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WORKING PAPER  
TRANSITION FROM AGROFORESTRY TO ECOTOURISM  
IN MAE KAMPONG VILLAGE  
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Hua, Tuyet Mai and Kamberovic Marina  
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn  
Institute of Oriental- and Asian Studies  
Department of Southeast Asian Studies  
s5tuhuaa@uni-bonn.de  
s5makamb@uni-bonn.de

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## **Abstract**

**In this paper, research is focused on Mae Kampong, an award-winning ecotourism village providing homestays and guesthouses for tourists. In the past, the community was known for its traditional cultivation of green tea and is a major producer of a traditional Northern Thai snack, called *miang*, which is made of fermented green tea leaves and is often part of the ingredients in various local dishes. After the demand from the market for *miang* has declined in recent years, there has been an economic transformation from agroforestry to ecotourism. Community-based ecotourism has been introduced and now serves as an additional source of income for the local community, this includes the offering of homestays and guesthouses. During our participation in the Summer School in Chiang Mai, in July 2018, which was initiated by the Erasmus Plus Project *KNOTS* and cooperates with a total of eight partner universities in Southeast Asia and Europe, we visited Mae Kampong to apply the transdisciplinary research approach, which we learned during the Summer School. TDR simultaneously represents teaching and learning approaches - an integration of learning and research is thus an integral characteristic feature. Exactly this interconnection, to what extent we have succeeded in applying the TDR approach, what expectations we had and what results we achieved during our research, we would like to present in our working paper.**

Key words: Economic and Social Change, Agroforestry, Ecotourism, Transition, Miang, Northern Thailand, Fieldtrip, Summer School

## **1) Introduction**

In the summer semester of 2018, we had the opportunity to participate in a module called "Transdisciplinary Research in Southeast Asia: Interactions between Environment, Social Justice and Migration" at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-University in Bonn. In this module, recent transdisciplinary approaches have been applied to the topics of environment, social justice and migration in Southeast Asia. Transdisciplinary research (as opposed to interdisciplinary research) refers to a problem-solving-oriented research that explicitly encompasses non-academic actors to address socially relevant issues in a goal-oriented manner. We have tried out this approach theoretically and practically in the transnational area of northern Thailand. The module was part of the Erasmus-Plus project "KNOTS" ("Fostering multi-lateral knowledge networks of transdisciplinary studies to tackle global challenges"), in which our department cooperates with universities in Thailand, Vietnam, Austria and the Czech

Republic. Project „KNOTS“ links partners from eight universities in Southeast Asia and Europe to address new challenges in a rapidly changing world. The project<sup>1</sup> aims at establishing vibrant and dynamic knowledge networks of multi-lateral and transdisciplinary studies. The core of the module was the Summer School at Chiang Mai University from July 17th to 21st, 2018. During the first week we had the opportunity to learn about transdisciplinary research methods through several lectures and discussions focused on three major topics: Migration, Social Inequality and Environmental Change. We listened to very interesting presentations on the topics mentioned above and then participated in various discussions with the lecturers from European and Southeast Asian Universities to learn more about the topics and their relevance to the region of Northern Thailand. After all participants were divided into different field trip groups, we met our field trip leaders and translators who would accompany us over the next few days. Our field trip leader Prasit Leepreecha – an anthropologist and researcher at the Social Research Institute and Center for Ethnic Studies and Development at Chiang Mai University – was a very open-minded, warm and helpful person. He showed great interest in our research and really went out of his way to make our stay as enjoyable and successful as possible. He even turned our entire daily routine - which had already been planned - upside down and tried hard to plan a better and more meaningful daily routine for us. Without Prasit, we would never have achieved the results we put on paper today. We would like to thank him on behalf of the entire "Eco-Adventurers" group. But our two translators, June and Pop, have also contributed a lot. They have helped with their open-minded nature, their sensitivity and their personal commitment to steer the interviews in the right direction. They, too deserve our gratitude.

After some days of preparation and discussion in our field trip groups, then a five-day field research phase from the 22nd of July to the 27th of July followed. In this phase, we were able to apply our knowledge of transdisciplinary research learned during the Summer School at Chiang Mai University to various field trips. During these field trips, we were able to practice some research methods such as observation methods, free-listing methods, in-depth interviews or focus-group discussions. Initially, the theory and methodology of transdisciplinary research was imparted and correlated with the three thematic strands: Migration, Social Inequality and Environmental Change.

In this context, the concepts of transdisciplinary research attract growing attention in the

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<sup>1</sup> To get a detailed insight into the KNOTS project and its goals, please visit the following website: <https://knots.univie.ac.at/> or visit <https://knots.univie.ac.at/news/knots-summer-school-and-field-trips-2018/>.

academic world. Even though no common definition of Transdisciplinarity exists, it generally refers to an integrated research approach involving multiple disciplines as well as non-scientific stakeholders that are defined by the shared problem to be addressed. Transdisciplinary research can be defined as a process where different academic disciplines work jointly with practitioners to solve real-world problems. It is also characteristic of transdisciplinary research methods that they simultaneously represent teaching and learning approaches - an integration of learning and research is thus an integral characteristic feature. Exactly this interconnection we would like to present in our working paper.

In this paper, research is focused on Mae Kampong village, a small village located in Chiang Mai Province, Northern Thailand which has traditionally cultivated green tea for years and producing a fermented tea product, called *miang*. However, since the beginning of the 1990's, it has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in rural northern Thailand, when it became involved in community-based ecotourism.

First, we will give a small historical overview of the village of Mae Kampong, where we conducted our field research. For this, we will describe topics such as the change of the relationship and meaning of *miang* to Mae Kampong. Next, we will give a glimpse into the transition from agroforestry to ecotourism, with a closer look at the OTOP initiative. Then, we will compare the two dominant tourism business forms, namely guesthouse and homestay business, show how they are organized and clarify whether there are social inequalities within this business. We will also look at the research methods we have used, the results that we found or did not find, the expectations we had of the field trip, how our daily routines looked, what difficulties we faced and why the transdisciplinary research approach was unrealizable. Finally, we would like to summarize our findings and give an outlook on the future, which improvements could possibly be made and where perhaps future research approaches could tie up.

