

## Article

# A Quest for a Sustainable Social Enterprise Model: The Case of Amphawa Chaipattananurak, the Kingdom of Thailand

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**Abstract:** The social enterprise concept, a business with specific social objectives, has been questioned by scholars and practitioners for its sustainability. More importantly, a paucity of research exists on how a social enterprise can be sustainable, indicating the necessity of developing a sustainable model of social enterprise, particularly in the Asian context. Filling in the gap in the literature, the present study's prime objective is to explore a sustainable social enterprise model. The bodies of knowledge on social enterprise and sustainable enterprise are reviewed, followed by identifying a sustainable social enterprise model for exploration. The identified model is among the few sustainable social enterprise models available, thus making it appropriate for the exploration. To explore the model, the phenomenological paradigm is adopted. The study uses the case study approach with open-ended, semi-structured interview methods as well as documentation to explore a case enterprise called Amphawa Chaipattananurak (ACCP) in Thailand. To ensure data validity, the data, method, investigator, and theory triangulation methods are adopted. Ninety-five stakeholder informants were interviewed, ranging from the management team, staff, community people, and visitors to customers. In terms of analysis, the working analytical framework is adopted to analyze the collected data. Findings indicate that the ACCP practices and outcomes are consistent with those of the sustainable social enterprise model, indicating the model's applicability. Based on the findings, a refined sustainable social enterprise model is derived. Limitations, future research directions, theoretical contributions and implications, and managerial implications are also discussed.



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**Keywords:** sustainability; sustainable enterprise; social enterprise; sufficiency economy; social entrepreneurship

## 1. Introduction

Although the body of knowledge on social enterprise and sustainable enterprise is flooded with a wide variety of concepts, only a few reports address both concepts as a sustainable social enterprise or contain a holistic approach to develop one [1,2]. In particular, scholars have critiqued to which extent a social enterprise with social objectives can be sustained over a long period of time to achieve its objectives [3]. In the end, they question whether the social enterprise concept is effectively sustainable [4–7].

The present study's objective is to fill in this specific gap in the literature. Built upon prior studies that focus on a philosophical approach to sustainable enterprise called sufficiency economy philosophy [2,8], the present study explores the extent to which a community enterprise that adopts the sufficiency economy philosophy in guiding its development can be sustainable.

A social enterprise (SE) is defined in the present study as an independent organization that recognizes, evaluates, and exploits business opportunities resulting in the creation of social value [9–12]. SE serves as a “double bottom line” that is a simultaneous blend between the financial and social returns by focusing on investment and reinvestment for shareholders, who are social, environmental, or communal [13].

The distinguishing characteristic of SE is sustainable orientation, while the social mission is the core [8,14]. As for SE, sustainable orientation refers to the interconnection between the social, economic, and environmental factors [15]; therefore, SE attempts to achieve its goals in the social, economic, and environmental spheres, with the aim of stakeholders being able to continue to lead healthy and productive lives, with the objective of maintaining both physical and mental wellbeing [16], and in our view it is extremely challenging to perform such an ambidextrous role. In addition, SE activities are mainly geared towards the creation of social value through innovation, risk management, and energetic collaboration among stakeholders over profit making [17,18], focusing on prioritization of social over economic value creation, and this is often regarded as the key boundary separating social enterprises from traditional business ventures—even for those engaged in advanced forms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) [19].

When considering the main triple goals of SE: social, economic, and environmental, these were found to be consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs, which were set as a 2030 global sustainability agenda, cover people (social goals), prosperity (economic goals), and the planet (environmental goals) [20]. According to the study of Kulshrestha, Sahay, and Sengupta (2022) [21], when SE has been applied to attempt achievement of these goals, there has been a failure to tackle challenges, which is in our view highly daunting given the multiple tensions among the goals that need to be managed to reach a dynamic balance. In particular, sustainable development problems are in our view a “wicked problem”, with solving one problem leading to creating more problems. These challenges have been found in terms of strategic formulation and implementation [21], human resources management [21,22], and financial acquisition [21–23]. Among these, the main challenge facing SE and that which could not be overcome is financial management [23], endorsed by a recent study that discovered in Thailand that only 19% of SEs obtained broke even after the COVID-19 pandemic [24].

Even though there are some research studies on the factors driving SE to achieve its goals from various perspectives, generally, knowledge remains scattered and fragmented. For all that, the most recent systematic review on social enterprise sustainability conducted by Kulshrestha, Shay, and Sengupta in 2022 [21] showed that only a few deep-thinking researchers proposed SE as a theoretical model in relation to sustainability. These are Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2019) [8], Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2022) [14], and Lumpkin et al. (2013) [25]. The theoretical development in their studies explicitly explains the linkage between corporate sustainability practices and sustainability performance outputs such as socioeconomic performance, brand equity, and environmental performance.

Among these mentioned, only Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra [8,14], as informed by the sufficiency economy philosophy, focus on the Asian context. According to the systematic review [21], sustainable SE is an underrated research topic despite it being an important aspect of today’s sustainable development. Therefore, understanding this pivotal model regarding the relationship between practice and output is considered crucial. However, by the very nature of the studies adopting a quantitative research method, there were some limitations, with no detailed explanation in terms of how to strategically implement it, particularly in the case of SE beneficial in the maintenance of sustainability. Thus, this paper attempts to bridge this research gap by using the framework from Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra’s model [8,14] and then extend knowledge on how a sustainable social enterprise model can be implemented. Furthermore, this study aims to explore how SE, as informed by the philosophical approach of sufficiency economy, can be used to cope with the challenges and opportunities in the creation of social enterprise sustainability. The broad research question below is used to guide the development of the present study.

**Research Question:** To which extent and how can the sufficiency economy philosophy be used to ensure social enterprise’s sustainability in Thailand?

Since (a) a recent literature review [14] has indicated that the literature on social enterprise is dominated by conceptual and empirical studies and (b) many of the concepts introduced in the literature also lack theories or models that provide the answers to the

theory building questions: “what”, “how”, and “why”, of the social enterprise phenomena [26], our present study introduces a refined model of sustainable social enterprise that features the process of social entrepreneurship [27], our significant contribution to the social enterprise literature.

## 2. Background Literature

This section discusses relevant concepts of social enterprise, sustainability, and the philosophy of sufficiency economy, followed by the sustainable social enterprise model used to explore the research question.

### 2.1. Social Enterprise and Sustainability

The emergence and evolution of the social enterprise (SE) concept in academia are still unclear because many scholars have different views [28]. However, a few researchers note that the term SE was first introduced in 1970 by Borzaga and Defourny in their book entitled “The Emergence of Social Enterprise” [29]. In the early stages, SE was viewed as part of organizational skills and activities that aimed to solve social problems.

Ten years later, after the initiative by the Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof. Muhammad Yunus on a microfinance revolution and the emergence of a social business model, SE became widespread and gained attention globally by both practitioners and academic researchers [30]. However, during the 1980s, although gaining increasing significance, in practice, each organization was implementing the SE concept differently.

In the 1990s, with the creation of the New Labor era by the UK government, the attempt to link capitalism and socialism increased the focus on the social enterprise (SE) concept [31]. Inequality and problems of endemic poverty dictate that organizations focus on doing business with society. This is the key concept of SE, that there is a return on investment for the community. Gradually, the focus of SE has shifted to the implementation of the non-profit making organization.

What followed was that SEs increased in both number and scale because governments around the world encouraged it, and perceived SE as a global concept to alleviate poverty [32]. By and by, Peter Drucker added to the SE concept by introducing the term social innovation. Therefore, SE is now viewed as a managerial practice to enhance efficiency in the creation of social wealth [33].

Later on, SE gained recognition as a separate discipline in academic research and applicable in all types of non-profit organizations, both private and public. This is not only because of their purpose to “respond to the needs of others” but also because of their growing contribution to economies [34,35].

However, the lackluster world economy caused a reduction in government funding, and this lack of support to SE resulted in its collapse as operating costs could not be covered [36,37]. Therefore, the concept of sustainability has now been integrated into SE. However, it is still a question of debate amongst researchers whether SE can really be sustainable [5,6]. This may be because the early studies on SE addressed mainly the principles of SE and the viewpoints of practitioners and policy makers [30]. These studies mainly addressed SE as a suitable approach to accelerate the implementation based solely on philanthropic charities and donations [38].

However, various researchers believed that SE could be sustainable if we understand what standard sets of corporate sustainability measured items are, particularly when the business is facing the threat of world economic downturn and the impacts of COVID-19. Understanding the factors that influence SE to attain sustainability is in the spotlight [39].

In the context of SE, sustainability refers to, first, whether an SE can survive in business. Second is whether an SE can financially support itself and, last, whether an SE can be resilient over time. The foregoing studies stated that sustainability of SE comes from the combination of three components: social sustainability, environmental sustainability, and economic sustainability. This is known as the “the triple bottom line” introduced by Elk-

ington in 1998 [40] which is similar to what business persons called the 3Ps: people, profit, and planet. This is the fundamental principle used widely in the field of sustainability.

To achieve long-term sustainability, SE needs to involve the local community. This is because community ought to play initiative roles in ensuring the operational efficiencies, appropriate management, and control [41]. As involving community is a priority, nowadays there is an increasing interest in research studies to examine in detail how SE has been sustainably implemented in different contexts [36,42,43].

In Kerlin's study on seven regions of the world, he suggested that the Southeast Asian region has unique characteristics but far less discussion [44]. Several developing countries in Asia are facing the problem of multidimensional poverty which has worsened after the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, sustainable SE is expected to contribute to help alleviate poverty. Unfortunately, very limited studies were carried out [42]. Among those SE studies, newly industrialized contexts such as Thailand are examined [8,14,42]. Studies on SE in Thailand gradually increased since the Asian economic crisis in 1997 [42]. This may be because of the need for the country to empower local communities and grassroots in order to help improve economic conditions.

