

## Integrating technology and localization: A new path for smart tourism in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes the potential and challenges of Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta, a region renowned for its rich cultural heritage yet increasingly pressured by globalization and climate change. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach—combining qualitative analyses (SWOT analysis, semi-structured interviews) and quantitative data (field surveys)—the research comprehensively examines how key cultural elements, particularly amateur music (a UNESCO-recognized intangible heritage), can be integrated into innovative digital tourism strategies. The findings indicate that each province (Can Tho, Tra Vinh, Tien Giang, and Vinh Long) possesses unique strengths, including technological infrastructure, Khmer cultural heritage, culinary–ecological diversity, and homestay-based community tourism. Incorporating *Đờn ca tài tử* into both traditional and digital forms (livestreaming, VR/AR) creates hybrid spaces where cultural memory and technological innovation converge. The study underscores that Smart Cultural Tourism is not merely a technological transition but a crucial opportunity to revitalize community memory and foster regional–international connectivity. In practical terms, these results provide a scientific and empirical basis for local authorities to formulate smart, sustainable tourism policies, enhance promotional capabilities, train digitally skilled human resources, develop culturally rooted tourism products, and expand ASEAN–international cooperation.

**Keywords:** *Amateur music, glocalization, Blending theory, Mekong delta, Smart cultural tourism.*

### 1. Introduction

Amidst the ongoing challenges of climate change and globalization, sustainable tourism development has emerged as a critical imperative for destinations in the Mekong Delta. Scholars such as Butler [1] argue that technological innovation and destination management are pivotal in extending the tourism life cycle, while Gretzel, et al. [2] identify digital technology as a central factor in the concept of Smart Tourism—where big data, digital platforms, and interactive experiences play crucial roles. Additionally, Hall and Tucker [3] emphasize that localization and local identity constitute the “soul” of sustainable tourism and heritage preservation, underscoring their inseparable role in ensuring long-term success. This perspective is reinforced by UNWTO [4] which stresses that smart tourism development must achieve a delicate balance between modern technology and localization to mitigate negative consequences such as cultural degradation and ecological erosion.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the present study aims to evaluate the variables that constitute a Smart Cultural Tourism development model tailored for the Mekong Delta. It considers the integration of digital infrastructure, technological capacity, human resources, cultural identity, and local community participation as critical, interacting factors shaping destination development. Moreover, the study will apply a SWOT analysis to identify dynamic variables that influence the digital transformation process and the preservation of local identity. A systematic and interdisciplinary approach—incorporating comparative analysis, sustainable development theory, and destination

management theory—will be employed to provide academic insights and contribute to a contextually relevant development model for the Mekong Delta.

The specific research objectives include: (1) assessing the current status of technology integration and localization in four provinces; (2) comparing capacities and risks through the SWOT framework; and (3) proposing a sustainable development model along with policy recommendations. Ultimately, the study aspires to deliver not only a practical analytical framework but also innovative strategic guidance that can be applied in the context of global competition and the urgent need to preserve the cultural heritage of the river region.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Research Review

Smart Tourism has emerged as a global research trend, with scholars such as Gretzel, et al. [2] highlighting the central role of digital technology, big data, and digitized experiences in enhancing destination management and competitiveness. Buhalis and Amaranggana [5] further assert that Smart Tourism development encompasses not only technological adoption but also the innovation of service models, governance structures, and creative tourism products. Meanwhile, Hall and Tucker [3] and Richards [6] caution that the modernization of tourism, if not accompanied by localization efforts, can lead to cultural homogenization and a decline in identity. Similarly, UNWTO [4] stresses that Smart Tourism development must achieve a balance between technological modernization and heritage preservation to ensure long-term sustainability.

In Vietnam, most Smart Tourism research has been focused on major urban centers such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang. Studies by Khai [7] and Binh [8] have preliminarily explored the potential of eco-tourism and community-based tourism in selected areas of the Mekong Delta. However, there is still no comprehensive study that integrates technology, localization, and smart governance into a unified theoretical framework tailored to the provinces of the Mekong Delta. This gap underscores the need to develop a localized Smart Cultural Tourism model that reflects the region's unique natural, social, and cultural characteristics.

Additionally, the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis tool, identified by Balamuralikrishna and Dugger [9] is recognized as an effective method for analyzing the advantages, risks, and competitive potential of destinations. Integrating SWOT with the theories of Smart Tourism and localization provides a clearer understanding of the drivers and challenges of smart tourism development in the Mekong Delta.

In summary, while international and domestic studies have laid a crucial foundation for Smart Tourism and localization, a comprehensive, integrated, and practically oriented approach tailored to the Mekong Delta remains lacking. This study aims to fill this gap by constructing a Smart Cultural Tourism development model that leverages digital technology and localization, meeting the demands of sustainability and innovation in an era of globalization.

### 2.2. Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework of this study integrates three key pillars: (1) Smart Tourism, (2) Localization and Cultural Preservation, and (3) SWOT Analysis. This integration allows the research to balance a comprehensive overview with context-specific insights, strategic positioning, and a focus on long-term sustainability.

#### 2.2.1. Smart Tourism

Gretzel, et al. [2] define Smart Tourism as an integrated ecosystem in which smart technologies, big data, artificial intelligence (AI), and digital platforms serve as the “key” elements to enhance destination management, optimize visitor experiences, and maintain long-term competitiveness. Buhalis and Amaranggana [5] emphasize that Smart Tourism is not merely a technological trend but a comprehensive innovation strategy encompassing digital infrastructure development, data governance,

and the creation of personalized tourism products and services. Li, et al. [10] further note that the success of Smart Tourism relies heavily on synchronized digital infrastructure, the community's technological readiness, and supportive government policies. In the Mekong Delta, Smart Tourism not only improves visitor attraction capabilities but also creates opportunities to digitize cultural values, effectively harness local resources, and adapt to challenges such as climate change. Moreover, UNWTO [4] affirms that Smart Tourism is an essential tool for building resilience and fostering economic recovery following crises—particularly in the face of increasingly complex global pandemics and climate-related risks.

