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Cultural revitalization for tourism development from an Indigenous perspective: the case of Ta Oi people, A Luoi District, Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam

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Introduction: Preserving and revitalizing culture to ensure authenticity for tourism development is a critical concern, especially as modern societal changes have eroded numerous traditional cultural values. Most local tourism development efforts primarily focus on meeting tourists' demands, often overlooking the perspectives of local communities who practice these unique cultures. This study, grounded in constructivist grounded theory, emphasizes the importance of conducting research from the local perspective to maintain authenticity in cultural preservation and to balance the interests of local people, tourists, and stakeholders.

Methods: The qualitative research method employed included fieldwork and focus group discussions conducted in A Luoi district, Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam. Fieldwork and participation observations allow to capture information about the research area as well as the experiences and behaviors of the local community. Furthermore, focus groups were conducted with 20 Ta Oi people, divided into two groups: the elderly (aged over 50) and the young people, to gather thorough and various information from their perspective on the meaning and the revitalization of local culture. The data were analyzed thematically.

Results: The findings reveal that the Ta Oi people have revitalized four key cultural practices through tourism, including Dzeng weaving, traditional landscapes and architecture, traditional cuisine, and traditional art performances, rituals, and beliefs. In addition, cultural revitalization is also mentioned through people's perception of the authority's role and the adjustment of cultural activities toward tourism development. These practices have been adapted to fit the modern context, demonstrating that cultural revitalization is not about restoring traditions in a static form but rather reconstructing them to meet evolving societal and economic demands.

Discussion: The research illustrates the adaptability and creativity of local people in preserving and revitalizing traditional culture, along with their enthusiasm and willingness to take action. Cultural preservation is not a top-down process; instead, it is co-created by the Indigenous community itself, shaped by differing viewpoints between elder and younger generations. This ensures that while cultural traditions may evolve, they are still rooted in the values and identity of the

Indigenous people, rendering the cultural revival process both sustainable and meaningful in the context of tourism. The research findings serve as a crucial foundation for guiding local government policies on cultural preservation and tourism development.

KEYWORDS

cultural revitalization, Indigenous tourism, Indigenous voices, authenticity, constructivist grounded theory, Ta Oi people, Thua Thien Hue province

1 Introduction

Tourism continues to grow rapidly, opening up numerous opportunities for cultural exploration. However, the allure of Indigenous communities, with their unique traditions and ways of life, has become a significant factor in attracting tourists, making cultural preservation a priority (Cornassel and Bryce, 2012; Jacob, 2013; Yeh et al., 2021). Despite the rich history, knowledge, and traditions of many Indigenous communities, the pressures of modernization have led to the marginalization, underestimation, and even disappearance of traditional cultural values (Esman, 1984; Richards, 2018; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019).

In this context, Indigenous tourism has emerged as a potential solution for preserving local traditions while fostering economic growth. Indigenous tourism emphasizes the distinct cultures and lifestyles of local communities (Kunasekaran et al., 2013), enabling the revival of both tangible and intangible heritage (Zhang and Lee, 2021). This includes architectural designs, handicrafts, sacred festivals, traditional music, and community performances (Etten, 2010; Kunasekaran et al., 2013; Dinh et al., 2023). However, with the viewpoint of Indigenous tourism development focusing more on tourists' requirements (Nielsen and Wilson, 2012), the process of cultural revitalization also faces issues about cultural appropriation and authenticity/integrity. The commercialization of Indigenous culture for mass tourism has altered its regeneration and employment, thereby losing its authenticity and intrinsic cultural value (Cohen, 1988, cited in Kunasekaran et al., 2013, p. 1601). Whether an Indigenous culture loses its authenticity due to revitalization for tourism development, this issue needs to be verified through many studies and is an ongoing debate.