## 2.2. *The Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (SEP): Thailand's Sustainable Development Approach*

The philosophy of sufficiency economy (SEP), initiated by the late His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, is a holistic approach to sustainable development [45]. Although SEP was introduced to Thailand later than elsewhere, it has now been recognized and adopted universally.

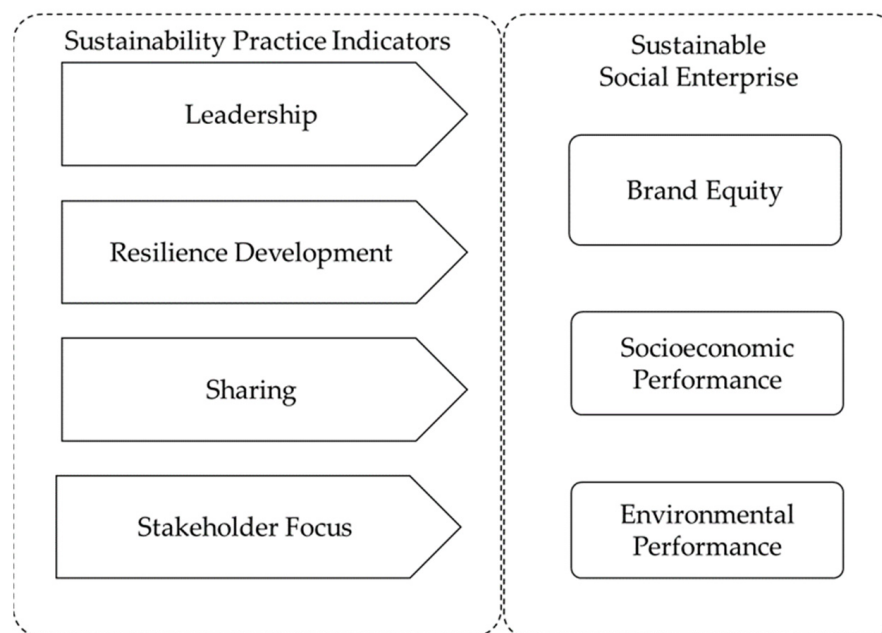
During the 1950s, the late King had been traveling throughout the country aiming to establish centers in different regions for the purpose of understanding the prevailing conditions of areas. His Majesty conducted research and came up with specific strategies for developing those areas properly. From this research work, SEP has been derived. The ideology is to help the country through globalization, with a balanced and integrated approach to globalization, while maintaining the value of community, comprising three principles: moderation, rationality, and self-immunity, with two underlying conditions: knowledge and morality, in the formulation of an enterprise sustainability strategy [46]. According to Kantabutra (2006) [47], moderation is a prerequisite for reaching a state of sufficiency. Moderation means a business should be grown naturally and not driven into either an over-consumption or an underconsumption condition. Rationality is accumulating knowledge and experience, along with an analytical capability and foresight, to evaluate the reasons for any action in order to understand its full holistic consequence. Self-immunity occurs when an enterprise has been armed with the economic, social, cultural, and environmental defenses needed to resist and ward off both internal and external threats. Successfully implementing SEP using three principles also requires morality and knowledge.

SEP addresses the middle path that is built upon a foundation of resilience, thus creating a balance of social, environmental, and economic conditions [48]. Various types of organization, public and private, business, government, non-government, or SE, can apply SEP to ensure sustainable development [45]. Enterprises can practice it according to their strengths, conditions, and limitations [49]. Furthermore, SEP is also applicable for sustainable development at all levels of the community [46]. SEP puts a high value on ethical behavior toward others [8]. This is in lieu of the concept of SE that places the responsibility of carrying out an ethical approach on all stakeholders.

The result of adopting SEP is the resilience to cope with the impact from economic, social, and environmental changes [50,51]. Embedded SEP helps an enterprise to prepare for negative impact, from both internal and external changes, and to mitigate risk from crisis [45,48–52]. Integrated operation of SEP resulted in excellent brand and reputation, and improved social, economic, and environmental performance [53,54] while focusing on the creation of long-term stakeholder values [48].

### 2.3. SEP and the Sustainable Social Enterprise Model

Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2019) [8] in their literature review on SE sustainability suggested that by incorporating SEP along with other profound internationally recognized sustainability theories, a social enterprise model could be achieved. These internationally recognized theories included the self-determination theory, the stakeholder theory, the sustainable leadership theory, the complexity theory, the knowledge-based theory, the dynamic capabilities theory, and the knowledge management theory, and by conducting an empirical test [8], they then proposed the sustainable SE model as presented in Figure 1. We introduce each of the model components one by one below.



**Figure 1.** Sustainable Social Enterprise Model. Source: Adopted from Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2019) [8].

#### 2.3.1. Resilience Development

The term resilience is from the Latin word meaning “rebound” [55]. It was used in the field of ecology in the research by Holling, who defined resilience as “a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables” in the 1970s [56]. In the social studies field, resilience is often mentioned in sustainable development as “the ability of a system to absorb disturbances and retain its basic function and structure” [54–57]. According to SEP, resilience is the ability to bounce back from external impacts. In the context of SE, a community requires that collaborative behavior become entrenched in the group. SE should emphasize risk management, diversity of products and services, and the use of acquired knowledge and information to plan for volatility, and thus create a readiness to stand against a crisis [55]. SE, by nature of its characteristics, has a greater ability than other types of enterprise to be resilient. SE is more flexible and adaptable [58]. For SE to increase resilience, innovation plays an important role. Some researchers have pointed out that SE is innovative in achieving social goals [10]. For SE, social innovation could cover the development of new products, services, or a variety of approaches to address social problems. SE can retain the innovative character that requires monitoring changes in the environment and capturing new opportunities while cooperating with other stakeholders [58]. SE, with resilience, would have a risk management plan, diversity in product and services, and use the acquired knowledge and information to be prepared for a stand in the event of a crisis.



### 2.3.2. Stakeholder Focus Practice

SE should understand the need of aiming to build long-term relationships with stakeholders to ensure long-term and sustainable success [59]. The lack of support from key stakeholders could end in the demise of SE. Focus on stakeholders means managing the stakeholder engagement process, as SE should share common goals with key stakeholders [60]. According to SEP, reasonableness occurs from having knowledge and experience; therefore, acquiring technical and managerial skills from stakeholders can help SE to scale its social impact [61]. SE should consider investing in customers, society, and the environment. SE should provide a standard quality of the product and service for paying customers, plus systematic support, and development of the internal customer, i.e., its own employees. For society, SE should develop local communities and eliminate problems to improve the community's quality of life. For the environment, SE should preserve natural resources and protect the environment [8]. The trustworthiness of SE will strengthen relationships with stakeholders, and furthermore could introduce increased numbers of stakeholders to the SE network [59].

### 2.3.3. Leadership

Leadership is affirmed in many studies as one of the antecedents driving sustainability in SE [1]. There is a tension in managing SE as one of the goals is to deliver an impact to society whereas the second goal is to create a sustainable business that is financially successful. Therefore, having a leader with a sustained vision is mandatory [4] to development of a sustainable SE based on SEP. According to Kantabutra's study on SEP and leadership [47], a leader ought to have a clarity of vision for abstraction, challenge, and future orientation. The vision must comprise moderation, reason, the need for a self-immunity mechanism, knowledge, and morality imagery that is directly associated with sustainable employment and customer satisfaction, and with a satisfactory financial outcome [1]. Another study by Phukamchanoat [62] confirmed that the leader in a community should be committed to the application of SEP in order live a life of sufficiency. They are mainly concerned with the interests of the community, and pay attention to community communication, not only within the enterprise but also with external partners [62]. For the internal community, the SEP leader often communicates their vision and motive in order to empower employees and followers. For the external community, the leader liaises with the community, government, and private enterprise in order to achieve the social mission. These leaders were found to be conflict resolution types who utilize their qualities of respect, honesty, and dignity, and are aware of the diversities among stakeholders from different cultures, ways of life, and beliefs. SE ought to have a leader who is considerate toward the diversities of stakeholders [31]. With the belief in moderation, knowledge, and virtue, a community leader often makes logical decisions with consideration of the factors involved and careful anticipation of the outcomes that may be expected from such actions [62].

### 2.3.4. Sharing

Sharing, which means giving and receiving, is an underlying concept of SEP, and is a virtue [14,63]. Virtue in a community can be either be inherited or learned [64]. Shared virtues in a community create the community norm. However, without knowledge sharing, virtues are not enough for SE to achieve sustainable goals [65]. For SE, sharing knowledge refers to not only explicit but also tacit knowledge as well as feelings, experiences, and skills among those stakeholders in the enterprise [66]. The resulting benefit is the speeding up of new ideas and the enterprise-learning processes, which, as a consequence, lead innovation within the enterprise [67]. In the case of business enterprises that adopt SEP, there is even more sharing of knowledge with those who are external, even with competitors. Sharing knowledge can also help increase the adaptive capacity of the enterprise [68]. Adaptability enables organizations to have flexibility and be capable of breaking through barriers and restoring scalability. This is interrelated with self-immunity. Sharing is not only beneficial

for the enterprise itself in terms of efficiency and success, but also helps improve and create value within the entire supply chain.

### 2.3.5. Corporate Reputation and Brand Equity

Increasingly, corporate reputation and brand equity are used as measures for corporate sustainability (e.g., Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]; Kantabutra and Ketprapakorn, 2020 [70]). Corporate reputation is the perception of the enterprise from the viewpoint of all stakeholders in relation to its main competitors [71]. Corporate reputation positively influences brand equity. A sustainable strategy is a tool to enhance the corporate reputation and even increase brand equity [72]. Brand equity is considered as value added to a product by virtue of its brand name [73]. Based on the SEP concept, resilience, sharing, virtue, and self-immunity are related to how the enterprise behaves morally, and develops strong relationships with customers and other stakeholders and therefore results in greater sustainability. Corporate reputation and brand equity are the most valuable intangible resources because, first, they help reduce stakeholder doubt regarding the future performance of the enterprise. Second, they lead to stakeholder trust [72]. This trust, based on the relationship with customers and other community members, serves as an important component and guarantor of self-immunity during times of economic hardship [74].