## **2) Historical Background**

### **2.1) Mae Kampong Village**

In this paper, our focus is a village called Mae Kampong, which has – because of its traits as a traditional agrarian rural community – a great potential for achieving a self-reliant way of community governance. In the past, Mae Kampong was known for its opium plantations.

Today, the highland agricultural community is known as a major producer of the Northern Thai traditional tea product called *miang*, in which most villagers had been traditionally engaged.

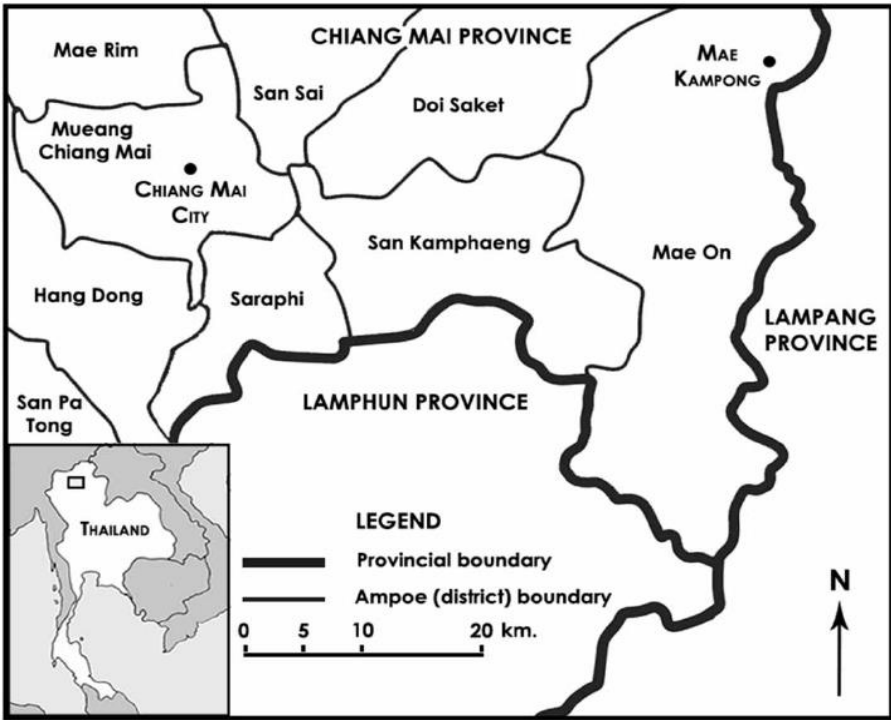


Figure 1: Map of the location of Mae Kampong Village in Southern Chiang Mai province, Northern Thailand.  
 Source: KONTOGEOGPOULOS et al. (2015): Homestay Tourism and the Commercialization of the Rural Home in Thailand.  
 In: *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* (p.111).

Mae Kampong is located in Huay Kaew sub-district, Mae On district, Chiang Mai Province. It is 55 km away from Chiang Mai city and it lies at an average height of 1,300 meters above the sea level. According to government statistics from 2013, there were 312 people living in Mae Kampong (KONTOGEOGPOULOS et al. 2013: 111; HARADA 2016: 107). According to the Village Headman, presently there are 140 households and 380 people in total. The ethnic background of the villagers in Mae Kampong is *Khon Muang* or *lowlanders of Northern Thailand*, like they call themselves and speak their own Thai dialect. The village was named after its native flower, called ‘*dok kampong*’ and the Thai word for river ‘*maenam*’. “The name, Mae Kampong, is a short and combined form of river and a local flower” (HARADA 2018: 3).

The village of Mae Kampong wasn't officially founded until the early 1900's, it is thought that the first generation of this village that had been searching for suitable places for tea cultivation and came from nearby areas like Doi Saket to settle in the location and started to form the community. Because of its mountainous location in the highlands "it [is] difficult for the villagers to grow rice" (HARADA 2016: 108), so those early settlers came here to farm the land and grow tea which was used to make a local delicacy known as *miang* from fermented tea leaves.

Previously, villagers in Mae Kampong relied on *miang* plantation. It can be said, that *miang* has a symbolic meaning for the community. HARADA's research "*The Village in Transition - Development and Cultural, Economic and Social Changes at Mae Kampong Village, Chiang Mai, Thailand*" from 2016 and some interviews we conducted during our research for the KNOTS project in Mae Kampong, demonstrate, that *miang* is not only an



Illustration 1: *Miang* – fermented green tea with sea salt on a banana leaf. *Miang* is loaded with caffeine and antioxidants from wild tea leaves and has therefore an energy-boosting effect.

Photo: Marina Kamberovic

economic capital for the villagers, but that *miang* is anchored in the cultural identity of the villagers and seems to have an important symbolic meaning for them. Since it was too hard for one household to cover all their *miang* fields, and picking and processing the tea leaves, they used to work in groups, together with other villagers, in a kind of cross-household work (HARADA 2016: 108 – 109). In the past, chewing *miang* was very popular among Northern Thai People, because of its energy-boosting effect, but nowadays chewing *miang* is no longer popular among today's younger generation, so the village has been gradually changed to be an ecotourism site since 2000.

Over the years, the demand for *miang* dropped because of the changing lifestyles of Northern Thai people who nowadays think *miang* is "not tasty and old-fashioned compared to the contemporary substitutes such as chewing gum and coffee" (REICHART, PHILIPSEN 1996: 129), and the villagers started to look for other sources of income. In the 1980's the people of Mae



Illustration 2: Arabica coffee beans which are cultivated in the community forest of Mae Kampong next to *miang* and other plants.