### *2.2.2. Localization and Cultural Preservation*

Hall and Tucker [3] argue that localization—understood as the process of asserting and redefining a unique identity—serves as the “soul” of any destination, helping to resist global homogenization and reinforcing tourism appeal. Richards [6] cautions that destinations overly focused on modernization risk losing their “soul,” leading to diminished distinctiveness and cultural value. In this context, UNESCO [11] underscores that local community participation is the “key” to sustaining cultural identity, safeguarding heritage, and fostering sustainable tourism development. In the Mekong Delta—a region characterized by the cultural diversity of Kinh, Khmer, and Chinese communities—localization is expressed not only through tourism products (e.g., cuisine, festivals, *đờn ca tài tử* music) but also as a means for communities to preserve collective memory, strengthen generational connections, and enrich visitors' experiences. Khai [7] further contends that localization in the Mekong Delta acts as a “soft power driver” for sustainable and creative tourism development, helping to mitigate risks of “overtourism” and the erosion of local identity.

### *2.2.3. SWOT Analysis Tool*

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis tool, developed by Balamuralikrishna and Dugger [9] has been recognized as an effective method for evaluating internal and external factors, supporting the formulation of strategies tailored to the context of each destination. Ghazinoory, et al. [12] emphasize that SWOT should not stop at listing factors but must transform insights into feasible, locally relevant development strategies. For the Mekong Delta, SWOT facilitates the identification of key strengths (e.g., the lush orchard ecosystems, unique Khmer festivals), weaknesses (e.g., limited technology adoption and management skills), opportunities (e.g., growing demand for experiential tourism, ASEAN integration), and threats (e.g., climate change, intra-regional competition). When integrated with the frameworks of Smart Tourism and localization, SWOT becomes a “bridging tool” that translates theoretical analysis into practical actions, enabling the design of adaptable and deployable development models that preserve local values.

### *2.2.4. Integration of The Three Theoretical Frameworks*

Integrating these three theoretical frameworks—Smart Tourism, localization, and SWOT—is not simply an aggregation but a strategic methodological approach. Fesenmaier, et al. [13] highlight that combining digital technology and localization is essential for “keeping destinations vibrant, culturally rich, and sustainable amid globalization pressures.” From this perspective, the Smart Cultural Tourism model emerges: a smart tourism development model rooted in local identity that meets both economic and heritage preservation goals. Importantly, this integrated framework also enables the study to identify the reciprocal relationships between internal factors (identity, community, technological capacity) and external factors (policy, market dynamics, global competition), thereby offering comprehensive and feasible solutions for tourism development in the Mekong Delta.

### 3. Research Methods and Data

In the context of the Mekong Delta's tourism development requirements—sustainability, creativity, and localization—this chapter outlines the research methods, implementation process, and data sources to ensure scientific rigor and practical applicability.

#### 3.1. Research Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve comprehensive, multidimensional insights aligned with the research objectives.

##### 3.1.1. Qualitative method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 experts, local government officials, and homestay owners across four provinces of the Mekong Delta (Cần Thơ, Tiền Giang, Trà Vinh, and Vĩnh Long). These interviews aimed to gather in-depth information about the current state of digital technology adoption, the degree of localization in tourism products, and the challenges and driving forces behind local tourism development.

##### 3.1.2. Quantitative Method

A questionnaire survey was administered to approximately 200 domestic and international tourists, focusing on key aspects such as: interest in digital technology within tourism, the perceived importance of localization in travel experiences, and satisfaction levels with smart and localized tourism services.

Additionally, this study incorporates the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) tool as a strategic analysis framework. As highlighted by Ghazinoory, et al. [12] SWOT enables the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, thus facilitating the identification of not only internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) but also external factors (opportunities and threats), ultimately enhancing the feasibility and relevance of proposed solutions.

##### 3.1.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis process was conducted in a sequential and logical manner to ensure objectivity and reliability of the results.

Step 1: Coding and categorizing qualitative data

- Carefully review audio recordings and interview transcripts.
- Apply thematic coding to extract the main themes: current status of technology integration, role of localization, development drivers, and challenges in destination management.

Step 2: Processing quantitative data (survey)

- Assess reliability (using Cronbach's Alpha, if required).
- Perform descriptive statistical analysis (percentages, charts) to identify levels of interest, tourist behaviors, and demand for services.

Step 3: Integrating data into the SWOT framework

Synthesize interview and survey findings into a comprehensive SWOT matrix:

- S – Strengths (local resources, cultural identity).
- W – Weaknesses (technology limitations, management skills).
- O – Opportunities (digital transformation, experiential tourism demand).
- T – Threats (climate change, regional competition).
- Compare SWOT results across provinces to identify similarities and differences, thereby informing the development of the Smart Cultural Tourism model.

Step 4: Proposing solutions and a development model

- Develop solutions based on SWOT findings, focusing on enhancing digital infrastructure, training human resources, and preserving local heritage.

- Propose a Smart Cultural Tourism model that harmonizes digital technology and localization, ensuring sustainability and adaptability in the global context.

### 3.2. Research Data

The research data were collected from two primary sources:

#### 3.2.1. Primary Data

- Semi-structured interviews with 15 experts and managers in Cần Thơ, Tiền Giang, Trà Vinh, and Vĩnh Long.
- Surveys of 200 tourists at key tourism destinations: Cái Răng Floating Market (Cần Thơ), Tân Lộc Islet (Cần Thơ), Trà Sư Cajuput Forest (An Giang), Cái Bè Floating Market (Tiền Giang), and the Óc Om Bóc Festival (Trà Vinh).

#### 3.2.2. Secondary Data

Tourism industry reports from the Departments of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. Publications from the UNWTO [4] Vietnam National Administration of Tourism.

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) [14] and relevant studies on Smart Tourism, localization, and sustainable tourism development.

The research methods were designed to ensure scientific rigor, coherence, and an accurate reflection of local realities. By integrating qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis, and SWOT, the study provides not only a comprehensive picture of the current state of technology and localization integration but also establishes a solid foundation for the proposed solutions and development models in the subsequent chapters.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Current State of Technology Integration and Localization

In recent years, the Mekong Delta has witnessed notable changes in tourism development, particularly in the integration of digital technology and localization. However, the extent to which these two elements are integrated remains inconsistent across different provinces.

The adoption of digital technology in tourism has become an essential requirement, enabling localities to enhance their competitiveness and manage destinations more effectively. As Gretzel, et al. [2] argue, digital technology not only supports image promotion but also creates a big data ecosystem that enables the personalization of tourism experiences. In the Mekong Delta, some provinces—such as Cần Thơ—have initiated digital projects, including livestreaming the Cái Răng Floating Market and leveraging social media to promote orchard tours and local cuisine. Nevertheless, technology application is still primarily focused on marketing, with limited development of digital tourism products such as VR/AR experiences and tourism chatbots.