Based on a recent stakeholder model by Winit and Kantabutra (2022) [75], an enterprise has to deliver both functional and emotional benefits in order to increase the level of stakeholder trust that is a precursor to brand equity. Therefore, sustainable enterprises promote the delivery of functional benefits that lead to improving emotional benefits to improve stakeholder trust, leading to improved brand equity, given that functional benefits leading to psychological benefits empirically lead to stakeholder trust and thus brand equity [75].

### 2.3.6. Socioeconomic Performance

Drawing from their study, Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2019) [8] proposed socioeconomic performance as a measure for social enterprise performance. Generally, socioeconomics, a term used in various contexts, is how economic activity affects and is shaped by social processes. At the community level, it refers to the way social and economic factors influence one another in local communities and households. The measurement of socioeconomic sustainability is found to be the relationship between quality of life and health [76], life satisfaction of community members [77], community wellbeing [78,79], etc.

At the personal level, it is how each group that shares values behaves within the society in the relation of economics to social values [80]. The measurements at the personal level were found to be individual quality of life [81], the relationship between happiness and longevity [82], and mental health and personal relationships [83].

In the case of SE, in which the ultimate goal is to conduct business in service of the social mission, social benefit, community wellbeing, and economic benefit outcomes coupled with financial freedom are all inseparable. A previous study on SE at a hospital in Thailand [6] found that when SE members shared the same vision on SE sustainability, they viewed financial and social outcomes as related [8]. Members in SE devoted themselves, as they strongly believed in contributing good things to the community. Thus, this leads to greater social outcomes, and consequently helps build improved brand reputation. After all, not only do they have loyal patients, but also new patients who attend as they trust in the brand and want to support SE. These things, at the end of the day, turn into SE financial success [70]. This is the key difference between sustainable SEs regarding achieving socioeconomic performance and those with corporate social responsibility (CSR). Some studies [84,85] argued that CSR alone could not lead to a win-win situation. Particularly in the case of developing countries, CSR is implemented as part of corporate philanthropy, not for the sake of the community. Those who participate in CSR activities do so on a voluntary, temporary basis and thus it is not sustained. Furthermore, economic power,

benefit, and decision making belong to the enterprise that manipulates CSR activities, and not the community [85].

This corporate philanthropy approach is also consistent with an introduction to the development of the Directive of the European Parliament and of the EU Council [86], which obliges certain large entities and groups to consider and report social issues in their environment regarding the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information. In other words, the CSR activities are conducted because enterprises are directly or indirectly required to by rules and regulations. On the contrary, Thailand's sufficiency economy philosophy approach guides business enterprises to contribute to developing the society because the enterprises view themselves as part of the society [87]. If the society cannot exist, neither can the enterprises. With this mindset, the sustainable enterprises as informed by the sufficiency economy philosophy perform CSR activities because they want to ensure a pleasant society, as opposed to being required to by certain rules and regulations. In our view, it is this mindset that guides them to view their performance as a balanced combination between social and economic performance outputs, or socioeconomic performance outputs.

### 2.3.7. Environmental Performance

One of the outcomes from a sustainable SE is measured by its environmental performance. SE, although doing business for society, exploits the community resources and environment by its activities. Environmental sustainability is directly linked to the socioeconomic performance. It is how a community has economic growth while balancing the wellbeing of community members and efficiently utilizing and managing community natural resources without destroying the natural environment [88]. SE therefore exists to provide help and support for a wide range of environmental reasons that "give back" to society—hence, reflecting the "multibottom line" [89] or virtue in SEP. SE could embed environmental responsibility as part of its social mission.

Sustainable SE takes into consideration the physical input to production, emphasizing environmental life-support systems. These environmental components include the atmosphere, water, and soil, which all need to be healthy, meaning that their environmental service capacity must be maintained [90]. During its business operation process along the supply chain, SE ought to preserve and regenerate resources starting from development through to the delivery of products or services [91]. Previous studies reported the measurements of the environmental sustainability as the environmental performance that a sustainable enterprise should consider; for example, assessment of environmental inputs [92], reduction of chemical usage in the operation [91], use of renewable energy resources [93], minimization of waste and waste management [94], pollution alleviation [88], consideration of the environmental footprint such as carbon, land, water, material, etc. [91], and adopting green marketing strategies such as the production of environmentally friendly products, eco-labeling, and packaging [95].

In summary, SE should be compliant to balance the needs of business, but not operate over capacity or oversupply product and services, without supporting the community ecosystems, and at the same time meet the needs of the society [59,60]. The present study adopts the sustainable social enterprise model [8] to explore the research question. The following section introduces the research methodology designed to explore the research question.

## 3. Research Methodology

In exploring the research question, the phenomenological paradigm of research is adopted. We explain the overall research design, data collection, and analysis approaches in this section.

### 3.1. Case Study Approach

This study employed the qualitative research method in order to obtain a deep understanding of how SE embraced the Thai sufficiency economy philosophy to achieve its



sustainable performance. The case study approach was adopted, as it is well suited for explorative theory-building research [96]. The case study could provide more detail and could go beyond the quantitative model. Furthermore, it could help explain anomalies or unexpected results [97].

The case study approach allowed researchers to deeply understand the holistic and meaningful characteristics of SE and its managerial processes. Yin [98] encourages the case study approach in a study that wishes to explore the complexity of organizational phenomena. The case study approach helps capture the history of the organization, its phenomenography on how the concept of SEP was put in place, its past and current scenario, and how the organization implemented a better expression of leadership and innovation in order to achieve the organizational goals and minimize or control negative aspects.

### 3.2. Case Study Selection

We use the case of Amphawa Chaipattananurak Conservation Project of the Chaipattana Foundation (the ACCP) to explore the sustainable social enterprise model for the following reasons.

In terms of sustainable enterprise, the ACCP, since its foundation in 2002, has demonstrated its organizational abilities to deliver competitive performance (see the sustainability performance outcomes for details), go through crises including the subprime crisis from 2008–2009 and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis starting in 2020, and maintain market leadership [99] as evident by the fact that it is regarded as one of the outstanding projects that received an honorable mention cultural heritage conservation award from UNESCO [100].

In terms of social enterprise, no universally agreed definition of social enterprise exists [53]. While a social enterprise is defined by some scholars as an enterprise that tries to maximize long-term profitability for a private owner to spend on social development activities as part of corporate philanthropy, the concept is defined by others as a commercial, non-profit enterprise that wants to contribute to improving society and is very clear in its social mission [101,102]. With a wide variety of descriptions, the overarching goal of both extremes is clear, to benefit society. By this commonly shared definition, the ACCP is considered as a social enterprise because it was started with a social vision to develop and preserve the Amphawa community, details of which are discussed in the following section.

Since the present study used the sufficiency economy philosophy as part of the framework, the ACCP is also appropriate as a case study because (1) it belongs to the Chaipattana Foundation, a development foundation founded by HM King Rama IX who formulated the philosophy of sufficiency economy, and (b) it is an SE showcase that successfully demonstrated how SEP could create awareness and rejuvenate an abandoned community to its previous vitality, according to UNESCO [100].

Thus, the ACCP is considered suitable as a subject of study for the present study because it can be justified as a sustainable social enterprise, the development of which is informed by the sufficiency economy philosophy.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Triangulation

In order to answer the research question of how SE could create sustainability through the SEP concept, it is crucial to understand the context of the socioeconomics and environment of the case study from various stakeholders. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the concept of SEP and Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra's sustainable model [14]. Using semi-structured interviews, this study was able to extract the necessary characteristics of a successful sustainable SE that key stakeholders were attempting to achieve. The semi-structured interview guide and data collection processes were conducted under the approval of the Institutional Review Board of the Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University (MU-IPSR IRB).

To ensure the validity of the studies, data triangulation was conducted at various levels of the project, from top down to operational level, while full- and part-time volunteers of

the case were interviewed. Furthermore, in the local community people such as the local governor, local school teachers, local merchants, villagers, etc. as well as tourists were other important entities that this study paid attention to. With the understanding that all stakeholders play a significant role in crafting SE, this methodology allows for the recognition of paths fundamental to the development of SE sustainability. This methodology emphasizes the need for continued dialogue to minimize the gap of understanding between different stakeholders [103].

In addition to extensive data triangulation, we also adopted (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, and (c) theory triangulation [104,105]. In terms of method triangulation, we adopted the probing technique, non-participative observations during five field visits, collecting data from the same informants at different times. We adopted the investigator triangulation by using four different investigators in collecting and analyzing the data. Each investigator was trained on the framework, the analytical framework, and how to evaluate the data. Findings from each evaluator were compared. If the findings from each evaluator arrived at the same conclusion, data validity was determined to be sufficient. If, however, the conclusions were different, the investigators investigated further to unearth the “certain” and “true” finding. In terms of theory triangulation, we finally explored and analyzed our data through different theoretical/conceptual frameworks as shown in the following section of Findings and Discussion.

In reference to theory triangulation, we would like to point out that the sustainable social enterprise framework we used as the research framework alone is supported by seven key theories [8]. To be precise, the leadership practice is endorsed by the self-determination and sustainable leadership theories, while the stakeholder focus practice is endorsed by the stakeholder theory. The sharing practice is endorsed by the knowledge-based, knowledge management, and dynamic capabilities theories, while the resilience development practice is endorsed by complexity and sustainable leadership theories. Thus, if the findings are consistent with the framework, the findings must also be supported by these seven key theories, endorsing the findings’ validity.

### 3.4. Participants

A total of 95 participants were purposely interviewed in this study. They were selected as they had experience working with the ACCP for at least 1 month. As for the community members, they had experience with ACCP activities or products/services. Face to face interviews of 1–1.5 h were conducted. Participants are presented in Table 1.