This raises a crucial question related to the true guardians and practitioners of traditional culture, ensuring its authenticity in this modern context. Many experts assert that Indigenous communities play a central role in preserving and revitalizing their culture (Nielsen and Wilson, 2012; Diekmann and Smith, 2015; Weaver, 2015; Radel, 2018; Richards, 2018; Shrestha et al., 2025). These communities are not only protectors of their cultural heritage but also the stewards of their unique identities, expressing pride and reinforcing their people's daily existence.

Nevertheless, some studies suggest that government-led tourism programs, often top-down in nature, frequently dominate cultural preservation efforts. This top-down approach assumes that authorities hold superior knowledge regarding preservation, sometimes forgetting Indigenous voices (Korstanje, 2012; Pabel et al., 2017). In certain cases, Indigenous communities are

undervalued, leading to a sense of disempowerment. As a result, Indigenous people are often reduced to cultural symbols instead of being recognized as active participants in the preservation and promotion of their traditions (Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019; Yeh et al., 2021).

Vietnam is home to numerous Indigenous groups, and this study focuses on the Ta Oi people of A Luoi District, Thua Thien Hue Province, as a case study of Indigenous cultural preservation in the context of tourism development. By using constructivist grounded theory, the study focuses on the local perspective, recognizing that cultural revitalization is a dynamic and ongoing process. It is not about restoring traditions in a fixed, static form but about reconstructing them to align with contemporary needs. Second, the study highlights the importance of empowering Indigenous communities to lead in preserving, restoring, and promoting their cultural heritage for tourism development. Through a qualitative methodology that includes fieldwork, participant observation, and focus group discussions with Ta Oi community members, the research investigates how tourism development interacts with cultural preservation. The ultimate goal of this study is to provide insights that can inform both government policy and local initiatives, ensuring a balance between tourism growth and the authentic preservation of Indigenous culture.

2 Literature review

2.1 The authenticity of Indigenous cultural practices and its relationship to tourism

Historically, the term "Indigenous peoples" referred to a group of people who have occupied and lived in a certain territory for a long time but were later invaded, conquered, or colonized by white colonial powers (Weaver, 2016; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). In other words, they are individuals who dwelt and controlled territories before establishing current state boundaries (International Labour Organization, 1989) or before nation-states (Saarinen, 2013). Accordingly, Indigenous peoples are considered a distinct group, and their identity, way of life, culture, as well as physical and emotional wellbeing are all strongly correlated with the land they live on (The World Bank, 2023). They maintain various aspects of their traditional social, economic, cultural, and political institutions, thereby preserving the continuity of

their historical identity and practices (International Labour Organization, 1989).

Indigenous cultural identity is expressed through various elements, such as language, costumes, music, arts, cuisine, traditions, religious beliefs, and handicrafts (Sadiqi, 2007; Etten, 2010; Koç, 2012; Kunasekaran et al., 2013; Cappucci, 2016; Okech and Timothy, 2023). Tourism is widely recognized as an effective means of maintaining Indigenous cultural heritage, including both tangible and intangible (Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). As Indigenous cultural identity is highly valued and applied in tourism development, leading to the growing popularity of “Indigenous tourism.” According to Hinch and Butler (2007), “Indigenous tourism refers to tourism activities in which Indigenous people[s] are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction” (p. 5).

Research on Indigenous tourism frequently focuses on how tourism promotes local culture and emphasizes Indigenous peoples’ distinct and authentic lifestyles (Kunasekaran et al., 2013). Cultural identity is a sign of community belonging and contributes significantly to local tourism development (Weaver, 2015; World Tourism Organization, 2019). Kouri (2012) highlighted the importance of integrating culture into tourism strategies, noting that the combination of culture and tourism significantly contributes to economic development.