Photo: Marina Kamberovic

Kampong began growing coffee under the Royal Project<sup>2</sup>. To solve the problems of deforestation, poverty and opium production by promoting alternative crops, His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand initiated the Royal Project after he visited the hill-tribe village of Doi Pui in 1969 where he “learned of a variety of peach tree that provided the local farmers with a higher income than the opium poppy”<sup>3</sup>. According to NOPPAKOONWONG et. al (2015: 45 – 46) the cultivation of Arabica coffee was introduced to provide hilltribes with an alternative source of income and replace opium poppy cultivation with substitute crops. Another reason is that because the land and climate in northern Thailand are suitable for growing coffee and it can provide high income for the farmers, the coffee promotion program was introduced in Mae Kampong. In the 1990’s the

Thai government were encouraging each sub-district – called Tambon – to produce a product, service or activity that it could be associated with as part of the new „One Tambon One Product“ scheme – called OTOP. Mae Kampong received the OTOP designation for its community-based homestay project. According to the Royal Thai Embassy this “local entrepreneurship stimulus program [...] aims to support the unique locally made and marketed products of each Thai tambon all over Thailand”. Inspired by the Japanese *One Village One Product (OVOP)* program, village communities are encouraged to produce one local product, including handicrafts, pottery, fashion, decorative items or foods. The idea of OTOP was initially a concern for the Village Headman “to cope with poverty due to the downturn in agriculture” [PHOOKAO 2014: 4] until he decided to propose Mae Kampong as an ecotourism village to take advantage of the natural surroundings and beautiful location. The cultivation of tea leaves (*miang*) and Arabica coffee beans, the production of handmade tea leave pillows – made of the “old” leaves which cannot be used for *miang* production or local dishes like *miang salad* – as well as ecotourism itself, are the products that contribute Mae Kampong to the OTOP initiative.

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<sup>2</sup> Royal Thai Embassy: <https://www.thaiembassy.sg/friends-of-thailand/p/what-is-otop> (last call: March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Highland Research and Development Institute: <https://www.hrdi.or.th/en/WhoWeAre/ThailandsRoyalProject> (last call: March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019).



These products are sold nationwide and thus provide a good source of income for the local people.

According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<sup>4</sup> ecotourism means “responsible travel to natural areas conserving the environment and improving the well-being of the local people”<sup>5</sup>. It focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are primary attractions. It “provides effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity”<sup>5</sup> and empowers “[...] local communities around the world to fight [...] poverty and to achieve sustainable development”<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the International Ecotourism Society draws attention to the fact, that principles like building awareness and respect for the culture and environment, construct and operate low-impact facilities or generate financial benefits for local people, must be adopted by those who want to participate in ecotourism.

Issues relevant for ecotourism in Mae Kampong village include community-based tourism (CBT), *miang* and tea industry, coffee industry, self-governance, hydro-power electric generating, natural resources management, influences of outsiders’ investment on tourism businesses, and village fund organization. With the support of the Department of Energy in 1981, the village built two mini-hydroelectric dams to produce electricity and making use of the river that runs through the village (HARADA 2018: 46). They are managed and supervised by an elected village committee. “Ten per cent of income from all ecotourism activities are deducted and allocated to the community savings account” (PHOOKAO 2014: 5). As already mentioned, the form of tourism taken by the villagers is community-based tourism (CBT), focusing on ecotourism, due to the *miang* and Arabica coffee plantations, the location of the village in the watershed and homestay and guesthouse business. Community-based tourism can be described as “taking [...] account of environmental, social and cultural sustainability” (KONTOGEOURGOPOULOS et al. 2013: 108). Furthermore, it is important that the community members are directly involved and benefit from it. For this, a fair financial distribution is very important. In the case of Mae Kampong, this happens through the so-called *village fund*.

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<sup>4</sup> The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1990 and has been the forefront of the development of ecotourism. It is a global network of ecotourism professionals and travelers providing guidelines, standards and educational resources.

<sup>5</sup> The International Ecotourism Society (TIES). <https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/> (last call: March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

The fund ensures that the entire community profits from tourism and nobody is left out. This strengthens the community and contributes to the improvement of living standards. Another aim of CBT is to “increase the visitors’ awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life” (KONTOGEOURGOPOULOS et al. 2013: 110). After Mae Kampong became an ecotourism village, some villagers opened their doors as homestays and others opened their doors as guesthouses (see Chap. 3.2 Homestay and Guesthouse Business). In addition to the introduction of homestay and guesthouse business, the electric hydro-power dams built in 1982, the production of aromatic tea pillows and herbal medicine, traditional Thai massage, local cooking classes are now among the main sources of income. Furthermore, since Mae Kampong is located in the forest, a transnational ecotourism enterprise offers eco-adventure zipline canopy tours, known as „*Flight of the Gibbon*“, nearby the village.

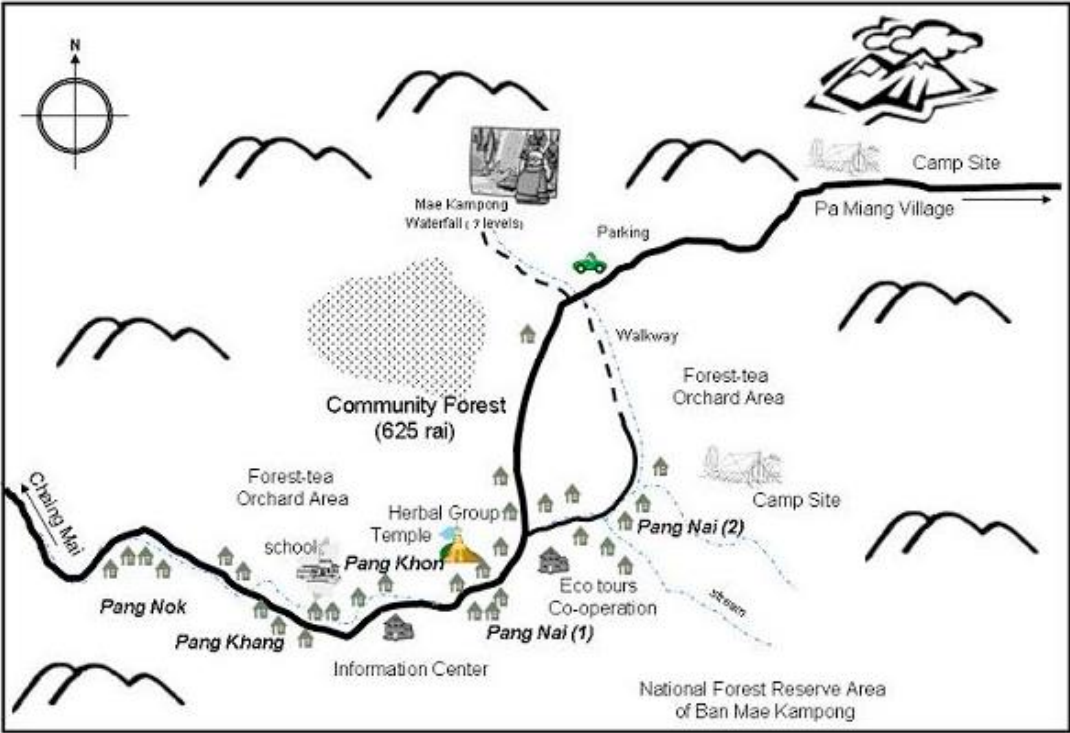


Figure 2: Sketch of Mae Kampong

On the sketch one can see the river that runs through the village and the houses which are nearly all located along the river. The mountainous landscape, the several *miang* plantations, the forests and the community forest, show the limited land that is available to the community.