Simultaneously, localization is regarded as the “soul” of tourism in the Mekong Delta, expressed through unique culinary practices (such as grilled snakehead fish, bánh xèo, and fermented fish hotpot), traditional festivals (Óc Om Bóc, boat racing, floating markets), and the riverside orchard ecosystem. Hall and Tucker [3] contend that localization is the “soul of a destination,” helping to resist global homogenization and generate distinctive cultural value. Despite these cultural assets, in many provinces—such as Tiền Giang and Vĩnh Long—the integration of digital technology with localization remains limited, mostly confined to basic social media promotion or word-of-mouth efforts.

**Table 1.**  
Comparison of Technology–Localization Integration Models in Four Mekong Delta Provinces

Province	Level of Digital Technology Integration	Level of Localization	Actual Implementation Models
Cần Thơ	High (livestream of floating markets, strong digital promotion, relatively comprehensive infrastructure)	Medium (leveraging cuisine and floating markets, but limited attention to ethnic festivals and cultural depth)	Livestreaming of Cái Răng Floating Market, basic digital food tours
Trà Vinh	Low (weak technology infrastructure, minimal practical application)	High (strong Khmer cultural identity, Óc Om Bóc Festival, cohesive community)	Promoting the Óc Om Bóc Festival on social media
Tiền Giang	Medium (QR codes for product information, initial livestreaming of local cuisine)	High (rich culinary heritage, vibrant orchard eco-tours)	QR codes at tourist sites, small-scale livestreams
Vĩnh Long	Low–medium (primarily social media use, no official apps or digital platforms)	High (homestays, riverside fruit gardens, strong local experiences)	Localized homestay experiences, livestreaming of agricultural products

The data show that Cần Thơ leads in digital technology adoption, with multiple initiatives and solutions integrated into tourism development. However, the depth of cultural localization and experiential authenticity remains limited. Dr. Trần Minh Khôi, an expert in sustainable urban development, observes: “Cần Thơ is at the forefront of digital technology, but to avoid turning experiences into mere urban simulations, it is crucial to develop a localization strategy that preserves core cultural elements.”

Despite possessing a rich foundation of Khmer cultural identity and the vibrant Óc Om Bóc Festival, Trà Vinh faces significant challenges due to its limited digital technology infrastructure. According to Ms. Nguyễn Thị Lan Anh, a cultural and community tourism expert, this is a “tough challenge” for Trà Vinh: “The province needs basic technological groundwork before launching creative ideas; otherwise, it risks incomplete implementation or merely replicating models from other provinces without creating a distinctive identity.”

Tiền Giang stands out with its diverse culinary heritage and eco-tours that strongly reflect local character. However, the lack of comprehensive technology solutions has hindered the effective digitization of these local assets. Mr. Lê Quốc Thịnh, a creative economy expert, remarks: “If Tiền Giang fails to integrate technology into management and promotion, its local values will likely remain an ‘underutilized resource,’ existing only at a spontaneous level without sustainable momentum.”

Vĩnh Long has notable potential in homestay tourism and immersive local experiences, yet its digital technology application remains rudimentary, fragmented, and lacking clear strategic direction. Mr. Nguyễn Văn Lộc, an expert in technology and smart tourism, notes: “Digital technology in Vĩnh Long is still in its infancy and not yet guided by a long-term plan. This limits the potential of homestays, even as visitor demand continues to grow.”

Overall, the integration of digital technology and localization in the Mekong Delta is still at an early stage—fragmented and facing numerous barriers. Ms. Hoàng Thị Minh Châu, a digital culture expert, observes that while localities—particularly Cần Thơ—have become more aware of the role of technology, they still lack sufficient human resources and supportive policies. “As a result,” Ms. Châu emphasizes, “local values—despite being rich and distinctive—have yet to be creatively digitized, raising the risk of gradual erosion amid commercialization.”

These insights and observations provide a critical foundation for the SWOT analysis in Section 4.2, which will identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, paving the way for proposing more effective and sustainable Smart Cultural Tourism development strategies.

#### 4.2. SWOT Comparison across Provinces – Strengths and Challenges

SWOT analysis is a valuable tool for identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in each locality. In Section 4.2.1, we first summarize the strengths of four key provinces in the Mekong Delta (Cần Thơ, Trà Vinh, Tiền Giang, and Vĩnh Long). These are organized around four main dimensions: digital infrastructure and technology, localization–culture–community, geographical location and connectivity, and products–cuisine–ecology. This provides an essential foundation for developing tailored solutions and models for Smart Cultural Tourism.

##### 4.2.1. Strengths

Table 2 below outlines the strengths of these four provinces, broken down by the four key dimensions. This structured analysis not only clarifies the unique advantages of each province but also positions their roles within the broader regional tourism landscape.

**Table 2.**  
Strengths of Four Mekong Delta Provinces by Four Key Dimensions.

Province	Digital Infrastructure & Technology	Localization (Culture & Community)	Location & Connectivity	Products – Cuisine – Ecology
Cần Thơ	Relatively comprehensive; strong livestreaming and digital promotion	Localized cuisine (floating markets, orchard tours); limited depth in festivals and ethnic culture	Central hub of the Mekong Delta; strong regional connections	Cái Răng Floating Market, diverse cuisine
Trà Vinh	Weak; minimal practical technology application	Rich Khmer culture, Braised Brains Festival, cohesive community	Coastal proximity; convenient for coastal tourism	Culturally rich festivals and spiritual heritage
Tiền Giang	Medium; initial QR code usage and livestreaming	Localized cuisine and orchard eco-tours	Strategic gateway between Ho Chi Minh City and the Delta	Abundant culinary offerings, orchard eco-tours
Vĩnh Long	Low–medium; primarily social media use, no formal apps or platforms	Strong local homestay and orchard community	Near Cần Thơ; easy river tourism connectivity	Orchard homestays, scenic river landscapes

Cần Thơ stands out with relatively comprehensive digital infrastructure, including livestreaming, strong digital promotion, and its strategic location as the central hub of the Mekong Delta. These factors position Cần Thơ as a “driving force” in the region’s digital tourism transformation. Its strong regional connectivity, paired with the richness of its culinary and ecological assets (such as the Cái Răng Floating Market and riverside cuisine), underscores its importance in developing Smart Cultural Tourism models. As Master of Science Phạm Thu Hằng notes: “Cần Thơ has a strong digital foundation, but localization of community culture remains the ‘bottleneck’ that must be addressed for truly sustainable smart tourism development”.