Tourism can positively impact local culture by introducing and promoting traditional values, encouraging conservation, and preserving unique customs (Liao et al., 2019; Charag et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2022). The locals also recognize the benefits offered by tourism in various ways. Development of the tourism industry facilitates interactions between hosts and diverse cultures, fosters the connection and exchange of expertise among stakeholders, and thus improves comprehension and broadens collaboration, opening up more opportunities for communication and learning about other cultures (Richards, 2000; Besculides et al., 2002; Salee et al., 2022). The act of presenting Indigenous culture to tourists, who are seen as outsiders, has further reinforced the acknowledgment of native people regarding their identities and roles, which enhances their sense of identity, pride, cohesion, and support (Besculides et al., 2002; Kunasekaran et al., 2013; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). However, tourism, in parallel, posed a considerable challenge to local culture, especially by accepting the commodification and commercialization of Indigenous culture (Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). The overwhelming demand for tourism products leads to the commodification of local cultural practices and traditions (Ryan and Aicken, 2005; Reisinger, 2009). This undoubtedly represents the solution to the erosion of local culture, as it reinforces traditional values and acknowledges local cultural identity, while cultural norms are expressed as physical products that attract tourists. The effort of the leader to provide distinctive and traditional products for tourism is also evident in cultural revitalization (Reisinger, 2009). Unfortunately, no traditional value can be transformed into tangible products without a loss of meaning; consequently, the vast commodification could lead to the degradation of local culture. This commodity creation may obscure underlying cultural values and keep categories similar or identical in meaning.

Moreover, cultural identity, in the process of adaptation to tourism development, has been transformed toward satisfying tourist’s expectations, resulting in changing traditional culture and posing a painful obstacle to cultural authenticity (Ryan and Aicken, 2005; Whitney-Squire, 2016; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). Cohen (1988, cited in Kunasekaran et al., 2013, p. 1601) said that “using Indigenous culture as a mass tourism product can ultimately cause the loss of authenticity, inherent cultural value and significance.” In other words, while tourism provides opportunities for Indigenous communities to acknowledge their traditional cultural values, it also exposes a challenge for them in preserving and maintaining the authenticity/integrity of their rich cultural heritage (Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019).

The question of authenticity has always been a controversial topic among scholars (Adams, 1997; Boz and Karakaş, 2017; Ardren, 2018; Boag et al., 2020). Nonetheless, a nation’s tradition does not represent the whole culture but symbolizes a manifestation of culture. According to Etten (2010), traditional culture has been established, practiced, and accumulated gradually throughout a process, and “nothing can be considered traditional without being deemed so by the present, but where present traditions cannot be wholly unrelated to the past” (p. 21). Therefore, the culture continues to adapt and develop based on distinct identities, aligning with contemporary trends that seek to benefit locals, including economic, social interaction, cultural integration, and political dimensions (Etten, 2010; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). With the root of nebulous cultural practices and the intricate integration of mixed cultures becoming increasingly prevalent, culture remains in the process of transforming, which needs to be considered and acknowledged. The authenticity in this context is seen as dependent on how Indigenous actors choose to show off their culture authentically from their point of view (Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019).

2.2 Indigenous cultural revitalization and the role of local community

Modernization, socio-cultural exchanges, and lifestyle changes have gradually eroded traditional cultural values in many Indigenous communities (Richards, 2018; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). Despite this, tourism has played a significant role in promoting reviving cultural values that were presumed to have disappeared. Esman’s (1984) study found that tourism revitalized Cajun festivals and traditional customs in Louisiana, which were diminishing due to rapid acculturation. The resurgence of arts for tourism has inspired Cajuns to become researchers as they reflect on the disappearing local features and subsequently introduce them to tourists. They acknowledge their unique culture and actively promote it, thus fostering a sense of pride and ensuring its preservation (Besculides et al., 2002). Similarly, the Meri community in Pulau Carey, Malaysia, has inspired younger generations to preserve and maintain three primary tourism products closely related to Mah Meri culture to serve tourists, including Mah Meri dance, wood carvings, and weavings. In particular, Mah Meri Dance was champion in the contest in 1977

and was performed in almost all cities in Malaysia, even on television stations. Mah Meri Dance is the pride of the Mari people, and they take great delight in continuing to preserve and represent it to global audiences through tourism (Kunasekaran et al., 2013).