Source: [http://www.chiangmai-chiangrai.com/baan\\_mae\\_kampong-high\\_living.html](http://www.chiangmai-chiangrai.com/baan_mae_kampong-high_living.html).

Due to limited land and natural resources, villagers set up rules for not allowing outsiders to purchase land and operate tourism businesses in the village. However, some outside investors have settled and run businesses in Mae Kampong. During an interview with one guesthouse owner, we found out that many young villagers decided to move to urban areas like Chiang Mai, to live and work in towns after they graduated from college or university, so they can make some money. Some of them, like the guesthouse owner's children, moved to the city to educate themselves so that they can earn enough money to support the parents still living in the village. Her elder son even plans to build another guesthouse and run it with his mother as soon as he earns enough money. Some of them married outsiders and live in towns but invested businesses like guesthouses, to be run by their parents or relatives who still live in Mae Kampong. Today, as we learned in an interview with the former Village Headman and other villagers too, Mae Kampong serves as a role model for other villages that want to introduce the ecotourism model as well. Every day up to 80 visitors from other villages in the larger area gather in Mae Kampong's community center to listen attentively to the former Village Headman's lectures about the village's history, the change in main income (from *miang* to ecotourism) or the increasing focus on tourism, cooperation of the villagers, financing and necessary knowledge about organization and economic operations.

## **2.2) Miang tea product**

Mae Kampong has been well known for its production of *miang*, a Northern Thai snack made of fermented green tea leaves, in which most of the villagers had been traditionally engaged. In the past, *miang* cultivation was one of the major sources of income. In fact, "about 97% of the villagers are engaged in *miang* production" (HARADA 2018: 48), but because of the declining demand of *miang* from the market, the village started to get involved in the tourism industry with its village homestay program in 2000. Since then, more and more villagers are shifting their focus on production of *miang* to other sources of income, such as cultivation of Arabica coffee, homestay and guesthouse business, aromatic tea leave pillow making, and Thai massage. For the people in Mae Kampong, *miang* production, in which almost all the villagers have been engaged, has a special meaning. As we learned in several interviews with some villagers, *miang* has always been the community symbol of Mae Kampong. Since approximately 100 years ago, when the ancestors of the current generation came to settle in the place, almost all villagers across the generations have been participating in *miang* cultivation and processing of it. Thus, it is natural to think that *miang* was ingrained in the villagers' cultural identity and came to bear



Illustration 3: A villager shows us the jars, where he stores his *miang*. To produce *miang*, wild green tea leaves are mixed with salt and left to ferment in a jar outdoors.

Photo by Maria Blechmann-Antweiler

an important symbolic meaning for them. Mae Kampong village is surrounded by tea plantations which are woven into the natural landscape. Tea trees grow alongside Arabica coffee, herbal medicines and the natural forest. To produce *miang*, community members rely on traditional methods of planting, harvesting and fermenting tea. As we learned during a Transect-walk through the community forest, only the tips of the tea leaves are picked. This allows enough sunlight to reach the old leaves and enables the community to harvest tea all year round. Green tea is made from the young leaves, medium old leaves are used for cooking, and the old, slightly dried leaves are fermented or processed into tea-leave pillows, which are said to have a relaxing and soothing effect. After the tea leaves are picked, they need to collectively process the tea leaves in groups. This work often involved cross-household work in the village, and it was a common form of *miang* production. In the past, chewing *miang* was very popular among Northern Thai People, but nowadays it is said to be old-fashioned. Since the

village started to get involved in tourism industry, most of the villagers changed their focus from production of *miang* as a predominant economic activity to homestay and guesthouse businesses.

### **3) Transition from Agroforestry to Ecotourism – Homestay and Guesthouse Business**

#### **3.1) Homestay Business**

After Mae Kampong became an ecotourism village in 2000, the initiation of community-based tourism persuaded five households to open their houses for homestay, which means that the tourists sleep at the residence of a local and get the chance to experience the traditional daily life of the hosting families. To match the increasing tourist demand, the number of families participating in Mae Kampong's homestay program has grown. According to the former Village Headman the number has steadily grown to 30 homestay-serving households, which represents approximately 20% of all households in Mae Kampong, most of which are concentrated in the villages' center. During an interview with a homestay operator we learned, that homestay-serving households get 520 Baht per visitor for a one-night accommodation and two freshly made traditional northern Thai meals a day service. 350 Baht out of 520 Baht goes directly into

the household's revenue and the remaining 170 Baht go into the village funds. During an interview, the former Village Headman told us, like HARADA (2016: 109) also mentions, that the village has a system of village cooperative, and the major financial source to the cooperative comes from the homestay business. The cooperative securing them to have benefits such as financial support for young peoples' and medical care financial support.

### **3.2) Guesthouse Business**

As another opportunity to participate in the tourism business is running a guesthouse. This form of business has the advantage of more space and privacy because the owner's living space is separated from the business. It is a type of inexpensive hotel-like lodging. Moreover, the capacity of hosting guests in the house is higher than in homestays. For example, the guesthouse owners can decide for themselves how many guests they would like to receive and host at their accommodation. However, they also must take care of the marketing of their accommodation. Unlike homestay business, which is governed by the village's routing system, self-marketing in the guesthouse business plays an important role in attracting guests. As a guesthouse operator told us during an interview, she is currently reading some books on "Online Marketing" and wants to present her accommodation in the future via *Facebook* and *Air bnb*. Thus, she hopes to arise the interest of foreign guests in order to increase her income. However, despite the need for self-marketing, the operation of a guesthouse also has an advantage over homestay: income. The guesthouse owners are not obliged to hand over part of their money to the village funds. They keep all the money they earned.