Interviews with internal stakeholders were designed to cover not only the management level, but also those at the operational level of the project. Volunteers who joined the operation of the SE consisted of two groups. The first group was in the majority. They were students from various educational levels: elementary school, high school, under-graduate, and graduate level, in the community. The second was those who were impressed with the SE’s brand reputation and only joined the activities from time to time.

Partners of the projects consisted of two groups. The first is project consultants. Project consultants were those expert professionals in industries who were invited to coach and give feedback to the SE projects and activities. They joined on a part-time basis. Project collaborators were mainly universities, for example, faculties from Chulalongkorn University and Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, which despite not being located in the community areas came and worked in collaborative events or activities such as research studies. Merchants in the project were those local villagers who were suffering from floating market land price manipulation and those locals born in the Amphawa community who wished to return home, looking for an affordable rental place to do business.

**Table 1.** Research participants.

No.	Informant	No.	Relationship with the ACCP	Classification of Informant
1	Project director of the Chaipattana Foundation	1	Employee	SE member
2	Former project director of the ACCP	1	Employee	SE member
3	Manager	1	Employee	SE member
4	Staff	10	Employee	SE member
5	Students	9	Volunteer	SE member
6	Linguistic mentor	1	Volunteer	SE member
7	Project consultants	2	Partner	SE member
8	Project collaborators	3	Partner	SE member
9	Merchants in the ACCP project	12	Customer	SE member
10	A deputy director of Thailand tourism	1	Stakeholder	Community member
11	A former municipal mayor	1	Local community stakeholder	Community member
12	A vice chairman of the Cultural Council of Samut Songkarm Province	1	Local community stakeholder	Community member
13	Villagers	15	Local community stakeholder	Community member
14	Local businesses in the community	15	Local community stakeholder	Community member
14	Community schoolteachers	2	Local community stakeholder/Partner	SE member and Community member
15	Local artists	2	Local community stakeholder/Partner	SE member and Community member
16	Visitors	8	Customer	Community member
17	Tourists	10	Stakeholder	Community member
Total		95		

By the nature of SE, various groups of stakeholders were included. The first were government officers. A former municipal mayor, a deputy director of tourism, and a vice chairman of the Cultural Council of Samut Songkarm Province were interviewed in order to understand the background, situations, needs, and problems arising in the Amphawa community before and after the operation of the ACCP. Another group was villagers. Villagers were those living in the Amphawa community, who experienced the community boom and bust, as well as having seen the development of the ACCP. Some of them had participated in the ACCP activities. Some had experience as suppliers to the ACCP whereas some were buyers of the ACCP products. Third, in the case of Thai local communities, community schoolteachers are considered as one of the key community influencers. As the ACCP attempted to regain the culture of local music and art, it encouraged teachers and students of the Amphawa district to participate. Two teachers were involved in the ACCP activities. Both were interviewed as partners and community stakeholders. Third, two

local artists who returned to their hometown had experience of participating in exhibitions at the ACCP galleries. They were considered as partners and community stakeholders. Fourth are local businesses in the community. They are local businesses in the Amphawa tourism ecosystem: hotels, home stays, tourist boats, restaurants, boat vendors in the floating market, local groceries, etc. and both medium-sized and small businesses. Last, the biggest group was tourists and visitors. Tourists were those visiting the floating market. The majority of tourists experienced both boom and bust times. Few were first-time visitors to the ACCP and Amphawa floating market. Visitors were those who visited the ACCP project activities for learning purposes; they were mainly farmers from other provinces. Some were government officers and some were from educational organizations.

After data collection, we transcribed the data recorded during the interviews. Although highly time-consuming, the transcription facilitated our later data analysis. We transcribed interviews while details and reactions of the interviewees were still fresh. All of our 95 interviews were very lengthy, lasting in total about 65 h. At the end, we had about 254 A4 pages of interview transcript for analysis. In addition, other types of data such as observed data and reflective notes were made into an organized written form for analysis.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

In terms of analysis, qualitative data analysis typically takes place concurrently with the data collection. Therefore, findings frequently develop gradually over time in a non-linear manner. By design, we thus transcribed the interviews by ourselves. Given the deductive approach to qualitative data analysis, the framework approach was adopted [106]. Our framework approach involved analyzing qualitative data based on a theoretically and empirically predetermined structure as shown in Table 2 below, since from the literature review, we could anticipate the responses from the interviewees. The framework approach helped us focus the coding on those critical issues identified by the existing literature.

**Table 2.** Example working analytical framework.

No.	Type of Interviewee	Interview Quote	Leadership	Stakeholder Focus	Sharing	Resilience Development	Brand Equity	Socioeconomic Performance	Environmental Performance
1	Management	"By Conservation and Development, we want to develop the Samut Songkhram community to be sustainable allowing people to have a good quality of life. At the same time, the resources, wisdom, ecosystems will remain for the next generations to come. In terms of development and conservation, these must be carried out in parallel".	X	X	X			X	X
2									
3									
4									
5									

X = consistent.

In addition, the framework approach was suitable for the present study, that is, cross-sectional analysis with descriptive data, because it enabled us to view different aspects of the observed phenomena under exploration [106]. Given the framework approach, the resulting interpretations of interviewees' experiences were transparent [106]. It also provided clear steps to follow and bring about highly structured outputs of summarized data. It also allowed us to move back and forth across the data until we reached a coherent account [106]. Most importantly, the framework approach allowed us to constantly refine emerging themes as more data were collected.

We introduce the case enterprise, justified earlier as a sustainable social enterprise, in the next section.

#### 4. Case Study: The Amphawa Chaipattananurak Conservation Project (ACCP)

Amphawa is the name of a district in Samut Songkarm Province, central Thailand. Amphawa has long been a small community situated by a river. In the 16th century, it was very famous as one of the key floating market centers in the country. However, faced with changes such as the advent of urbanization and the reduced importance of waterways for transport, the younger generation abandoned the place. Amphawa was therefore considered a dead city, with an aging population and a deteriorating socioculture. The community had gradually lost its local culture and norms. Consequently, some of the community land had become degraded and unusable and some parts were even considered as a “slum” [107].

In 1997, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Department of Community Development cooperated with the local community in the redevelopment of tourism in Samut Songkarm Province by reviving the night floating market, boat tours for firefly visits, and home stay within the local community. This promotion was so successful that the community became a tourist destination. However, without a long-term plan, problems occurred [108].

With an unclear strategy in the management of community interests, lack of participation by the majority of villagers, and ignorance of sharing local knowledge and norms, a void in culture developed between villagers and tourists, which brought about a negative impact. Although there was a consistent economic performance from the community [109], the first negative impact noticed was the change in cultural identity. The traditional floating market was changed from daytime to nighttime all to serve the needs of tourists. Local fruits and products were changed to encourage tourist purchases. Secondly, and the more serious, was that land prices dramatically increased. Land and shop areas changed hands to investment capitalists, which included the shifting of investment from people in the local community to outside investors. Thirdly, the traditional rowboats were changed to motorboats to meet the excessive tourist demands which resulted in an increase in environmental pollutants, such as noise and air, and landslides. Some local villages decided to cut down all indigenous trees within the habitat to encourage fireflies and almost 50 families deserted the community [110].

From boom to bust, villagers who were in the tourist business faced hyper-competition and business conflicts between local villagers and outside investors. The naturally green areas of Amphawa, normally an agricultural area and orchard, disappeared to be turned into a residential hotel area. Problems of the degradation of resources and the environment occurred, such as the state of trees and soil along the riverbank and the accumulation of solid waste, because there was no preparation for the problems that occurred. All these problems were compounded by the fact that the agencies in the area did not have a clear policy to solve the developing problems [111].

In 2002, Miss Prayong Nakawarang presented her 1 rai of land (8.3 acres) in Amphawa to Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. Other donations of land have since increased the site to 25 rai (9.9 acres) in total area. Princess Sirindhorn charged the “Chaipattana Foundation” with developing this site for the benefit of the local community. Thus, the Amphawa Chaipattananurak Conservation Project (ACCP) was embarked upon [112]. The key objectives of the Amphawa Chaipattananurak Conservation Project are reflected in its name: “Pattana” means “development” and “Anurak” means “conservation”. The core working philosophy of the ACCP is based on applying SEP principles in collaboration with the local community [113].

Under the ACCP, development began by exploring sociogeographic factors, promoting their “cultural value” and then turning them into “marketable values”. All ACCP activities, at each step, from cultural conservation to preservation of the traditional way of life, local wisdom, and environment, involve the local community. Using close cooperation in conservation as well as in development, the ACCP believed that sustainability could be within realistic reach. This belief is reflected in the “Chai” part of the Foundation’s name, which adds “victory” to the development and conservation concepts [112].



To run the project, HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn provided four royal initiatives as a guideline for operations:

- (1) Develop and conserve arts, ways of life, and local culture unique to the Amphawa community in both the physical and other ways of life of residents in the area and community.
- (2) Develop the area to be a conservation destination, attractive to tourists. Link the ACCP areas with the other tourist attractions of Samut Songkhram Province as well as make it a source of education and dissemination of knowledge about native plants by maintaining the orchard ecology as a source of information about the way of life of the Amphawa community.
- (3) Create value added products and income for the community by the sale of produce and services, with emphasis on eco-tourism.
- (4) Promote holistic development by creating opportunities for the local community. Play a role in the management of the area to achieve a balance in development and community self-reliance according to the concept of a sufficiency economy system [112].

The project development and conservation activities can be systematically divided into three phases.

1. Rehabilitation.
2. Self-sustaining community.
3. Holistic sustainability.

In the Rehabilitation phase, the ACCP started by renovating the land and buildings in 2002. Prior to the land donation, many people had rented land from Miss Nakawarang, with good relationships between the parties. The ACCP was concerned with these people and wanted them to remain living in the area. In developing and managing the land in Amphawa, the ACCP considered various alternatives but chose those that least adversely affected the people living in and around the areas and the community generally.