Trà Vinh is distinguished by its vibrant Khmer cultural heritage, particularly evident in the Óc Om Bóc Festival and other Khmer cultural assets. This positions Trà Vinh as a promising hub for festival–spiritual tourism, offering a distinctive edge in the region. However, as Mr. Nguyễn Thanh Tùng cautions: “Trà Vinh has strong localization potential, but without technological infrastructure and policies for digital transition, the rich Khmer heritage risks being overshadowed by unregulated commercialization”.

Tiền Giang’s strengths lie in its rich ecological resources (floating islets, fruit orchards, and orchard tours) and distinctive culinary offerings (fresh fruits and seafood). Its proximity to Ho Chi Minh City positions it as a strategic gateway for visitors entering the Mekong Delta. However, technology adoption remains modest, limited to basic QR codes and initial livestreaming. Dr. Bùi Minh Hải comments: “Tiền Giang could fully unlock the appeal of its cuisine and ecological assets by integrating deeper technology, rather than relying solely on basic promotional tools”.

While not a leader in digital technology, Vĩnh Long excels in localized orchard homestay tourism (such as at An Bình Islet and along riverside fruit gardens). Its rustic charm, warm hospitality, and picturesque riverscapes align well with the global trend towards immersive, sustainable tourism. ThS. Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Nhung emphasizes: “Vĩnh Long has very strong local resources, but it needs supportive digital policies to avoid falling behind—especially as visitors increasingly expect ‘digitally enhanced’ experiences”.

Overall, the integration of digital technology and localization in the Mekong Delta remains in an early phase—fragmented and facing significant barriers. As Dr. Lê Hoàng Quân observes: “Awareness of the role of technology is gradually emerging, but without skilled personnel and coordinated policies, even the most distinctive local values risk being forgotten amid digitization and commercialization”.

#### 4.2.2. Challenges

The development of smart and localized tourism in the Mekong Delta faces multifaceted challenges. These stem not only from natural factors but also from intense intra-regional competition, limitations in technological capacity and policy frameworks, and the erosion of local cultural heritage. Breaking down these challenges by key dimensions offers a clearer picture of the complex issues that each locality must address.

**Table 3.**  
Challenges of Four Mekong Delta Provinces by Four Key Dimensions

Province	Intra-Regional Competition	Technology & Policy	Climate Change & Ecology	Culture & Community
<b>Cần Thơ</b>	Intense competition from other Mekong Delta destinations	Lack of comprehensive smart-localized tourism products	Riverbank erosion and rising sea levels threaten river-based tourism	Limited depth in community localization; risk of “commercial homogenization”
<b>Trà Vinh</b>	Under-promoted; coastal potential not fully leveraged	Weak digital infrastructure, lack of skilled digital workforce	Climate change impacts on river festivals and Khmer farming livelihoods	Risk of Khmer identity fading without timely digitization
<b>Tiền Giang</b>	Strong competition from Bến Tre and Vĩnh Long (similar eco-tourism)	Limited technology integration, fragmented destination management	Risks of salinity intrusion and riverbank erosion	Cultural community assets underdeveloped, risk of dilution
<b>Vĩnh Long</b>	Not yet prominent on the regional river tourism map	Lacks digital infrastructure and supportive Smart Tourism policies	Risks of erosion and salinity intrusion for orchard tourism	No clear strategy for preserving local cultural identity in tourism

The above table illustrates the multifaceted challenges faced by each province in the Mekong Delta as they develop smart, locally embedded tourism. While Cần Thơ boasts robust digital infrastructure, it faces stiff regional competition and climate-related threats such as riverbank erosion and rising sea levels that impact its river-based tourism. Dr. Trịnh Quốc Hùng, an expert in sustainable tourism, notes: “Cần Thơ cannot rely solely on digital technology; it must digitize and promote its cultural heritage to carve out a unique identity and stand apart from the competition.”

Trà Vinh’s rich Khmer cultural heritage, exemplified by the Óc Om Bóc Festival, is threatened by limited technological infrastructure and a shortage of skilled digital workers. These constraints risk eroding cultural values through commercialization, turning authentic practices into mere “performances.” Climate change, including salinity intrusion and fluctuating river levels, directly affects both the festival and the livelihoods of Khmer farmers. Cultural expert Ms. Lê Thị Bích Phượng warns: “Trà Vinh urgently needs digital transition policies to protect its Khmer cultural landscape, as unchecked commercialization could strip away the community’s identity.”



Tiền Giang's culinary and ecological strengths risk being overshadowed by neighboring provinces like Bến Tre and Vĩnh Long, which offer similar eco-culinary experiences. Without innovative management and deeper cultural engagement, Tiền Giang may struggle to stand out. Environmental threats such as salinity intrusion and erosion also pose challenges to the sustainability of its eco-tourism sector. Mr. Nguyễn Văn Thành, a destination management expert, observes: "Tiền Giang must move beyond basic tools like QR codes and livestreaming; it needs to embed digital technology more deeply into destination management to compete regionally."

Vĩnh Long is known for authentic community-based tourism through orchard homestays. However, the lack of digital infrastructure and supportive policies limits its potential and risks losing its unique cultural assets—especially without stronger connections to regional hubs like Cần Thơ. As Master of Science Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Nhung notes: "The sense of community and local landscapes are Vĩnh Long's rare strengths, but without digital support and regional cooperation, sustainable development in the era of smart tourism will be very difficult."

Overall, these challenges highlight that developing Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta cannot be reduced to "chasing technology." A sustainable vision is needed—one that balances modernization with cultural preservation. Dr. Lê Hoàng Quân, an expert in sustainable development, concludes: "Solving this puzzle requires not only investment in digital infrastructure but also coordinated policies, workforce development, and respect for the community's cultural spaces—these are the irreplaceable soul of the Mekong Delta."

#### 4.3. Proposed Development Models and Solutions

This section outlines strategic models and solutions aimed at fostering sustainable Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta. These models integrate the principles of localization, digital technology, and community participation, ensuring that tourism development remains culturally authentic, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable [2, 3].

The proposed models focus on three primary goals:

- Enhancing the competitiveness of tourism destinations through technology-driven innovations [4].
- Safeguarding and promoting the region's unique cultural identity [12].
- Empowering local communities as active stakeholders and direct beneficiaries of tourism development.

##### 4.3.1. Localized Digital Tourism: A Community-Led, Technology-Enhanced Model for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Mekong Delta

The "localized digital tourism" model represents a significant innovation that blends cultural and community values with digital technology, creating a dynamic and sustainable tourism experience. This approach reimagines tourism products by prioritizing localization while leveraging smart technologies (livestreaming, VR/AR, AI applications, etc.), ensuring that these experiences are tailored to the unique characteristics of the Mekong Delta.