## **4) The Fieldtrip**

### **4.1) The group and our expectations**

The outstanding characteristic of our group during this fieldtrip was diversity. The group consisted of ten participants coming from different countries (Germany, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma), having different academic backgrounds (social sciences, anthropology, marketing, development studies) and positions, and being interested in different topics. However, the overall expectation was to try some research methods and get results during the stay in the village because most of us haven't been to a field trip before. We also kept in mind to include

the transdisciplinary approach and the knowledge we got during the summer school, so we hoped to create a basis for further research on Mae Kampong.



Illustration 4: Our Fieldtrip Group “Eco-Adventurers”

From left to right: Pop (our translator), Salai, Marina, Mai, Loi, Linh, June (our translator), Prof. Dr. Christoph Antweiler and his wife Maria Blechmann-Antweiler

Photo by Prasit Leepreecha (Fieldtrip leader)

In our group discussions before the field trip, we tried to figure out topics to focus on and we ended up with the *miang* industry and ecotourism plus homestay and guesthouse business. Our aim was to find out any problems and issues of social inequality in the village regarding these topics. So, what about TDR? In our case, transdisciplinary research should be done with villagers, for villagers and for other villagers as well.

Before we came to Mae Kampong, we had certain expectations of the field trip itself, but also certain reservations. We imagined Mae Kampong as a small mountain village, with moderate tourism, where the people who live there face great social injustice and environmental problems. But that was not the case. When we got there, we were surprised by the very well organization of the community, the clean environment and the tourists, who were brought to the village by bus daily throughout our stay. Most of them came from urban areas such as Bangkok, which, as we learned in some interviews, wanted to enjoy the cool climate and the fresh air and nature. They wanted to escape the hectic city life and relax for a while. While we had read some literature on Mae Kampong during the summer school, we still had the idea that there were problems in the community about social inequality or the environment that needed to be resolved and that we could solve. And, exactly that was the mistake; we thought we could change, improve or even solve problems in such a short time. It was not until we started our

"research" that we realized that Mae Kampong has no problems to "solve". The community works very well even without our help. Furthermore, we believed to do real research, as Alexander Humbolt or Indiana Jones did, to achieve new results that no one has achieved before us. However, it was much more of a "research-learning". Except for our Fieldtrip Leader, Prasit, and our lecturer Prof. Dr. Antweiler, none of us had ever done fieldwork before. So, we had to learn how it works. Which transdisciplinary research method exists, how to observe, conduct in-depth interviews, perform free-listing and try to evaluate the obtained results. Shortly before our departure, after receiving our daily schedule, which included many tourist activities, including a visit to the Zipline adventure park "Flight of the Gibbon", we had some concerns about how the villagers would treat us. We were afraid that we would not be viewed as researchers, but more as tourists, which would have made our TDR approach more difficult. Fortunately, Prasit was able to restructure the daily schedule, giving us the opportunity to practice TDR. But because of the short stay and hence lack of time, we were only able to apply some of the participatory methods in order to get an overview of the village's situation and the two topics we focused on – environmental change and social inequality. Besides, our group was on the one hand quite diversified, but there were still several disciplines lacking, e.g. natural sciences, tourism sciences etc., as additional perspectives that are necessary for identifying and structuring the problem, for analyzing it, and for developing and testing resources. This is of great importance because each of the researchers and actors locates the problem in an alternative point of view.

## **4.2) Daily program**

**Day 1:** Sunday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018

In the morning, we departed from Chiang Mai and it took about one and a half hours to arrive in Mae Kampong Village. The village is located about 50 km east from Chiang Mai city and it lies at an average height of 1,300 meters above the sea level.

Day 1 was designated to get a base of information on the *miang* industry, the village itself and its development. Therefore, the first item on the agenda was a trekking tour in the local forest, guided by a female villager. During this tour, the guide gave some general information about the *miang* and coffee plants and the industry, and the development of the village from agroforestry to ecotourism. There were still some *miang* and coffee plants in the forest, but they

were not for productive use anymore. The present industry of *miang* and coffee relies on plantations which are not directly located in the village.

In the afternoon, we visited the *miang* museum where we met the current Village Headman. During the visit, we got further information about the history of *miang* in Mae Kampong and the purpose of the museum. The museum was set in a small house consisting of one spacious room which was open to the outside. It not only displayed a *miang* photo collection and some tools used in the *miang* processing, e.g. baskets for collecting *miang* leaves, as exhibits, but it also showed the *miang* production process in so-called dioramas. These were glass boxes in which miniature scenes of the different stages of the *miang* production were depicted: 1) picking leaves in the forest, 2) steaming and fermenting the leaves in special pots, 3) transportation to the town/city for selling or own use. After getting an inside into the *miang* production, we had a conversation round with the current Village Headman, during which we got further background information about the establishment of the museum and its purpose. The museum was closely connected to the Village Headman`s objectives for sustainable development in Mae Kampong, especially concerning the younger generations: Following the concept of a “living” museum, the museum`s aim was to involve and educate all people (locals, tourists, students, researchers etc.) about the village`s natural environment and *miang* business while reviving the *miang* culture as a special characteristic of Mae Kampong which needs to be preserved. In the long run, a *miang* planting program as learning activity and a learning center for tourists shall be added to the museum, which shall be run by the younger generation by then. But the current Village Headman assumed that it would take a lot of time to achieve the understanding of the local people.

Afterwards, we went to the guesthouse which was owned by the former Village Headman and where we stayed during the field trip. In the late afternoon, we had a conversation round with the former Village Headman who introduced ecotourism and homestay business to Mae Kampong 20 years ago. First, he gave us a short talk about the historical development of the village, and after that, we got the chance to ask him further questions regarding tourism, management, and environmental issues. During the conversation, we learned that Mae Kampong before was an isolated village with poor infrastructure and *miang* production as the only business model. But in the 90`s, the former Village Headman introduced the idea of sustainable development by tourism business based on the existing capital of the village: natural scenery and culture. The transformation into a tourism village brought great improvement in



infrastructure, for example new roads, a local market and locally generated water supply, and offered new business possibilities related to tourist activities, e.g. homestays and guesthouses. In addition to that, the former Village Headman created a welfare system by introducing a common village funds, which was basically accessible for all villagers and served as support for running a business in the village.