Sustainable development requires systematic management. However, the challenge the ACCP faced in this phase was that people who had been living in this area for a long time had no rental contracts with the former landlord. The ACCP needed to introduce legal contracts, but in doing so attempted to ensure that people clearly understood the contract details, agreed upon the contract terms, and accepted the contract obligations. The ACCP used the first contracts it signed with the people living at Amphawa as a way of keeping the balance in the Amphawa community. In this phase, the principle of equity in society was of key concern to the ACCP.

Rehabilitation was financed from an initial rehabilitation fund from the foundation, the local municipality, and donations from Denmark and with assistance from Chulalongkorn University. In addition, the ACCP encouraged the local people to become involved. If residents were interested in restoring their buildings, they could obtain a 50% subsidy, supplying 50% themselves. Later, this concept was extended to other community development activities such as schools and community assets.

In the self-sustaining community phase, the ACCP rejuvenated and implemented the floating market idea. However, the first and foremost challenge was a conflict of interest with the nearby community on the other side of the river where a floating market was already established. The ACCP involved all stakeholders in solving this problem, and found a community consensus that resulted in the Amphawa market officially opening in 2008.

Currently, the ACCP offers a range of services. First, the agriculture areas are the zone for planting local plants for conservation, the traditional coconut sugar stove, and greenhouses producing vermicomposting fertilizer. In this area, tourists and visitors can learn and experience how coconut sugar is made with green traditional processes and how to produce vermicomposting fertilizer for home and commercial use. In addition, in this area the ACCP sells various local foods and types of coconut sugar. Second, the ACCP market is a rental area for local farmers to sell local products. Third, Nakawarang stage

is a space for arranging local art and craft performances, where students in Amphawa are encouraged to perform traditional Thai music. The area is also a space for other activities with partners such as an eco-friendly market. Fourth, the ACCP retail shop sells consignment products that are local home-manufactured products inspired by local wisdom, as well as local products from nearby areas. Examples include coconut basketwork, handicrafts, and calcium salt talcum powder. Fifth, the Chan-cha-la shop is a shop located next to the floating market. The ACCP offers free space for tourist and visitors. The ACCP decided to sell only natural drinks and not foods to avoid competition with local restaurants.

Finally, the ACCP also offers an exhibition room with a low rental price for artists to show their art pieces. The ACCP also invited the local community experts to demonstrate various local handicrafts, aiming to educate and preserve the knowledge for the next generations.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

Overall, the resulting findings are to a large extent consistent with the Sustainable Social Enterprise model. As part of the theory triangulation, we discuss the findings in relation to the extant theoretical, empirical, and conceptual literature in this section.

### 5.1. Sustainable Social Enterprise Practices

In relation to the broader literature and as part of the theory triangulation, we present and discuss the findings in relation to the four practices and their outcomes in this section.

#### 5.1.1. Leadership Practice

Consistent to the broader literature on sustainable leadership (e.g., Avery, 2005 [99]; Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]), the ACCP adopted a farsighted management policy with a visionary decision. The project decision making was based on long-term impacts in order to achieve a sustainable business and community-based tourism.

The project started with emphasis on long-term planning aiming at reviving the local culture and community, as endorsed by the corporate sustainability practice of geosocial development where development takes place by considering the requirements of the locals [70]. However, because there were tenants who were local residents in a row of houses by the river, the land was given to the foundation when the ACCP commenced its operation; they first set up an administration system to prevent the land being sold to financial investors. The ACCP hence initiated a contract system, adapted to suit stakeholders for efficient management of resources. The fair contract system was based on the benefits in using the common areas to satisfy all parties as informed by the stakeholder focus practice [70]. The visionary leadership of the management team of the ACCP created value for relevant stakeholders based on “common interests”, endorsed by the broader literature on sustainable enterprise (e.g., Avery, 2005 [99]; Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]).

*“By Conservation and Development, we want to develop the Samut Songkhram community to be sustainable allowing people to have a good quality of life. At the same time, the resources, wisdom, ecosystems will remain for the next generations to come. In terms of development and conservation, these must be carried out in parallel”.*

*Former project director of the ACCP*

For those who apply to be merchants in the area of the ACCP, the project will not charge expensive space rental fees, supported by the corporate sustainability practice of moderation [70]. The research team asked to see the rental receipts of the shops in the project and found that the rental price is about 80% cheaper than other places in the floating market. The key consideration criterion is that the merchants have to be local people, selling locally made products or offering a service to the local villagers. In addition, merchants in the project areas are encouraged to help each other and produce products and services that contribute to conservation, development, and sustainable self-reliance. This principle

is also informed by the corporate sustainability practice of knowledge sharing in which knowledge sharing among stakeholders is promoted [70].

In addition, the ACCP focuses on the cause of sustainable conservation of the identity of the riverside community. Therefore, the policy of development mainly focuses on space allocations. The ACCP utilized its space to organize various activities with the concept of local culture and wisdom preservation such as a traditional Thai music band and traditional local cuisine and desserts that will benefit the community. This finding is supported by the sufficiency thinking model [87] in which the quadruple bottom line performance is suggested by including the cultural dimension with the prevailing triple bottom line concept [40].

*“The project has come to help the community in many ways. . . . visit Amphawa is learning a cultural conservation, not only in terms of shopping and eating then leaving . . . The project is to be a center of learning. It is the center of learning in the community”.*

*ACCP volunteer*

Consistent with the sustainable enterprise literature (e.g., Avery, 2005 [99]; Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]; Ketprapakorn, 2019 [114]; Suriyankietkaew, 2019 [115]), the ACCP recognizes the importance of employees in a concrete way by continuously retaining and developing employees even in times of crisis. In addition to this, there is also an emphasis on the development of a management team from within the organization. Both the promotion from within the organization and the high staff retention rate are crucial to maintaining a strongly sustainable organizational culture [2].

The ACCP then focuses on the importance of selecting employees from people in the community as well as being a source that helps train employees in various specific skills. The internal training of organization-specific skills and knowledge is found to be important in sustainable enterprises, particularly in a time of disruption. The organization-specific skills and knowledge help in timely responses to an abrupt change [111]. Therefore, the ACCP is not only a workplace but also a school and an internship place for villagers. The concept of recruitment was reflected in the interviews as follows:

*“Sometimes, being a new graduate from a village it is very competitive to get a job without experience. Although we know that it is normal that when they have had experience they will quit the job, we want them to learn team roles and responsibility, in order, to prepare them to be good community citizens. Here we work for society and community”.*

*Project director of the Chaipattana Foundation*

At the ACCP, the management team believes that human resources are one of the most valuable assets, a core principle of sustainable enterprises around the world (e.g., Avery, 2005 [99]; Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]; Ketprapakorn, 2019 [114]). Tacit knowledge can be turned into financial value. In order to do so, value creation needs to be built from human resource development. Therefore, the ACCP encourages and trains farmers to be trainers, so that they can change their roles to that of community philosopher. These philosophers are the main speakers and trainers for those who come to learn and visit the ACCP.

In line with the practice of sustainable enterprises of all sizes around the world (e.g., Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]; Ketprapakorn, 2019 [114]), the ACCP focuses on retraining and developing employees from within, for example, providing opportunities for self-development and preparation for career advancement, e.g., promotion to management positions. Also consistent with the broader sustainable enterprise literature is the teamwork approach at the ACCP (e.g., Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]; Ketprapakorn, 2019 [114]) since teamwork often leads to innovative ideas, required for corporate sustainability [70].

*“The ACCP consists of many working teams. We need to train the new young blood for the sake of a sustainable community in the long term. Should the foundation withdraw from the community, the ACCP will have a strong and capable local management team”.*

*Project director of the Chaipattana Foundation*

At the ACCP, creating value through developing people's potential is key. The ACCP creates organizational culture that believes in human value and development of individual competencies, providing the opportunity for people to learn and undertake challenging tasks.

The cultural development practice at the ACCP above is endorsed by the sustainable enterprise literature that found a strong organizational culture operating in sustainable enterprises around the world (e.g., Avery, 2005 [99]; Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]; Ketprapakorn, 2019 [114]; Suriyankietkaew, 2019 [115]). Baumgartner (2009) [116] and Kantabutra and Ketprapakorn (2020) [66] also assert that a strong organizational culture is a precondition for the development of sustainable enterprise. A strong organizational culture is also critical in ensuring organizational resilience in difficult times [117].

### 5.1.2. Stakeholder Focus

Sustainable enterprises view themselves as an entity operating within society (Avery, 2005 [99]; Ketprapakorn, 2019 [114]). If the society cannot exist, neither can they. This is the reason they focus on a wide range of stakeholders including future generations. Like other sustainable enterprises, the ACCP places high priority on the protection of all stakeholders, particularly for the future of the community and retaining those society and community benefits even if this incurs additional cost.

The population residents are mainly the elderly and children. Restoring the local life of a floating market provided the creation of business opportunities for local villagers. The ACCP focuses on a "geosociety" and the common interests of the community. This particular approach of the ACCP is consistent with the corporate sustainability practice of geosocial development [70], indicating that any development must take into consideration the surrounding society, culture, environment, and economy. The data triangulation with the minutes of the monthly meeting of the subdistrict administrative organization committee as well as the interview with the former mayor of the district confirmed the geosociety focus of the ACCP. The former mayor shared his point of view that:

*"... ACCP, they charged a very low rental rate and reserved it solely for local villagers. ... the project prohibited the resale of the rental business areas to others. With this fresh opportunity, our younger generation started coming back home and doing business with new ideas".*

*Former mayor of Amphawa Subdistrict Municipality*

Adopting the corporate sustainability practice of moderation [70], the ACCP is willing to pay more to generate income while maintaining local culture and products, which is also consistent with the philosophy of sufficiency economy that promotes local wisdoms [118]. One of the main activities of the ACCP is the natural coconut sugar stove. The traditional process has been replaced by an industrial process that may consume less time but product quality and the safety of the process are reduced. The ACCP supported and encouraged villagers to return to the making of authentic coconut sugar, which is beneficial and safer for both the villagers and consumers. To motivate villagers, the project then purchased village produce at a higher price than the market. This was an effective strategy as it prompted some villagers return to the use of the local authentic processes. In addition, the project promoted the use of local natural packaging. This helped preserve the traditional occupation of villagers and the production of packages from local plants. Even though this led to higher cost, the ACCP strongly believed this short-term loss would eventually lead to long-term profit (Figure 2).