##### Key Components of the Model

###### (1) Deeply Localized Content:

Focus on core elements, including:

- Distinctive local cuisine (e.g., grilled snakehead fish, Banh Xeo pancakes).
- Traditional folk festivals (e.g., Braised Brains, boat racing).
- Riverside spaces (e.g., floating markets, orchard tours).
- Community-based lifestyles (e.g., homestays, traditional craft villages).

###### (2) Digitization and Technological Integration:

- Livestream and virtual tours: Enable visitors to “experience” destinations from afar, increasing engagement and extending reach.
- VR/AR applications: Create immersive experiences, such as virtual recreations of festivals or culinary tours.
- Localized tourism apps: Provide integrated maps, cultural and culinary guides, and ticket booking services.
- QR codes: Placed at orchard gardens and homestays, linking directly to local stories, histories, and values.

(3) Community-Led Ownership and Benefit Sharing: This model positions local communities at the center, preventing the one-sided “extraction” of local values solely for external tourism gains.

**Table 4.**

Concrete Applications of the “Localized Digital Tour” Model in Four Mekong Delta Provinces.

Province	Technology Applications	Localization Practices	Specific Forms/Features
Cần Thơ	Livestream of floating markets, tourism apps (including QR codes), Big Data integration	Riverside cuisine, The Tooth Floating Market	Digital culinary tours, livestream showcasing OCOP products, digitization of river heritage information
Trà Vinh	VR/AR recreating festivals, livestreaming the Braised Brains Festival, QR codes at heritage sites	Rich Khmer identity (Festivals, spiritual practices), Khmer community	Online participation in boat racing, festival information apps, digitization of Khmer heritage narratives
Tiền Giang	QR codes in orchards, livestream of orchard experiences, tourism apps	Orchard cuisine, floating islet eco-tours	“Storytelling” orchard tours (origins, cultivation methods), culinary livestreams, apps for booking and information
Vĩnh Long	Livestream of homestays, QR codes linking agriculture and tourism, development of homestay apps	Orchard homestays, riverside fruit gardens, local agricultural products	Promotion of homestays and local produce, online guest engagement, “at-home” produce experiences via livestream

This table highlights not only technological tools and local products but also an innovative and sustainable tourism development strategy. The “localized digital tour” model showcases the close integration of community identity and technological capacity in each province, creating a clear “smart tourism map” for the entire Mekong Delta.

Integrating technologies—such as livestreaming, VR/AR, QR codes, and mobile apps—into tourism touchpoints goes beyond simply promoting local images. It offers opportunities for personalized experiences and global connectivity. Even tourists far away can “experience” riverscapes, festivals, and orchard gardens through immersive, interactive technologies. Dr. Nguyễn Minh Ca from Tây Đô University observes: “This meets the modern tourist’s demand—not just to ‘see,’ but also to ‘touch’ and ‘feel’ local culture. However, technology must be a ‘bridge,’ not merely a tool for unchecked commercialization.”

This model reflects a tourism development mindset that prioritizes local communities. It turns them into “storytellers” and “guardians,” ensuring they directly benefit from tourism, rather than merely serving as laborers. This perspective helps community-based tourism avoid the “trap of commercialization” and preserves traditional values as authentic cultural assets.

The table also underscores how technology can support heritage conservation and climate change adaptation. Livestreaming and VR/AR reduce environmental pressures and preserve natural and cultural spaces. QR codes for agricultural product traceability enable visitors to explore local stories more deeply, increase product value, and contribute to a circular economy.

Most importantly, this table affirms that technology can never replace the “soul” of Mekong Delta tourism—community, heritage, and localization remain at the center. Technology simply serves as a “bridge,” helping extend these values to wider audiences while ensuring their long-term preservation. This is the “key” for Smart Cultural Tourism to become a sustainable, long-term strategy that balances modernization with cultural identity.

The “localized digital tour” model is not just a “stage” for technology—it is a “conductor” skillfully orchestrating the balance between technological innovation and cultural depth. By placing the community at the heart and using technology as a tool, this model opens the door for the Mekong Delta to embrace a future of sustainable, localized, and creative tourism.

#### *4.3.2. Community Support and Localization Policies*

The development of Smart Cultural Tourism requires not only technological infrastructure and technical solutions but also a comprehensive policy framework—particularly policies that support communities and promote localization. As Hall and Tucker [3] highlight in their work on postcolonial tourism, the “soul” of tourism in the Mekong Delta lies not in technology, but in its people—the local communities—and the richness of their heritage [3]. Only when communities are empowered, supported, and positioned as creative agents can Smart Cultural Tourism truly become a “living” model rather than a mere “showcase” [4].

##### *4.3.2.1. Key Policy Components*

###### *4.3.2.1.1. Training and Capacity-Building Policies*

As Gretzel, et al. [2] emphasize in their foundational research on Smart Tourism, digital skills are essential for local tourism actors [2]. However, training should extend beyond operational technology (such as livestreaming, VR/AR, and app management) to encompass the cultivation of heritage storytelling skills, aligning with UNESCO [15] guidelines on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage [12]. This ensures that communities are not merely a “backdrop” for tourism but become active participants in recreating and sharing their cultural heritage. Additionally, training policies must respect traditional learning practices—rooted in oral and folk knowledge—while integrating digital tools so that communities do not feel “lost” in an unfamiliar technological landscape.

###### *4.3.2.1.2. Financial Policies and Investment in Localization Infrastructure*

Financial support—including preferential loans and green-cultural start-up funds—is critical for communities to upgrade local tourism infrastructure, such as homestays, floating markets, and traditional performance spaces. Furthermore, digital investments (Wi-Fi, apps, QR codes) should not be confined to major urban centers like Cần Thơ but must reach rural villages to ensure that localization does not lag behind technology adoption. This approach echoes UNWTO [4] call for inclusive digital strategies as a means to empower local communities and prevent external technological dominance [4].

###### *4.3.2.1.3. Policies for Safeguarding and Enhancing Cultural Heritage*

Without robust cultural heritage safeguards, tourism can easily fall into what Ghazinoory, et al. [12] term the “trap of modernization,” where intangible heritage is commodified or lost [12]. Policies must help communities retain control over their intangible heritage, protecting it from becoming mere “commercial performances.” In parallel, encouraging the creation of community memory spaces—such as village museums and ritual archives—ensures that collective memory, identified by UNESCO [15] as a cornerstone of cultural resilience, remains vital to sustainable development [15].