**Day 2:** Monday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018

Day 2 started with a group discussion. Based on the first impressions and the information from the day before, we could decide on the strategy to start our research activities and plan the next days. We formed three groups: Group A focused on inequality regarding *miang*, Group B focused on TDR itself, and Group C focused on inequality regarding ecotourism. The method for this day was interviewing and having conversations with different villagers whom Prasit, our field trip leader, made appointments with before we came to their places.

In the afternoon, half of Group B went with Group A to a local *miang* producer. The other half and Group C interviewed a homestay owner and a guesthouse owner. Additionally, each group included one translator for communication with the locals, and a local village guide who led us to the meeting places. Both groups could gather more information about *miang* and homestay/guesthouse businesses during the conversation with the interviewees.

**Day 3:** Tuesday, July 24<sup>th</sup> 2018

After sharing the results from the day before and discussing new methods for the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, we planned to go to the community center where the former Village Headman gives lectures about ecotourism and Homestay/Guesthouse businesses to visitors on a daily basis.

But on the way to the community center, we changed the plan as we walked by a tea pillow workshop. As Prasit talked about it before, saying it was worth a visit, we spontaneously decided to split the group again: Half of the group (Group A and half of Group B) went to the workshop in order to talk to the owners, while the other half (Group C and half of Group B) went to the community center. At the tea pillow workshop, the group was taught to make a tea pillow by hand and had a free conversation with the women who run the business. The topics covered *miang*, its history and the current situation from their perspective. At the same time, the other group had to change the plan again because the lecture already ended by the time the

group arrived. So, they went to a coffee shop and did a *coin task* with their local guide, which gave them some insight into possible personal networks in the village.

**Day 4:** Wednesday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018

The third group discussion of the fieldtrip was about self-reflection on the group and our expectations for this fieldtrip. Since this day was the last full day in Mae Kampong, we decided to try out new methods: free listing and un-participatory observation, which again led to the formation of two groups.

The group doing the free listing method just walked on the street and asked people who randomly came across. The others chose places in the village where they sat down and observed the people and surroundings.

**Day 5:** Thursday, July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018

The last day in Mae Kampong was about wrapping up the fieldtrip and final comments in the group. After exchanging our experiences and results from the day before, we reflected on the field trip as a whole. Since we were participants of the KNOTS summer school and field trip project, we were in a special researching environment. In addition to that, we had some tasks in mind, which were given by the project and our home institutions, that influenced our activities on the field. Finally, we also did some brainstorming on ideas how to design our presentation of the fieldtrip for the summer school.

## **5.) Methods and Findings**

In both topics which the group focused on, *miang* and ecotourism/homestay/guesthouse business, methods were applied in which interaction with the local villagers or other people was required. This was a crucial key point in TDR/ TDS regarding the involvement of both academics and non-academics in order to target real problems and find sustainable solutions. Having this in mind, we tried to interact with the locals as often as possible aiming at getting an image of Mae Kampong and the businesses from their perspectives.

Another aspect to be considered were the target issues of the KNOTS project: Environment – Migration – Inequality. Before coming to the village, we had discussed about these topics in relation to Mae Kampong and decided to focus on inequality. Our idea was that inequality issues

in the village might lead to other problems related to migration (as young people tend to move to cities for education/jobs) and to environment (which was questionable because of the ecotourism model). Following that idea, we assumed that there might have been inequality in the *miang* industry in the past, e.g. in terms of space sharing, and maybe today. In addition to that, the economical shift to ecotourism in combination with homestay and guesthouse businesses meant major changes to the villagers' life which might lead to inequality problems as well.

The following part presents the methods and their results under the categories “*miang*” and “ecotourism”.

## **5.1) Miang**

### *Interview*

Our interviewee was Mr. Saneh who is a local villager. He had been working in the *miang* industry for over 30 years in which he produced fermented *miang* snack. Today, he earns his main income by running a homestay, but cultivating and processing *miang* is still his passion. The interview with him was very open, which means that there was no strict questionnaire that we followed. Sitting in a round with Mr. Saneh created a conversation-like situation. Our questions to him concerned his personal background and history with *miang*, his thoughts and feelings, the *miang* market and the current situation in the village.

### *Results*

During the interview we got to know that Mae Kampong village has recently been undergoing some major transformation processes, especially regarding its economic system. The first significant change was the shift from agroforestry to ecotourism. This automatically led to the second change: The villagers' occupation moved from farming and production of *miang* and Arabica coffee to providing touristic services. Lastly, there is a recent trend in shifting from homestay business to guesthouse business. Although *miang* production has been pushed to the background, there are still people being active in this business today, but mostly as an additional activity.

Due to the transformation of economic orientation, the role of men and women has changed significantly. During the time of *miang* industry, men were responsible for the heavy work at the plantation/in the forest while women did easier chores, like the packaging of the products.

With the rise of homestay and guesthouse business, women became a central part of the village's economy.

*Participatory method*

Our idea of a participatory method was to interact with the locals freely without the process of doing research as the main aim, e.g. by participating in a certain activity or event.

At the main road of the village, we found a tea pillow workshop which offers courses (mainly to tourists) in making one's own tea pillow (a pillow stuffed with dried tea leaves for aromatic benefits). Although the course already finished when we arrived there, the owners still invited us to produce some pillows. This created a relaxed atmosphere to have a free conversation with the shop owners.

*Results*



The conversation with the tea pillow workshop owners gave us a similar insight of the economic development of the village. *Miang* played an important role in the past for both women because their livelihood based on the *miang* business. But having followed the village's development, the owners started a homestay business which is now their main income. Running the tea pillow workshop is just an additional activity which serves also as a reminder of the special meaning of *miang* to Mae Kampong.