Core to the sufficiency thinking model is to preserve and develop the cultural capital [87]. The ACCP promotes the cultivation of the young generation to love and preserve the locality. One of the key activities of the ACCP is called the little tour guide program. The ACCP invited children in the community to participate in the program. ACCP volunteers joined the program as mentors, helping develop children's potential to communicate in foreign languages such as English and French, and also improve their presentation skills.

The program was a success in building the confidence of children. This created a sense of pride in them, and they feel proud of being community hosts. Data triangulation with the voice of the visitors reveals the success of the program. The visitors appreciated this initiative of the ACCP.

*“Our little tour guide did a big thing. They are not only the representatives of their hometown, but also the representatives of the country . . . They not only learned about their origins, but also about how to grow up as good citizens”.*

*Mentor of the little tour guide program*



**Figure 2.** The traditional coconut sugar: a forgotten art.

Involving community children is very important to the local culture. Only if the children appreciate their culture and identity will the local community identity be preserved and continued in years to come.

*“I joined the little tour guide program because I wanted to learn something new about the culture and the history of the community . . . ”*

*A girl, who joined a little tour guide program*

Efforts of the ACCP in jointly preserving the identity of local arts and culture through “social landscape” conservation and development always adhere to the principle of participation of many parties, especially people in the community. The ACCP plays an important role as a co-driver in learning that will truly be “beneficial to the public”.

*“Amphawa people are very proud that our children can preserve the local art”.*

*A visitor to ACCP Facebook*

This stakeholder engagement practice at the ACCP is also endorsed by a recent study on a much larger, over a hundred years old, industrial conglomerate, named the Siam Cement Group (SCG), in Thailand where stakeholder engagement is used not only to develop local communities but also to instill its corporate virtuous values among its participating communities [119]. The stakeholder engagement practice at the ACCP is also found in a sustainable social healthcare enterprise in Thailand [14] where a social vision is espoused organizationally to bring about the delivery of endocrine care services both in Thailand and abroad.

### 5.1.3. Sharing

A hallmark of the theory of corporate sustainability [70] is knowledge sharing among stakeholders, including competitors, which frequently leads to innovation. The ACCP considers itself as a knowledge organization, sharing and dissimilating knowledge. Like other farmers, agricultural products often encounter the problem of low and fluctuating pricing. This causes farmers to use modern methods that can produce large quantities without much concern for environmental hazards and food safety for end consumers. The



ACCP therefore encourages farmers who still have traditional folk wisdom, combined with modern engineering techniques and knowledge. After organizing and recording local wisdom, by trial and error success was achieved. Sharing and dissimilating knowledge not only bring a sense of pride to farmers but also instruction in new techniques from visitors or ideas for product line extension. Although the ACCP operates the business by selling agricultural products produced by staff in the projects, it also supports the local community by offering a low fee for community consignment products. The ACCP also keeps conducting R&D and develops its own innovation capabilities through cooperation with its partners who are well known as innovating companies, such as the Siam Cement Group (SCG) [119].

*“We work and learn from our partner then transfer knowledge to community . . . we take leading role for R&D in a simple way . . . the community began to follow . . . ”*

*Former project director of ACCP*

The sharing practice at the ACCP is endorsed by the broader corporate sustainability literature. According to an Asian sustainable leadership model [120], knowledge sharing is required for a sustainable corporation, since it improves corporate innovation. Internally, knowledge sharing helps corporations to identify best practices, and promotes new ideas and organizational learning. At times, corporations need revolutionary thinking from corporate members and stakeholders to innovate products and services. Innovation is achieved when a corporation executes its strategies that integrate sustainability within them to align economic, environmental, and social value for future generations [99]. The sharing practice is also underlined by the dynamic capabilities theory [121–123]. The dynamic capabilities theory asserts that sustainable corporations develop and renew their external and internal knowhow through knowledge sharing within themselves, between corporations, and with external stakeholders to keep them competitively sustainable. They continue to renew their competencies as the external environment changes, concurrently developing their organizational resilience capacity [117]. Through this way, they can continue to ensure business continuity and enhance profitability, while improving the society and environment.

#### 5.1.4. Resilience Development

Consistent with the resilience development practice of sustainable enterprises, particularly in Asia [114], the ACCP has learned from the past to prevent future risks to achieving sustainability. To prevent risks and create a sustainable community-based management of tourism, the ACCP set up a non-competition policy, with the businesses of the ACCP as different from local merchants. The ACCP attempted to promote an eco-friendly product and share knowledge with local farmers. At the ACCP retail shop, they helped support knowledge on product development and feedback on eco-friendly packaging among local farmers to be different. This system prevented local farmers producing the same products or copying each other's product and ending up with cutthroat prices to enable the sale of products. The ACCP took the role of premarket examiner, providing feedback and ideas in terms of product quality, product packaging, and design.

The practice at ACCP above is underlined by the organizational theory of resilience where organizational buffering capacity needs to be developed [117]. It is also directly in line with the “resilience” or “self-immunity” principle of the sufficiency economy philosophy [118]. The organizational buffering capacity is fundamental to organizational resilience as it immunizes the organization from external shocks.

Consistent with other sufficiency economy businesses [118], the ACCP manages risks by having an in-depth understanding of the product, market, and the business prior to making an investment decision. The ACCP adopted risk management through various strategies. First, the ACCP has a wide range of products. During a field visit, the research team examined the product list which presented the record of new products and delisted products. This is consistent with the interview result that ACCP attempted to have

more product categories which helped mitigate the effect of price competition. Second, the ACCP applied market development strategies by looking for new target groups and new geographic markets. However, investment decisions were based on solid market information.

*“... Our ACCP operational decisions were based on how we are able to manage the outputs. We always learn from previous problems and mistakes...”*

ACCP staff 1

In addition, in selecting products to sell in community stores at the ACCP, the staff helped by playing a coaching role to help farmers develop products to meet the target market in order to reduce risk and increase the opportunity to sell the product for profit.

*“... Unlike a commercialized channel, we accept low volume products. From trial and error, farmers can minimize the risk from high investment and at the same time minimize our risk as a distributor”.*

ACCP staff 2

The resilience development practice at the ACCP is endorsed by the broader literature on organizational resilience. Conceptually, organizational resilience is a path-dependent, latent set of capabilities that organizations develop by noticing and correcting for maladaptive tendencies to help them to encounter unexpected, challenging circumstances [124–126] such as crises, shocks, and disruptions of routines as well as ongoing risks. It comes from the capabilities of quickly processing and responding to environmental signals [125] and developing flexible resources that can be applied to a wide range of interchangeable alternatives [127]. With resilience outcomes of continuous improvements, low volatility, and strong viability, the resilience development practice helps enterprises to endure over the long term and through crises.

All the sustainable social enterprise practices above lead to the following outcomes of brand equity and socioeconomic and environmental performance, to be discussed next.

## 5.2. Sustainable Social Enterprise Outcomes

We present and discuss the outcomes from adopting the sustainable social enterprise practices at the ACCP in this section: brand equity, socioeconomic and environmental performance.

### 5.2.1. Brand Equity

Given that the ACCP does not have a systematic approach to measure brand equity, we present some evidence to indicate that the ACCP has accumulated brand equity over time. First, the ACCP, as an outsider to the Amphawa community, has successfully mingled and received a welcome from the local community. This is very significant, particularly at the beginning of its business operation. If the local community does not appreciate SE practices, there is a high risk that the community will not patronize the SE and that the SE will not be able to survive. A transparent and accountable policy along with action leads to brand trust [128]. When the local community trusts in the ACCP, they can influence the community stakeholders to engage in the project activities. Thus, the ACCP can move forward by the following steps, demonstrated by the findings below.

*“... We used to suffered as outsiders took advantage of our community assets. After we observed the ACCP. They are sincere. ... They help recreate Amphawa brand as an eco-friendly tourism which is very good for our community. The people here and nearby believe that the ACCP is a trustable brand. ...”*

Villager 1

From the results of the study, it was found that the actions of the community really reflect its clear policy on doing things for the benefit of the community, by commitment and serving unmet needs. The local community trusts in the ACCP brand. Local farmers from

other communities in the province by positive word of mouth came to join the activities that the ACCP arranged.

*"I did not live close to the ACCP but not that far. I do not know business much. . . . The ACCP helps me with product development. . . . I am glad that I am be the part of the good reputation brand the ACCP".*

Merchant 1

Moreover, by using natural local products, the brand name of the ACCP has an excellent reputation. Tourists and visitors trust in the brand and are willing to support the ACCP in other products as well as those that local farmers produce and sell in the ACCP market.

*"I and my friend have a strong intention to come to Amphawa to visit the ACCP to buy coconut sugar. . . . Everyone trust the coconut sugar here as well we want to support the project".*

Tourist 1

Nowadays, the ACCP is considered as a famous learning center for those who are interested in SEP. The ACCP has a strong brand recognition as a sustainable SE applying SEP. Visitors from various regions come to the ACCP to learn how the SE turned a donated slum area into a business area, operating for local farmers. Accumulated knowledge of the ACCP is now turning out to be a product, capable of producing sources of income that help to sustain ACCP activities.