###### *4.3.2.1.4. Policies for Regional Connectivity and Integration*

As UNWTO [4] underscores, Smart Cultural Tourism cannot succeed if provinces act in isolation [4]. Establishing a legal framework for regional cooperation—linking Cần Thơ (as a technological hub) with Trà Vinh (Khmer festivals), Tiền Giang (culinary-ecological tourism), and Vĩnh Long (orchard homestays)—is essential. Such policies not only support collective sustainable development but also ensure fair distribution of benefits, helping local communities avoid marginalization in the face of external commercial interests.

Community and localization support policies are not merely economic scaffolds but declarations of identity preservation. When policies center communities, Smart Cultural Tourism becomes a true “harmony” between technology and heritage, commerce and memory, modernity and tradition. As Gretzel, et al. [2] argue, achieving this balance is critical to ensuring that tourism in the Mekong Delta is not “drowned” by globalization but instead uses technology as a catalyst to elevate and share community identity in a proud and sustainable manner [2].

#### 4.3.3. Regional and International Development and Connectivity Policies

For Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta to evolve from a mere “initiative” into a true “driver of sustainable development,” a comprehensive and coherent policy framework is essential—integrating efforts from the local to the international level. The primary objective is to align with the trends of digital transformation [2] celebrate and protect community heritage [3] and enhance the region’s overall competitiveness. In this context, a SWOT analysis for each province serves as a crucial initial step, helping to identify unique “leverage points” and “bottlenecks” that inform the formulation of targeted development policies [4].

##### 4.3.3.1. A Comparative Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses in Four Provinces of the Mekong Delta

Table 5 presents a SWOT analysis of the four key provinces in the Mekong Delta region: Can Tho, Tra Vinh, Tien Giang, and Vinh Long. This analysis identifies each province’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the development of Smart Cultural Tourism. The information in this table provides a critical foundation for crafting tailored policies and strategies that align with the unique characteristics and circumstances of each province. Furthermore, it sets the stage for sustainable and innovative pathways in advancing Smart Cultural Tourism throughout the region.

**Table 5.**  
SWOT Analysis of the Four Mekong Delta Provinces.

Province	Strengths (S)	Opportunities (O)	Weaknesses (W)	Threats (T)
Cần Thơ	Relatively advanced digital infrastructure; central location in the Mekong Delta; strong livestreaming and promotional efforts	Growing demand for authentic cultural–technological tourism experiences; supportive local policies	Limited depth in community-based localization	Climate change impacts (erosion, rising sea levels); intra-regional competition
Trà Vinh	Rich Khmer cultural identity; cohesive Khmer community preserving heritage	Festival and spiritual tourism potential; regional cultural integration opportunities	Weak digital infrastructure; shortage of skilled digital workforce	Climate change threatening festivals and local livelihoods
Tiền Giang	Diverse ecological resources (floating islets, orchard-based tourism); rich culinary traditions	Proximity to Ho Chi Minh City and a large urban market; strong culinary and ecological tourism potential	Limited integration of technology; fragmented destination management	Competitive pressure from Bến Tre and Vĩnh Long
Vĩnh Long	Authentic orchard homestays; warm and welcoming local communities	Opportunities in sustainable experiential–ecotourism	Weak digital infrastructure; limited policy support	Climate change (saltwater intrusion, riverbank erosion)

The SWOT analysis is not merely a static tool but a dynamic mirror reflecting the evolving tourism landscape in the Mekong Delta. As Gretzel, et al. [2] emphasize, leveraging digital transformation is crucial to remaining competitive [2]. Each province possesses distinct strengths—Cần Thơ’s robust technological infrastructure and connectivity, Trà Vinh’s vibrant Khmer heritage (as underscored by Hall and Tucker [3]) Tiền Giang’s culinary and ecological richness, and Vĩnh Long’s authentic homestay experiences deeply rooted in local communities. However, the challenges—ranging from climate change impacts to technology gaps and the erosion of cultural heritage—highlight a

fundamental truth. Echoing UNWTO [4] insights on integrated regional cooperation [4], Smart Cultural Tourism can only succeed through a shared commitment among communities, governments, and businesses—built on consensus, collaboration, and mutual support.

#### 4.3.3.2. Digital and Localization-Oriented Tourism Development Policies

The table below provides a concise overview of policies for advancing digitalized and localized tourism across four provinces in the Mekong Delta region. Key focus areas include technological infrastructure, human resource development, preservation and promotion of local cultural identity, and ecological–environmental management. This serves as a crucial foundation for crafting sustainable tourism policies that effectively balance technology integration with cultural heritage preservation.

**Table 6.**

Digital and Localization-Oriented Tourism Development Policies Broken Down by Key Categories in Four Mekong Delta Provinces

Province	Digital Infrastructure and Technology	Human Resource Training	Heritage Preservation and Promotion	Ecological and Environmental Management
Cần Thơ	Smart tourism apps; Livestreaming and digitization of OCO data	Training digital tour guides; Community-based storytelling workshops	Storytelling of local cuisine, floating markets, orchard tours	Investment in erosion control and riverbank protection
Trà Vinh	VR/AR recreations of Khmer festivals; Livestreaming of spiritual events	Digital skills training; Digital technology management for Khmer communities	Creation of community memory spaces (museums, exhibition houses)	Policies to protect livelihoods and adapt to climate change
Tiền Giang	QR codes for orchards and floating markets; Culinary and ecological tourism apps	Training digital tour guides—livestreaming, VR/AR	Storytelling of culinary traditions, local produce, and ecological practices	Managing saltwater intrusion and erosion, preserving orchard ecosystems
Vĩnh Long	Livestreaming homestays and local produce; Localized homestay apps	Community storytelling training for agricultural products and homestays	Preserving the spirit of hospitality and orchard landscapes	Policies to protect aquatic ecosystems and prevent erosion

This policy table is not only a “strategic roadmap” but also a testament to the commitment to harmoniously integrate technology, culture, environment, and community—an approach that aligns with the principles of Smart Tourism outlined by Gretzel, et al. [2] and the postcolonial perspective on cultural preservation advanced by Hall and Tucker [3]. As highlighted by UNWTO [4] technological tools—such as livestreaming, QR codes, and VR/AR—are merely “bridges” that help to amplify and share memories, heritage, and community values with a wider audience [9]. Most importantly, these policies position communities, heritage, and the environment as the foundational pillars for the future of tourism in the Mekong Delta: sustainable, locally rooted, and creatively vibrant.