Illustration 5: Miang tea leave pillow made by Marina Kamberovic during a tea leave pillow workshop in Mae Kampong  
Source: Marina Kamberovic

*Free listing: "What comes to your mind when you think of miang?"*

The free listing method is a very easy method to apply and in general considered as a "warm-up". Free listing, according to BEER (2008), has been used so far to raise ethnic taxonomies (native taxonomies). Especially at the beginning of an investigation, questions such as "What are the main dimensions and limits of a topic or problem in the perspective of the members of a society?" or "What is really important for the people being studied?" come up. They can be tackled with the very simple method of "listing" or "free listing". This method is, according to BEER (2008), particularly fruitful when it comes to which topics are of cultural relevance to local people at all. Free listing as a first step, is very enlightening and always recommended before moving on to other procedures. Furthermore, BEER (2008) believes that

the trick is to find a productive question that stimulates the conversation partner. This must be determined through informal interviews, depending on the person and culture. The notion of this method is to get lists of individually named words/group of words that the respondents associate with the topic which is named by the researcher. The lists obtained by this method can then be further evaluated in many ways. In this case, we asked people (local villagers, shop keepers, tourists, visitors) on the street, in coffeeshops, restaurants etc. to name words or group of words that come into their minds when thinking of *miang*.

### *Results*

The following list consists of the words which were often mentioned by the people we asked:

- old people
- chewing *miang* while smoking and eating salt
- tea is more popular now
- lack of interest of fermented *miang* and producing *miang*
- Lanna's high society
- Lay's chips

We can conclude from the lists that the interest in chewing *miang* rapidly decreased among the young generation. Young people mostly know the habit of chewing *miang* from their grandparents. *Miang* is also associated with the old lifestyle of Lanna's high society in which the fermented tea leaves were chewed together with salt while smoking. The respondents explained that "Lanna's high society" meant the people belonging to the upper social class of the regions in Northern Thailand which are also known as "Lanna". But all of this is considered as old-fashioned now and therefore, there are barely any villagers in Mae Kampong who still work in the *miang* industry. This means that the interest in not only in consuming but also producing *miang* decreased in the course of time and probably will fade in the coming generations. But there are other products made of the *miang* tea leaves which are more popular now, e.g. tea, tempura, tea pillows etc. Interestingly, the Lay's chips company produces chips with *miang* taste which is well-known among the young Thai people.

### *Wrap up: miang*

After collecting the results, we got using these methods, we could see that the *miang* industry was almost fully replaced by ecotourism in Mae Kampong. But it once played a key role in the village's economy and was the basis for the livelihood of the local people. Although *miang* is

a past-oriented issue, we could find some inequality issues after receiving information from the current and former Village Headman and the stories of the interviewees.

Inequality regarding...

- The roles of gender, especially on the family level: There were differences in the roles of men and women. Men worked harder in picking up *miang* leaves from trees, while women did the packaging of the final products.
- Landownership: Some families/households owned a big plot of land, while others had less land. In addition to that, the distance to the main stream and the village center played an important role for the value of the land.
- Opportunity: In the present context, individuals and households who have more knowledge about technology of roasting and packaging, financial capital and market, have better opportunities to develop new products made of *miang* leaves, which would be a benefit regarding to the tourism business, e.g. by making souvenirs.

As we already discussed before the field trip, these inequality issues might be connected to further problems concerning the other target topics migration and environment. This is a basis for further research on this field, but during the conversations with the locals and our discussions afterwards, we already got some hints that the declining *miang* business is one of the reasons for migration to the city for better career opportunities.

## 5.2) Ecotourism

*Free listing: "What comes into your mind when you think about Mae Kampong?"*

We applied the free listing method not only about *miang* but also concerning Mae Kampong Village itself. So after having listed the words associated with *miang*, we asked the respondents "What comes into your mind when you think about Mae Kampong?" But this time, we had to reformulate our question because the respondents only told us their reasons why they came to Mae Kampong. The revised question was: "Can you tell us five to ten words that come into your mind, when you think of Mae Kampong?".

## Results

The following list consists of the words which were often mentioned by the people we asked:

- weather
- scenery
- atmosphere
- nature
- coffeeshops
- Wua Tang
- Homestay & Guesthouse
- Hipster Village



Illustration 6: Famous village café in the center of Mae Kampong Village

It is a very famous Tourist spot for taking photos, with good local coffee and snacks.

Photo by: Marina Kamberovic

The lists have shown that not only people from outside but also locals have a certain image of Mae Kampong: a pretty, small village with a beautiful landscape and nostalgic atmosphere

which makes it a popular destination for domestic, as well as international tourists who enjoy the services of the village's homestays and guesthouses. On the other hand, young people from the city like to come to Mae Kampong as a day trip in order to take pictures for e.g. *Facebook* or *Instagram* to display their "unique" stay in a calm village as a contrast to their daily life in the city. This was considered by the respondents as a "hipster's behavior", meaning the behavior of a person who follows the latest trends and lifestyles which differ from the mainstream<sup>6</sup>, often combined with social media.

## In-depth interview

In order to get a deeper insight into the tourism and homestay/guesthouse business in the village, we did some in-depth interviews with one homestay owner and one guesthouse owner. Both of them worked in the *miang* and coffee industry before but shifted to homestay/guesthouse business by the time tourism was established in the village. Our questions to them concerned how their lives have changed in the course of tourism, the system and management of homestay and guesthouse business, the village fund, and future expectations.

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<sup>6</sup> Oxford University Press: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hipster> (last call: April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019)



Illustration 7: Our Field Trip Group during an In-depth Interview with one of the guesthouse owners

Photo by: June Sujiwan Yimyuan (One of our Translators)

### *Results*

The interviews with both the homestay owner and the guesthouse owner could give us a solid overview of the management system of the tourism business in Mae Kampong and some detailed information about running a homestay or a guesthouse.

Regarding the homestay program, the system is still managed by the former Village Headman, who introduced tourism in combination with homestay business to the village 20 years ago.

Before that time, the villagers were mostly occupied in agroforestry and *miang* industry.

There are certain regulations and standards that need to be met before starting a homestay, for example western-styled toilets, enough blankets and pillows for about seven persons, and being able to provide at least three meals. All homestays in Mae Kampong charge 520 Baht for one guest per day, including accommodation and three meals – breakfast, lunch and dinner. Part of this price (180 Baht) needs to be contributed to the village fund as a payback. Guests who like to stay in homestays are allocated by the former Village Headman following a queueing system.