*"I am also a farmer from another province producing sugar from Palmyra palm. Generally, others may think that we are competitors unlike the ACCP. They are very open-minded . . . I also will tell others to come, visit and learn how to work and live like a sustainable farmer from here".*

Visitor 1

*"I am a medical doctor. The hospital arranged the trip to visit here to learn on sustainability SE. We are interested in the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and practice at our hospital. . . . The ACCP and the foundation have very good reputations. As for medical personnel, we can learn from their challenges and successes then apply to suit with our way of working".*

Visitor 2

*"In the Philippines also, we do not have floating market, but we also attempt to promote the sustainable tourist. It is very impressive coming to learn from the ACCP. Being the non-community members then came to community development is not that easy. I am a government officer. I know how hard it is. . . . for SE, if you win their heart. If one asks me, where should they visit to learn on sustainable SE, I strongly recommend here, the ACCP".*

Visitor 3

The findings on brand equity at the ACCP are consistent with the broader literature. In particular, the theory of corporate sustainability [70], asserts that, in today's fierce market, competitiveness through tangible, functional benefits is no longer sustainable. It suggests that a corporate brand, considered as functional and emotional benefits, is pivotal in ensuring corporate sustainability. As a matter of fact, any corporate activities benefitting stakeholders contribute to improving corporate sustainability since stakeholders in society will support and protect the reputation of a virtuous enterprise [129,130]. Focusing on marketing and branding in the ACCP strategic direction helps raise the reputation as suggested by Kholiavko et al. [131].

#### 5.2.2. Socioeconomic Performance

Based on the SEP principle of starting from within, the ACCP was oriented towards the people. The employment opportunities offered to the younger generation, aging

groups, and women helped those groups earn income to support their families. Based on the interview results, all local staff confirmed strongly that they have a very happy and healthy work–life balance. Young graduates at the ACCP obtained better positions when they changed their jobs to the brand endorsed by the ACCP. The elderly and women in the Amphawa district become active community citizens, with higher self-esteem in the knowledge that they can contribute their knowledge to their society.

The ACCP increased opportunity, thus some of the younger generation took the chance to return home and start their own businesses, reviving the local economy. They value work–life balance. From multiple visits, more younger generation merchants helped increase wealth throughout the local supply chain. More agricultural products as raw materials have higher sales volumes whereby logistical costs are eliminated. Farmers also obtained a greater profit margin as compared to previously. When the merchants were confident with the fixed rental rate, they could better manage their business. When they felt secure with their investment, they then began to invest in new product development. More products that added value were developed. This action reflects the importance of common interests as a center and encourages perseverance in development of new products from merchants participating in the ACCP. When there were successful cases of local businesses, the new generation decided not to go to work in the city. Moreover, the greater the success of the operation of the farmers' businesses, the lower the likelihood that the new generation would sell their land. The problems of land price manipulation were minimized. When the working generation stayed in the community, this helped to reduce the family age gap.

*"I visit my family here every weekend because of my mom' health. I want to live here but it is impossible because of no job her. I rent a place at ACCP with low fees... I finally ended up resigning from the famous Japanese company and living here. I and my mom have a happy and healthy life. I even encouraged my friend to come back here".*

Merchant 1

*"We train our students not to lose our culture identity. The ACCP provides an opportunity, open a stage for children to show their talents. . . . The children were very excited and happy . . . Parents are so proud of them. . . . It is a matter of how we sustainably preserve our local culture".*

Music teacher from community school

Other evidence for socioeconomic performance is the project to extract sugar from coconuts. Not only did the ACCP preserve the traditional method of producing coconut sugar, which was about to be a forgotten art, but the sugar produced by this traditional method also achieves higher prices and is marketed by the ACCP. This, in turn, helps create added value to the sugar supply chain.

*"The ACCP promotes and encourages the use of woonden skewer and Krathong. I am too old to get another job. I want to stay home. Now I have a stable job. Besides, I sell it at a better price than before. I do not know how to thank you the ACCP".*

Villager 4

The learning center is considered a new rising star product that generates revenue for the ACCP. Knowledge is a commodity, and it was found that when traditional wisdom is brought back to the local community before loss, it preserves this knowledge for the new generation that wants to learn. These local trainers in turn help increase household family incomes for the community. However, the most important thing is the sense of pride from the development of the project.

*"Although I am an ordinary villager, people here encourage me to be a speaker. .I also earn money from being a speaker, I can pay off my family' debts. No more debt now.. I intend to save this speaker fee for my two children to study in the university level".*

Staff 1

*“I come here to demonstrate how to weave hats from coconut leaves... If I die, knowledge will disappear. I want to teach it to the younger generation to preserve our local knowledge ... ”*

*Volunteer 1*

The ACCP has a “systematic study of the area” to understand the problems that arise and “solve problems from small points”, “step by step”, making the project proceed in an orderly manner. The administration prevents problems that had occurred with the tourism management of Amphawa in the past.

The results reflect in the operation of the Chan-cha-la shop (Figure 3). At the shop, the ACCP sells only drinks and snacks to avoid competing with the local merchants at the floating market. Now, tourists buy food to eat from the floating merchants. Additionally, this shop has become a place for training children with practical knowledge of operating a coffee shop, while enjoying some part-time income. This brings mutual benefits to both the ACCP and the local merchants. Currently, revenue from the shop is the major source of income (approximately 75%) for the ACCP.



**Figure 3.** The Chan-cha-la shop.

The ACCP’s successful performance led to the opening of a new area for renting food kiosks. Now, the younger generation who had left the community to work in the city are seeing market opportunities and many have returned home to help continue the family business. This return of the younger generation also helped bring in new ideas for local product development and innovation. The rental fees contribute approximately 10% to the ACCP. It has taken the ACCP eight years to become self-funded and financially free from the rehabilitation investment. The floating market and rental kiosk spaces became so successful that trade-offs between financial revenue and the social environment started to threaten cultural domains.

### 5.2.3. Environmental Performance

Promoting local products, grown within the Amphawa district, helps support not only the local economy but also helps to preserve the environment. Generally, farmers must sell their products in other areas, which of course needs transportation, but the more distant the buyers, the greater the fuel consumption. This then releases more harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

*“ ... Using local ingredients helps in many ways, for example to reduce production cost and transportation costs. I used to work in the automotive industry. Transportation*



*consumes energy and is a part that create air pollution. I can save money and safe the world at the same time”.*

*Merchant 1*

In order to create a market opportunity for an eco-friendly local product, many local farmers tend to keep their products organic and preservative and pesticide free. This is not only advantageous for the health of consumers, but is beneficial for the environment as well. By not using pesticides and other harmful toxins, farmers are improving air quality and preventing water and air pollution. In addition, with awareness of the economic value of local crops, they continue growing and harvesting the local plants of the area, such as Amphawa lychees. These offer different tastes from lychees grown in other areas of the country; this also benefits the environment in terms of biodiversity.

*“... We are very concerned on environemnat protection ... When the ACCP was set up, there were no fireflies in our areas. Last two year, we found fireflies in our areas. Having fireflies is one of the indicators of good environment, good water, and good air ... ”*

*Project director of the Chaipattana Foundation*

Previously, Amphawa has suffered from the huge waste from tourists that impacted the eco-environment and threatened to change the way of living. Making preservation of the culture the top priority, the ACCP, local merchants, and local community decided to open the floating market only at weekends. This is to ensure better management of waste and the environment, as well as balancing tradition, local lifestyles, and agricultural activities needed to create and maintain a self-sustaining community. This is in line with the study of Tand et al. that found that local communities in ASEAN countries rely on effective natural management [132] while balancing between economic and social values for sustainable growth [133].

*“... the ACCP initiated the use of natural and environmentally friendly packaging. ... We received good cooperation with various shops in our area ... Tourists are also happy with eco-friendly packaging. I hope to create a good environment for future generations”.*

*Manager*

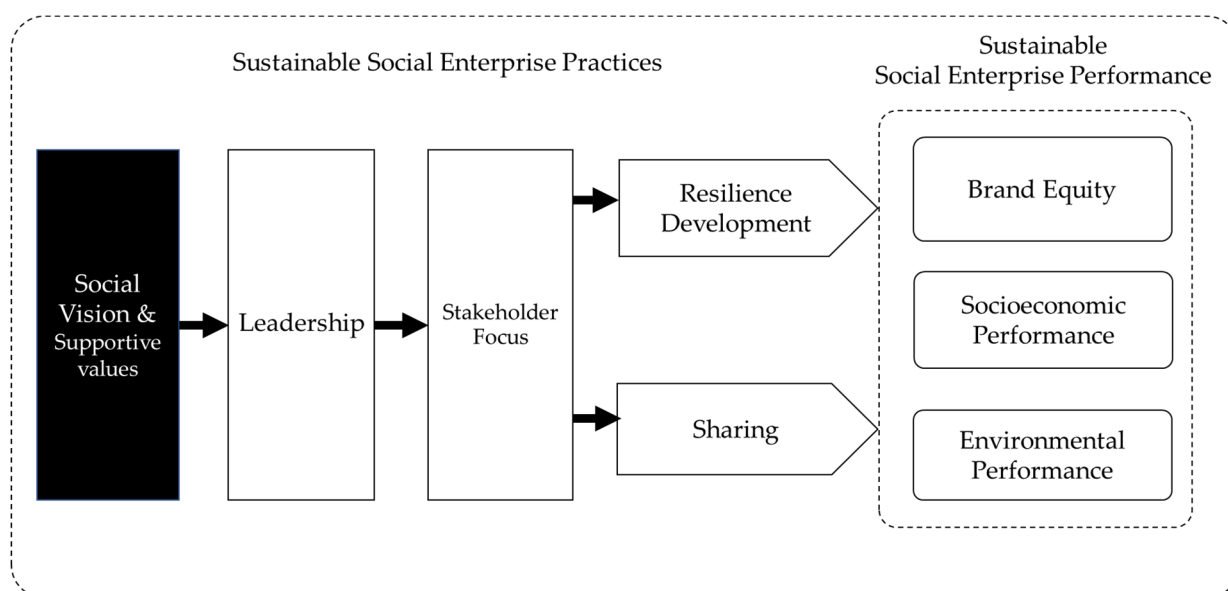
## 6. Refined Sustainable Social Enterprise Model

Given the phenomenological paradigm of research we adopted, our findings have revealed some significant insights into the sustainable social enterprise phenomenon, which helps to enhance our understanding about sustainable social enterprise. First, it is evident that a shared social vision has driven the practices at the ACCP since many of the interviewees have pointed out the role of the social vision and its associated values in guiding their work. In fact, the social vision has emerged as a core code from our analysis. Secondly, the findings also indicate that it is indeed the leadership that is fundamentally pivotal to the success of the ACCP's operation. The leadership practice is a prerequisite to the resilience development, sharing, and stakeholder focus practices. Among the three subsequent practices, our findings reveal that the stakeholder focus practice appears to influence the practices of resilience development and sharing.