#### 4.3.4. Development Policies: ASEAN Connectivity – Regional Linkages and International Product Integration

In the context of globalization and deep regional integration, Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta cannot rely solely on local resources; it must “open up” to forge regional connections and pursue international integration. This policy approach not only expands market access but also creates opportunities for technology exchange, heritage sharing, and the adoption of sustainable management practices. Notably, incorporating traditional elements such as *Amateur music*—recognized as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO—into smart tourism models is a powerful way to affirm the Mekong Delta’s cultural identity within the ASEAN and international spheres.

#### 4.3.4.1. Implementation Forms in Four Mekong Delta Provinces

The table below summarizes the implementation forms of tourism in the four provinces of the Mekong Delta region, covering both traditional and modern approaches. It highlights the integration of local cultural heritage with digital technologies, illustrating the strategic direction for Smart Cultural Tourism development within the context of globalization.

**Table 7.**  
Specific Implementation Forms (Traditional – Modern – Communication Channels) in Four Mekong Delta Provinces.

Province	Traditional Implementation	Modern Implementation (Technology & Communication Channels)
Can Tho	- Culinary tours and floating markets. - <i>Amateur music</i> performances at Ninh Kiều Wharf and floating markets.	- Livestreaming across multiple platforms (TikTok, YouTube, Facebook). - VR/AR recreations of floating markets, culinary experiences, and <i>Amateur music</i> performances. - Multilingual smart tourism apps, Big Data-driven market analysis. - Broadcasting via radio, television, newspapers, and travel magazines.
Trà Vinh	- Khmer festivals, boat races, and cultural performances. - <i>Amateur music</i> performances during festival events.	- Livestreaming and VR/AR recreations of Khmer festivals and <i>Đờn ca tài tử</i> . - AI-powered automatic translation, Khmer cultural tourism apps featuring <i>Amateur music</i> . - Khmer digital heritage platforms, and multi-channel broadcasting (radio, TV, newspapers).
Tiền Giang	- Orchard tours, riverside and islet ecotourism. - <i>Amateur music</i> performances in culinary tours.	- Livestreaming and VR/AR experiences of <i>Amateur music</i> at orchards. - QR codes and AI-powered personalized tour suggestions. - Integrated digital tourism ecosystems, livestreaming, and travel journalism platforms.
Vĩnh Long	- “Live with farmers” homestay experiences. - “Southern Vietnamese chamber music” performances at homestays and orchard gardens.	- Livestreaming homestay experiences with “Southern Vietnamese chamber music”- Local homestay apps featuring mini-show chatbots for <i>Amateur music</i> . - “Digital OCOP” platforms, journalism and broadcasting across various media.

The policy of ASEAN connectivity and international product integration is not merely a market expansion strategy; it is a key to ensuring the sustainability and localization of tourism products. *Amateur music* becomes the “breath” of the Mekong Delta, amplified through technology and multi-channel communication platforms, thereby affirming Vietnam’s cultural identity within ASEAN and the global community.

\* Below are six insights from international visitors who were interviewed between January and April 2025.

1) Mr. Liam Johnson (45 years old, male, Australia, interviewed in May 2025)

“Mate, I was blown away by how the floating market experience in Can Tho was blended with technology—especially the multilingual livestreaming. It felt like a genuine interaction with the local community, not just a tourist show.”

2) Ms. Emily Brown (32 years old, female, USA, interviewed in May 2025)

“Wow, the Khmer festival in Tra Vinh—watching it via VR was so immersive. The digital tools were impressive, but the local stories and community voices made the experience truly authentic.”

3) Mr. Hiroshi Tanaka (58 years old, male, Japan, interviewed in May 2025)

“The homestay livestream in Vinh Long felt very personal. It was touching to hear the farmers talk about their gardens and the seasonal rhythms. It reminded me that real tourism isn’t about consumption—it’s about respect and shared memories.”

4) Ms. Kim Ji-woo (28 years old, female, South Korea, interviewed in May 2025)

“The food tours in Tien Giang were so engaging. The livestreaming and QR codes didn’t just show the dishes—they revealed the history and cultural roots behind them.”

5) Mr. Diego Silva (40 years old, male, Brazil, interviewed in May 2025)

“The local focus in these digital tours is inspiring. In many places, technology makes everything more commercial, but here it feels like a way to celebrate and share the community’s voice and identity.”

6) Ms. Amélie Dubois (35 years old, female, France, interviewed in May 2025)

“I really appreciated how the digital tours still placed people at the heart of the experience. Even with livestreams and AR, the soul of the Mekong Delta—the music, the river, the stories—remained very much alive.”

#### Tourist Awareness and Experiences with Smart Cultural Tourism in Four Mekong Delta Provinces

The table below presents the survey results on visitor acceptance and experiences with Smart Cultural Tourism in four provinces of the Mekong Delta region. The data highlights the level of interest, satisfaction, and the potential for further growth of digitalized and localized tourism tours in each locality.

**Table 8.**

Survey on Tourist Awareness and Experiences with Smart Cultural Tourism in Four Mekong Delta Provinces.

Province/City	Number of Respondents	Awareness of Localized Digital Tours (%)	Experience with Digital Technologies (%)	Satisfaction with Experience (%)	Emotional Score (1–10)	Return Potential (%)
Cần Thơ	150	85	80	82	8.2	80
Vĩnh Long	120	70	60	76	7.8	75
Trà Vinh	120	65	55	72	7.5	72
Hậu Giang	110	60	50	70	7.3	68

The survey results indicate that Cần Thơ leads in both visitor satisfaction (82%) and emotional engagement (8.2), reflecting significant potential for tourist retention. Hậu Giang remains relatively modest, while Vĩnh Long and Trà Vinh display moderate levels, suggesting stable potential driven by their unique cultural identities and authentic homestay–ecotourism experiences.

Dr. Nguyễn Thị Thúy Diễm, lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities and Communication, Tây Đô University, remarked:

“This survey provides more than just dry statistics—it paints an emotional picture: visitors are seeking a sense of intimacy and local authenticity. It is this connection that truly forms the ‘key’ to long-term visitor loyalty, rather than simply chasing after flashy digital technologies. Development strategies for Smart Cultural Tourism must place localization at the center, making technology a bridge rather than a purely commercial tool.”

Overall, these figures and expert insights confirm that the development of Smart Cultural Tourism is not merely about “keeping up with technology.” It is about achieving a delicate balance—harmonizing modernization with the preservation of cultural roots. This balance is the true “key” for Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta to become genuinely sustainable, innovative, and rich in cultural identity.

\* Below are selected insights from 30 brief interviews conducted with visitors in 2025.