However, cultural revitalization also faces issues of cultural appropriation and authenticity. Indigenous textile techniques originated from cotton cultivation and have now been transformed into pre-dyed industrial yarns instead of hand-dyed ones (Myriem, 2019). Artistic crafts influenced by tourist demand have been adapted with new symbols and materials, thus resulting in a distinctive art form different from traditional Indigenous styles (Besculides et al., 2002). Indigenous sacred rituals/festivals are replicated and modified into events or dances designed only for tourists (Schmider et al., 2024). The phenomenon occurs because the Indigenous tourism development perspective is more focused on the tourists' demands, who are non-Indigenous people, in creating products and services, rather than considering the perspective of the individuals who possess and engage with that culture (Nielsen and Wilson, 2012). Many scholars argue that Indigenous people play the most important role in the preservation and revitalization of their own culture (Nielsen and Wilson, 2012; Diekmann and Smith, 2015; Weaver, 2015; Radel, 2018; Richards, 2018; Zhang and Lee, 2021). Indigenous people's experiences, knowledge, perspectives, and interests must be regarded as the central subjects in developing epistemology, methodology, and research methods instead of perceiving them as purely objective participants (Radel, 2018). However, their contribution to cultural preservation and tourism growth is still undervalued. Indigenous peoples continue to find themselves in a position of "powerlessness," reflecting the complexity of issues related to identity, authenticity and commercialization of Indigenous cultural heritage (Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). This highlights the necessity of empowering the Indigenous peoples in preserving and restoring their culture, respecting their voices, and ensuring that benefits build up not only tourists and stakeholders but also, and most importantly, to the local people living.

3 Materials and methods

3.1 Research design and theoretical framework

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017), which allows for the co-construction of knowledge between researchers and participants. According to Charmaz (2017), constructivist grounded theory emphasizes the subjective nature of human experience and recognizes that both the researcher and participants contribute to developing meanings and interpretations. This approach is particularly well-suited for studying cultural revitalization efforts in the Ta Oi community, as it enables the examination of how local cultural practices are negotiated and adapted in the context of tourism development from the perspective of those directly involved.

The research focuses on the Ta Oi people of A Luoi district, Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam. A Luoi is a mountainous district rich in Indigenous cultural heritage, making it ideal for

exploring how traditional cultural practices are being preserved and revitalized. The district's unique cultural and geographic context is significant, as it provides a backdrop where modern tourism intersects with Indigenous cultural preservation efforts.

3.2 Research area: the Ta Oi community in A Luoi District

A Luoi is a mountainous district of Thua Thien Hue province, in the Central region of Vietnam, located 75 km west of Hue city center, at an altitude of 600 m above sea level and is home to Indigenous groups including Ta Oi, Pa Co, Pa Hy, Co Tu and Bru-Van Kieu, Kinh. These communities have created and preserved many unique traditional cultural values. With the advantage of rich natural resources and unique human resources (Indigenous culture), A Luoi is one of the attractive tourist destinations, attracting visitors to visit and experience.

As one of the 54 ethnic groups in the Vietnamese ethnic community, the Ta Oi people belong to the long-standing population in the Truong Son mountain range, most concentrated in Thua Thien Hue province, accounting for more than 67% of the Ta Oi population nationwide, mainly in A Luoi district (Vietnam Statistics Department, 2020). The Ta Oi people have created and preserved a diverse and unique culture including tangible and intangible cultural heritages representing the traditional identity of the Indigenous community. The natural environment and the cultural practices of the Ta Oi people – such as Dzeng weaving, traditional music, and ritual performances – are deeply intertwined. However, these practices have been increasingly influenced by external forces, particularly tourism development, which has introduced both opportunities and challenges for cultural preservation.

This study's focus on A Luoi as a bounded research area allows for a comprehensive, in-depth examination of how the Ta Oi people navigate the tension between maintaining cultural authenticity and engaging in tourism development. The local context is essential for understanding the dynamics of cultural revitalization as the community confronts modernization and tourism-driven commodification.