The role of the shared social vision and its associated values, as fundamental elements of organizational culture, and leadership in ensuring organizational sustainability has been endorsed by the corporate sustainability literature. Among others, Baumgartner (2009) [116] has suggested that organizational culture and leadership are preconditions for the development of a sustainable corporation. The theory of corporate sustainability [70] has similarly pointed out that a shared organizational vision and leadership practices are critical to ascertaining corporate sustainability. In terms of the stakeholder focus practice, the literature on sustainable leadership (e.g., Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011 [69]) also endorses our conclusion drawn from the findings that the stakeholder focus practice drives the other practices of resilience development and sharing. According to the sustainable leadership model by Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) [69], the stakeholder approach is a foundation

practice leading to high-level practices, key drivers, and performance outcomes. The various roles of social vision, and the leadership and stakeholder focus practices, are also endorsed by the sustainability vision theory [134] that asserts that a sustainability vision must be one containing imagery about satisfying a wide range of stakeholders.

Therefore, based upon the present study's findings and the original model by Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2019) [8], the refined model of sustainable social enterprise, as our significant contribution to the field, is derived as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Refined Sustainable Social Enterprise Model.

According to the refined model, a sustainable social enterprise starts with a social vision. It is this social vision that guides the practice of leadership and its espoused practices of stakeholder focus, resilience development and sharing. We postulate that it is these sustainable social enterprise practices in this order that bring about brand equity, socioeconomic performance, and environmental performance.

Since social entrepreneurship is the process through which social entrepreneurs develop social enterprises [27] and a hallmark of social enterprise is entrepreneurship or innovation [135], our refined model here is essentially the process of social entrepreneurship.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Clearly, the present study is not without limitations. Although the case study contributes to improving our understanding about the sustainable social enterprise phenomenon, it is difficult to generalize the findings from one case study to other settings. Future research may conduct a quantitative study in a large variety of settings to confirm the causal relationships between the leadership, resilience development, sharing, and stakeholder focus practices and the brand equity, socioeconomic, and environmental performance, the findings of which will help researchers and practitioners to learn about the possible universal approach to develop a sustainable social enterprise.

In addition, given that the case of the ACCP is a community enterprise with no systematic approach to measure its sustainability performance, we only have some interview data to support our conclusions about brand equity, socioeconomic, and environmental performance. In conducting a similar study in the future, statistical data must be collected to support future conclusions.

## 8. Theoretical Contributions and Implications

Given that theory building is “the purposeful process or recurring cycle by which coherent descriptions, explanations, and representations of observed or experienced phenomena are generated, verified, and refined” [136], effective theory building should bring about two types of knowledge [137]: (a) the knowledge that can explain and predict; (b) the knowledge that helps to enhance our understanding about what something means and how it works. Our refined sustainable social enterprise model offers some ideas about both outcome and process knowledge. Essentially, it provides some insights about social enterprise components leading to sustainability and how the components interact to bring about sustainable social enterprise performance outputs and outcomes. Both scholars and practitioners can adopt/adapt this model to guide their future theory building.

In building theory on sustainable social enterprise, theorists can challenge the model or progress with it to advance the current body of theoretical knowledge in this specific area. As the theory continues to be refined, researchers will have a whole theory to understand, explain, and predict events, actions, and/or surrounding circumstances concerning the sustainable social enterprise phenomenon.

## 9. Managerial Implications

This present study offers some important practical implications for social entrepreneurs who want to develop a sustainable social enterprise, shown step by step in Figure 5 below.

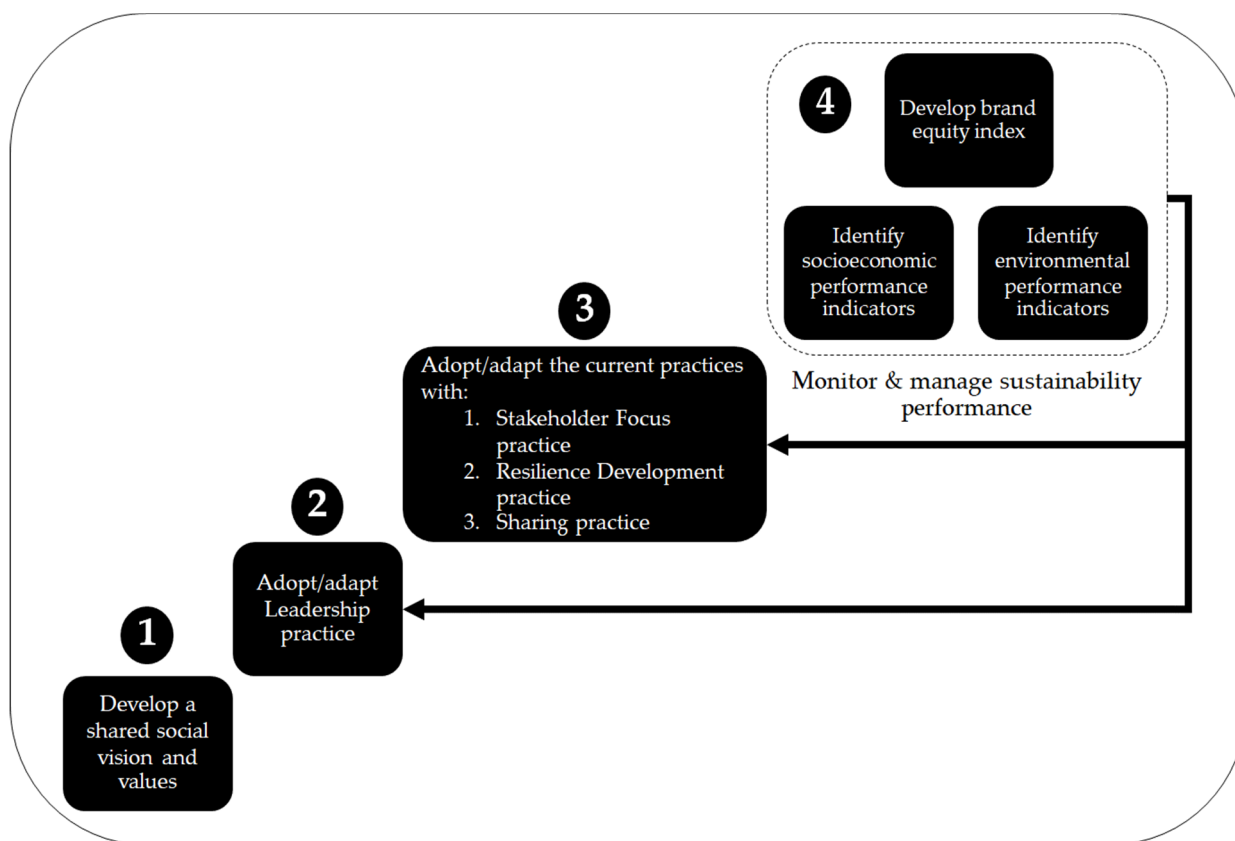


Figure 5. Sustainable Social Enterprise Development process.

Social entrepreneurs who want to ensure sustainability of their enterprise should start by developing a social vision. A social vision should be developed in a collaborative way involving organizational members and stakeholders while the focus of the vision should be on satisfying a whole range of stakeholders. To realize the vision, organizational values are needed to guide organizational decision making while members work toward the

vision. Some suggested values derived from the present study are social responsibility, environmental responsibility, and innovation. Social entrepreneurs may adopt these values.

After the social vision and its associated values are identified, social entrepreneurs need to develop business practices. For those entrepreneurs who have started their social venture, they can adapt the leadership, stakeholder focus, resilience development, and sharing practices to their own operational context. For those who are going to start a social venture, they can adopt the four practices. Among the four practices, they should start to adopt or adapt the leadership practice first, followed by the stakeholder focus, resilience development, and sharing practices, in this order.

Finally, social entrepreneurs should set up a sustainability performance system by identifying socioeconomic and environmental performance indicators, and developing a brand equity index. They should continue to monitor and manage these sustainability performance indicators and index, while possibly adjusting the practices along the way to ensure the prospect of social enterprise sustainability. To strengthen the entire system, once meeting or exceeding the target indicators and/or index scores, the social entrepreneurs should communicate each individual achievement among organizational members [14,134].

## 10. Conclusions

Given the scant knowledge on sustainable social enterprise in the literature, the present study's objective is to explore a sustainable social enterprise model in Thailand. Adopting the case study approach, we use a social enterprise, the development of which is informed by the sufficiency economy philosophy, as the case sample for our exploration. Informed by the identified sustainable social enterprise model, a series of open-ended, semi-structured interviews was conducted with 95 stakeholder informants, ranging from the management team, staff, community people, and visitors to customers. We adopt the working analytical framework to analyze the collected data. Findings indicate that the practices at the case sample are largely consistent with the model with a few differences that inform the development of our refined sustainable social enterprise model as the core contribution of the present study. Limitations, future research directions, theoretical contributions and implications, and managerial implications have also been discussed.

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