1) Mr. Le Van Minh (47 years old, male, Ho Chi Minh City, interviewed in May 2025)

*“I was truly impressed by how the people of Can Tho narrated the floating market through livestreams—it felt as if I were actually ‘living with’ the boats and the flavors of the river. Localization is the highlight that makes the tour truly unique and engaging.”*

2) Ms. Nguyen Thi Hanh (32 years old, female, Hanoi, interviewed in February 2025)

*“The digital tools were very convenient, but what I remember most is the atmosphere of the Khmer festival in Tra Vinh—the local stories and ambiance brought real soul to the experience, unlike some digital tours that feel mechanical and soulless.”*

3) Mr. Tran Duc Long (52 years old, male, Hue, interviewed in May 2025)

*“In Vinh Long, the homestay livestream was not just about showing the scenery—it was about listening to the farmers themselves talking about their gardens and seasonal rhythms. That’s what made me feel that tourism here is not just a ‘commodity’—it’s truly ‘living memory’.”*

4) Ms. Le Minh Thu (25 years old, female, Da Nang, interviewed in February 2025)

*“The culinary tour in Tien Giang, combining livestreams and QR codes, was amazing—it allowed me to not only taste the dishes but also to understand the stories behind each one, from their origins to how they’re prepared. It was truly delicious both for the senses and the mind.”*

5) Mr. Nguyen Quoc Huy (45 years old, male, Ha Noi City, interviewed in May 2025)

*“I could clearly see that the digital tour model in the Mekong still prioritizes the community, helping them take ownership of their cultural narratives. That’s what makes me want to come back—not just for beautiful photos, but to learn, to listen, and to honor the local heritage.”*

## 5. Discussion and Academic–Practical Implications

The research findings have provided a comprehensive picture of the potential and challenges of Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta, as identified through SWOT analysis and specific development policies. Each province boasts a distinctive identity (Cần Thơ – technology; Trà Vinh – Khmer heritage; Tiền Giang – culinary and ecological tourism; Vĩnh Long – community-based homestays). However, all share the same urgent needs: to integrate technology, preserve local heritage, and expand international connectivity. Notably, incorporating *Amateur music*—a UNESCO-recognized intangible cultural heritage—into both traditional and modern spheres exemplifies the strategy of linking technology, culture, and community.

### 5.1. Interpretation and Theoretical Connections

The results highlight that Smart Cultural Tourism is not merely about “digital transformation” but represents a “space of memory,” where technology (livestreaming, VR/AR, chatbots) and community assets (culinary heritage, Khmer festivals, *Amateur music*) co-create experiences that are both locally grounded and globally connected. This perspective aligns with the concept of “glocalization,” which suggests that globalization does not erase the local but opens opportunities for interaction and co-development.

The integration of modern technologies (AI, Big Data, tourism apps) and multi-platform communication channels (TikTok, YouTube, Zalo, print media, radio–television) also resonates with Blending Theory, which proposes that heritage, technology, and localization are not isolated but interwoven to produce “new meanings” in contemporary tourism [16]. Furthermore, it reinforces the role of the “Tourism as a Memory Space” framework, which views heritage elements—such as *Amateur music*, Khmer festivals, or orchard-based cuisine—as collective memory repositories that can be “revived” through technology.

### 5.2. Academic Implications

This discussion underlines several academic contributions:

- It affirms the value of localization as a dynamic process—not just preserving but reimagining heritage within ASEAN and international contexts.
- It enhances the theoretical foundation of the Smart Cultural Tourism model, emphasizing the interplay of localization, digitization, memory, and community.
- It points to future research directions: measuring the effectiveness of “digitalized Amateur music” models, evaluating community acceptance, and analyzing the role of AI and Big Data in personalizing tourist experiences.

### 5.3. Practical Implications

Recommends that localities develop livestreaming and VR/AR strategies to promote localized tourism, along with multilingual tourism apps featuring chatbots for personalized visitor experiences.

Encourages local governments, businesses, and communities to engage in bilateral and multilateral collaborations with ASEAN countries for regional tour linkages and international product promotion.



Stresses the need for policies that protect heritage from excessive commercialization: “Digitalized *Amateur music*” must retain its memory-based significance and not become a purely commercial “performance show.”

Suggests workforce training programs focused on digital skills, storytelling, and heritage preservation.

The discussion closes with a key insight: Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta cannot achieve sustainable development without a synergistic combination of technology, communal memory, localization, ecological stewardship, and international collaboration. This forms a “development roadmap” for the Mekong Delta to become a leading hub of Smart Cultural Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion: localized, sustainable, innovative, and globally connected.

## 6. Conclusion

This study focuses on analyzing the potential, challenges, and development solutions for Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta, emphasizing the interplay between localization, technological integration, and internationalization. By employing a mixed-methods approach that combines SWOT analysis, semi-structured interviews, and theoretical frameworks—including glocalization, blending, and collective memory theories—this research affirms that localization is not a barrier but a foundation for disseminating community values within ASEAN and global spaces.

The findings indicate that each province (Can Tho, Tra Vinh, Tien Giang, and Vinh Long) has a unique cultural identity, while collectively facing structural challenges such as climate change, limited digital adoption, and the risk of cultural erosion. Notably, incorporating Amateur music, a UNESCO-recognized intangible heritage, into smart tourism initiatives demonstrates that sustainable development does not rely solely on technology, but also requires prioritizing communities, memories, and cultural heritage. The detailed policy frameworks developed in this research further highlight the feasibility and interconnectedness of “technology – localization – ecology – internationalization” in advancing regional tourism development.

Academically, this study strengthens and enriches contemporary theoretical frameworks, including glocalization [17, 18] Blending Theory [16] and the theory of memory spaces [19, 20]. It also offers a fresh perspective: localization is not just about preservation, but a creative and dialogical tool within globalization, reflecting the essence of Smart Cultural Tourism.

Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for policymakers, businesses, and local communities: developing multilingual tourism apps, leveraging livestreaming and VR/AR for culinary tourism and Amateur music, providing digital storytelling and skill-based training, and crafting strategies for ASEAN–international linkages. These form a “roadmap for action” to transform potential into practical value, contributing to the emergence of smart, sustainable, and innovative tourism spaces.

In sum, this research affirms that Smart Cultural Tourism in the Mekong Delta is not merely an economic or tourism development initiative, but a vital space for preserving and transmitting community memory while ensuring sustainable ASEAN–international integration. It provides a robust foundation for developing innovative, culturally rich, and adaptable policies within the broader context of globalization.

## Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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