3.3 Data collection

The data collection process for this study was guided by the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2015) and employed a combination of fieldwork, participant observation, and focus group discussions to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of the Ta Oi people regarding cultural revitalization and tourism development. This approach allowed the researcher to engage directly with the community and gather in-depth, contextualized information.

The fieldwork was conducted over 5 days in A Luoi District, a mountainous area rich in Indigenous Ta Oi culture. The researcher spent significant time immersed in the local environment, engaging with Ta Oi people in their daily routines and observing how traditional cultural practices are integrated into

the community's daily life. This immersive approach provided an opportunity to witness firsthand the preservation and revitalization of cultural practices, as well as the impact of tourism on these traditions. Observations were focused on Dzeng weaving, Indigenous architecture, cuisine, and rituals. Additionally, the researcher observed interactions between locals and tourists, which were crucial in understanding how tourism influences cultural expression and adaptation.

To gather diverse perspectives, two focus group discussions were held, each targeting a different demographic as age-related changes lead to shifts in the perception of the importance of personal values (Borg, 2021). Older adults often prioritize the welfare of others and traditional values (Milfont et al., 2016). They place a strong emphasis on preserving cultural heritage (Borg, 2021) and transmitting knowledge and experiences to younger generations (Erikson, 1982). In contrast, younger individuals tend to focus more on status, power, independent thought, and behavior (Milfont et al., 2016). These differences in perceptions of goals and personal values between older and younger generations contribute to varying perspectives on the conservation and utilization of local culture. Therefore, there is a need to categorize local residents into younger and older groups to delve the different voices from their perspectives. In which, individuals over the age of 50 are considered elders. Preliminary interactions with residents reveal that those over 50 share a deep understanding of local customs and traditions, aligning with a perspective that emphasizes preserving the community's traditional values. Conversely, individuals under 50 exhibit a more flexible and open attitude toward cultural exchange and integration, contributing to the enrichment of local culture in tourism development.

The focus groups were structured to foster open, interactive dialogue, enabling participants to share their experiences and thoughts freely. By comparing the perspectives of older and younger generations, the study captured a more comprehensive understanding of the community's views on cultural preservation and the evolving role of tourism.

All interactions were documented using field notes, and focus group discussions were audio-recorded with participants' consent. This ensured the accuracy of the data and provided a rich source of information for later analysis. The combination of fieldwork and focus groups allowed the researcher to triangulate data, ensuring a robust and well-rounded understanding of the Ta Oi people's cultural revitalization efforts.

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted in line with the principles of constructivist grounded theory, allowing for an iterative and emergent process (Charmaz, 2015). Data collection and analysis co-occurred, enabling the researcher to refine themes as they emerged. Initially, open coding was used to identify key themes directly from the data, then refined through focused coding. NVivo 26, a qualitative data analysis tool, was used to manage and organize the data, facilitating the identification and comparison of codes across different sources. Thematic categories were developed through

constant comparison, a hallmark of grounded theory. Memo-writing further supported the analytical process, helping to capture the evolving insights and reflections throughout the research. Theoretical sampling was employed to deepen the understanding of emerging categories, ensuring that the final themes were fully developed and grounded in the participants' perspectives.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Given the sensitive nature of cultural practices and the potential impact of tourism on Indigenous communities, ethical considerations were paramount. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the potential implications of sharing their cultural knowledge. Informed consent was obtained, and the researcher took care to ensure that the voices of the Ta Oi people were respected and represented accurately. Additionally, the researcher engaged in ongoing discussions with community members about the research outcomes, ensuring that the findings were co-owned and could contribute to local cultural preservation efforts.

4 Findings and discussion

4.1 Fieldwork and observations

This section presents the key findings from the fieldwork, participant observation, and focus group discussions conducted with the Ta Oi people in A Luoi District. The findings focus on the revitalization of four key cultural elements, such as Dzeng weaving, traditional landscapes and architecture, Indigenous cuisine, and performing arts and rituals, and how these have been adapted and integrated into tourism development. The findings are organized into thematic areas based on the coded data analysis and highlight the perspectives of both older and younger community members.