Unlike the homestay business, a guesthouse is individually owned, and the owner manages it independently. They only must register their business at the local administration and the village committee. There are similar regulations and standards to be followed like the homestays. A guesthouse owner can decide on the price to charge the guest per day, but it must be at least 500 Baht per person including breakfast and dinner. The contribution to the village fund for guesthouse owners amounts to 50 Baht. Visitors who stay in guesthouses choose freely between the individual guesthouses in Mae Kampong. Therefore, the owners must advertise their guesthouse by themselves. Advertisement channels can be the internet and social media, person to person recommendations, or guest referral among guesthouse owners (e.g. in the case that one guesthouse is fully booked).

### *Observation*

Observation can be done in a participatory or non-participatory way. The non-participatory option requires the observer to be outside of the scene or activity to get an overall perspective.



This method gives a first impression of the everyday life, custom and behavior, and some relationships between individuals. In Mae Kampong, we observed different groups of people, for example local people, tourists or visitors from other villages. Observation places were the community center where the former Village Headman gave a lecture to representatives from other villagers about ecotourism, and public places of the village like the road or coffee shops.

### *Results*

The non-participatory during the former Village Headman's lectures in the community center gave us some impressions about the asymmetrical social structure of the villagers not only from Mae Kampong, but also coming from other villages in Northern Thailand. This was indicated by the seating arrangements of the participants which was clearly divided into female and male sitting groups. On top of that, we got an impression of an educational meeting following a top-down pattern because of the former Village Headman giving a lecture in front of the other villagers rather than an exchange of information.

However, we caught the villagers' attention when we entered the community center because of our non-Thai appearance. But the villagers were very open and welcomed us to the event, which even resulted in involving us in certain activities like traditional group dancing or having celebratory dinner with them. This changed our method from un-participatory to participatory observation.

### *Coin task*

The Coin task is a method that uses props like coins in different sizes, a piece of paper and a pen. The notion of this method is to get a map-like depiction which shows the network relationships of the key informant concerning a certain topic. Our key informant was Aum, who was a 22-year-old local villager and is going to be the future vice Village Headman. We asked him to place some coins representing a person or institution concerning tourism and draw the relationships between them and their relation to him. The size of the coins stands for the importance of the person or institution, the distance from the "ego" stands for the accessibility and connectivity to that person or institution. So, we asked Aum a simple question: "Who is important for you? And how reachable is this person or institution for you?" Our aim was to let him talk without interrupting him and this probably made him tell us some important things we could not think of.

## Results



Illustration 8: Coin Task

The illustration shows the results of the coin task, which was created by a 22-year-old villager Aum.

Photo by: Maria Blechmann-Antweiler

This is the result of the Coin task with Aum, the future vice Village Headman. In his present position, he obviously has a close relationship to both the former and current Village Headman and the villagers themselves. Tourists coming to the village have the same importance to him, but they are slightly less reachable because of their foreignness. Additionally, Aum considered other institutions which are not locally based in the village, but still play a role in his life, e.g. the Tourism Ministry. The outstanding coin is the one for external rich businesses which he gave the attribute as “mafia”. If we had more time in Mae Kampong, we could have asked more key informants to do the Coin task which would give us a collection of relationships and networks within the village.

### *Wrap up: ecotourism*

During our conversations with the respondents, we have noticed that the village is a role model for other villages regarding to ecotourism, management and homestay/guesthouse business. In this context, the former Village Headman still plays a crucial role in leading the village and spread this development to other villages in other parts of Thailand.

Although not explicitly mentioned by the people we interacted with, we also discovered some inequality in the ecotourism part regarding the differences between homestay and guesthouse

business and also the social interrelation among the villagers. It became clear that inequality is a more present issue than the other target topics of KNOTS, environment and migration, regarding ecotourism in the village.

Inequality regarding...

- Contribution to the village fund: A homestay owner has to contribute 180 Baht per guest/day while the amount for guesthouse owner is only 50 Baht per guest/day.
- Circumstances in room and services: A homestay owner must live together with the guests which means more effort and work compared to guesthouse owners.
- Advertisement: guesthouse owners need to advertise their business on their own while homestay owners are under a queueing system of guest allocation. For this reason, for homestays (unlike guesthouses), there is no high or low season.
- Involvement and power: The economic and political structure in the village seems to consist of networks with different people, stakeholders and institutions. There is an unequal distribution of power depending on its level of involvement.

## 6) Conclusion

After all, the short fieldtrip to Mae Kampong could provide us with new experiences in interacting with people and applying different research methods. Although the field of transdisciplinary research is still quite new, we have been able to apply some of the methods we learned during the Summer School in Chiang Mai within this short field trip phase. Scientifically speaking, TDR is not only a research method, but also a learning process. There is no precise approach or mode of application, as it is important in this type of method to involve non-academic stakeholders, work with them and focus on their needs and desires. Despite of the short amount of time, we were able to collect some major findings which we hope can contribute to a basis for further research in this village.

Because of the good organization and a functioning management system led by the former Village Headman, Mae Kampong seems to be a village which successfully combatted its problems from the past. Because the interest in *miang* (especially the fermented *miang* tea product as a snack) was constantly decreasing among the young generation, Mae Kampong's *miang* industry, which was the core of the village's economy, was weakened a lot. But the establishment of ecotourism and the homestay and guesthouse business by the development idea of the former Village Headman, enabled the villagers to establish a new source of income which seems to have a stable future.

At first glance, there are no problems to be targeted at. But after a few days of interacting with several people and gathering information, we were able to find some inequality issues regarding the fields of *miang* and ecotourism. These issues are currently not apparent and obviously, the villagers we talked to were not aware of that. Consequently, future research needs to be done thoroughly on these issues which may grow and cause problems in the course of time.

Speaking of the future, it may be a problem that the current core of Mae Kampongs economy and livelihoods is mainly based on ecotourism and the homestay and guesthouse business, which is backed by the former Village Headman. However, this occurs to us quite vulnerable: In case of a heavy incident that impacts or even stops the tourism activities in the village, e.g. a natural catastrophe (earthquake, landslide, flood) the village's economy would definitely be disturbed. Therefore, further thinking is needed to diversify the sources of income for stability. For example, the revival of the *miang* industry could be a possibility.

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