting the responsibility of higher education institutions in tackling social issues via collaborative collaborations with communities and stakeholders (Watson et al., 2011; Benneworth, 2018).

This study reveals that knowledge transfer, community capacity building, and collaborative network creation function as interrelated mechanisms rather than separate activities. Prior research has frequently highlighted knowledge transfer as the principal role of university-community collaboration

(Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Fitzgerald et al., 2012). This study indicates that the efficacy of knowledge transfer relies on universities' capacity to enhance community skills while fostering enduring collaborative partnerships. This discovery broadens current viewpoints on University–Community Engagement by emphasizing the significance of institutional and social networks in maintaining developmental results. The findings demonstrate that the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy serves as both a normative development concept and an operational framework for steering university–community collaboration. This study illustrates the integration of SEP into university missions and its translation into actionable development strategies via teaching, research, academic services, and strategic local development initiatives, contrasting with prior research that primarily viewed SEP as a development philosophy advocating moderation, reasonableness, and resilience (Mongsawad, 2012). This conclusion aligns with research highlighting the role of SEP in sustainable community development and local resilience (Mettathamrong et al., 2023), while also broadening the discourse by demonstrating its institutional implementation in higher education.

A significant conclusion pertains to the function of strategic local development initiatives, like the Rajabhat University for Local Development Project, as instruments that actualize university missions within local settings. The analysis indicates that these programs foster collaborative learning, knowledge co-creation, and community engagement in development processes. This study substantiates the assertion that universities enhance their contributions to sustainable development by including communities as active collaborators rather than passive users of knowledge (Trencher et al., 2014). The findings simultaneously affirm that sustainable local development necessitates collaborative governance and the involvement of several stakeholders, including universities, communities, local governments, and civil society organizations.

The study emphasizes the significance of collaborative learning as a mechanism for integrating academic knowledge with local wisdom. Prior studies indicate that community-engaged learning improves students' practical abilities and civic duty (Healey et al., 2014). The current findings indicate that collaborative learning produces wider advantages by enabling reciprocal knowledge sharing and fostering the co-development of locally pertinent innovations. This discovery corresponds with participatory and community-oriented methodologies that perceive knowledge generation as a collaborative endeavor between universities and communities, rather than a unilateral dissemination of expertise.

This study offers the SEP–University–Community Engagement Framework for Sustainable Local Development based on these findings. The framework delineates the influence of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy on university missions, the execution of these missions via teaching, research, academic services, and strategic local development initiatives, and the resultant contributions to knowledge transfer, community capacity enhancement, collaborative networks, and, ultimately, sustainable local development. This paradigm enhances the literature by offering a cohesive approach that links SEP, University–Community Engagement, and sustainable development within the realm of Thai higher education.

The findings indicate that Rajabhat Universities' contributions beyond traditional higher education roles. By integrating SEP and community engagement strategies, these universities act strategically to enhance community resilience, foster local creativity, and promote sustainable development. This viewpoint underscores the importance of higher education institutions as drivers of locally rooted and sustainability-focused social change.

8. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the strategic function of Rajabhat Universities in fostering University–Community Engagement via the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (SEP) and analyzed the contribution of university missions to sustainable local development. Documentary analysis of policy documents,

strategic plans, project reports, and pertinent scholarly literature reveals that Rajabhat Universities significantly contribute to the linkage between academic knowledge and community development by integrating teaching, research, and academic services.

The results indicate that Rajabhat Universities facilitate sustainable local development via three interrelated functions: knowledge dissemination, community empowerment, and collaborative network formation. Universities promote information and resource exchange, enhance local capacities, and establish collaborations among academic institutions, communities, governmental bodies, and civil society organizations. The research reveals that strategic local development initiatives function as effective means for universities to convert institutional missions into community-oriented development activities.

This study reveals that the theory of Sufficiency Economy serves both as a normative development theory and as an operational framework for guiding university-community collaboration. Rajabhat Universities foster development strategies that are attuned to local settings and conducive to long-term sustainability by incorporating the concepts of moderation, reasonableness, self-reliance, knowledge, and morality into their teaching, research, and academic services. The incorporation of SEP enhances University–Community Engagement by promoting participatory learning, collaborative problem-solving, and local creativity.

The study enhances the literature by establishing an analytical connection among the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, University–Community Engagement, and sustainable local development. The results indicate that universities can function as strategic intermediates between academic knowledge, community engagement, and sustainability-focused development approaches. This viewpoint enhances current dialogues on engaged universities by emphasizing the influence of locally rooted development ideologies on university-community connections and developmental results.

The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, higher education administrators, and community development practitioners aiming to enhance collaboration between institutions and communities. The research indicates that deliberate local development initiatives and the incorporation of SEP into university missions can bolster community resilience, foster sustainable livelihoods, and facilitate enduring local development.

This study is constrained by its dependence on documentary sources, thus concentrating on institutional policies, tactics, and recorded activities. Future studies should utilize empirical methods, such as case studies, interviews, or comparative analyses across various universities and regions, to investigate the economic, social, and environmental effects of university-community involvement programs more comprehensively.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings on the role of Rajabhat Universities in promoting university-community participation within the framework of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, the following policy and academic recommendations can be made to support sustainable local development:

9.1. Policy Recommendations

Firstly, relevant agencies responsible for higher education policy should systematically promote and support the development of university-community cooperation. This can be achieved by creating mechanisms or projects that facilitate collaboration between universities, government agencies, local administrative organizations, and civil society. Such support should include budget allocation, development of management systems, and the creation of collaborative networks at the local level, enabling universities to effectively and continuously play their role in local development.

Secondly, higher education institutions should promote the integration of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy into their curricula, particularly in courses related to community development, resource management, and sustainable development. Integrating this concept into the teaching and learning process

will help students understand balanced and sustainable development and apply their knowledge appropriately to community and social development. Furthermore, learning models that connect with communities, such as community-based learning, should be supported. (community-based learning) and service learning to promote meaningful learning experiences that meet the needs of society.

9.2. Future Research Recommendation

For future research, empirical research should be conducted to analyze the impact of local development projects implemented by Rajabhat Universities, particularly on the economic, social, and environmental aspects of the communities. Such empirical research will help to more clearly assess the effectiveness of the projects and identify factors contributing to their success.

Furthermore, a comparative study of the roles of universities in different regions, both in Thailand and internationally, should be conducted to understand the different operational models and development approaches in each context. Such studies will help to apply lessons and best practices from universities in different regions to improve the operations of Rajabhat Universities more effectively.

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