Fieldwork revealed that the Ta Oi people actively engage in efforts to preserve their cultural heritage, particularly in response to tourism development. Through participant observation, it was clear that traditional cultural practices such as Dzeng weaving and Indigenous rituals are not static but are continuously adapt to meet the demands of modern life and the tourism economy.

Observation 1: During the initial observation, the research team explored the cultural and tourism resources of A Luoi. It was noted that while some traditional practices, such as Dzeng weaving, remain vital cultural symbols, their everyday use has diminished. For instance, younger Ta Oi people prefer modern clothing for daily life, reserving traditional garments for festivals or tourism-related activities.

Observation 2: In the second phase of fieldwork, the team observed local tourism activities, including interactions between tourists and residents. It was evident that tourism provides a platform for cultural exchange, where traditional handicrafts and performances are displayed. However, challenges such as commodifying cultural practices were noted, particularly in cases where rituals and performances are adapted for tourist consumption.

TABLE 1 Profile of interviewees.

Group	Participant	Participant ID	Gender	Age	Occupation	Title/field
Focus group 1: Elderly group	Respondent01	(R01)	Male	82	Farmer	Village management committee
	Respondent02	(R02)	Male	79	Farmer	Village management committee
	Respondent03	(R03)	Male	78	Farmer	Village management committee
	Respondent04	(R04)	Female	51	Bamboo weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent05	(R05)	Female	60	Bamboo weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent06	(R06)	Male	67	Famer	Tourism service
	Respondent07	(R07)	Female	58	Dzeng weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent08	(R08)	Male	50	Tourism service business	Tourism service
Focus group 2: Young group	Respondent09	(R09)	Female	38	Dzeng weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent10	(R10)	Female	30	Bamboo weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent11	(R11)	Female	21	Commune official	tourism service organization
	Respondent12	(R12)	Female	35	Dzeng weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent13	(R13)	Female	39	Bamboo weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent14	(R14)	Female	37	dzeng weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent15	(R15)	Male	32	Tourism service business	Tourism service
	Respondent16	(R16)	Female	28	Dzeng weaver	Tourism service
	Respondent17	(R17)	Male	20	Tourism promotion	Tourism service
	Respondent18	(R18)	Female	19	Performing arts	Tourism service
	Respondent19	(R19)	Male	30	Providing facilities services	Tourism service
	Respondent20	(R20)	Female	18	Performing arts	Tourism service

4.2 Focus group discussions

The focus group discussions provided deeper insights into the generational perspectives on cultural revitalization and tourism development. The profile of interviewees were shown in Table 1.

Focus group 1: elderly group: The older participants expressed a strong commitment to preserving Ta Oi cultural values, particularly through the revival of Dzeng weaving and the maintenance of traditional architecture. They noted that while certain practices have been commercialized to attract tourists, the intrinsic cultural value of these traditions must be protected. Elders emphasized the need for government support in preserving authentic cultural elements, especially in relation to restoring traditional architecture like the Roong houses, which have lost some of their original design due to modernization.

Focus group 2: young group: Younger Ta Oi participants viewed tourism as a critical factor in revitalizing their culture. They expressed enthusiasm for using tourism to promote cultural practices such as Dzeng weaving and traditional cuisine, seeing these as opportunities for both economic benefit and cultural preservation. However, they also acknowledged the need to balance tradition with modernity, adapting certain practices to fit contemporary lifestyles and tourist expectations. For instance, they support incorporating traditional crafts into tourism but are mindful of preserving their authenticity.

4.3 Coding analysis findings

The data findings provide insights into Indigenous peoples' perspectives on the relationship between authenticity issues and cultural revitalization. After coding by NVivo 26, their answers are coded and organized into themes (Table 2). In particular, authentic issues include Dzeng weaving and traditional crafts, traditional landscapes and architecture, traditional cuisines, traditional performances, rituals, and beliefs. Cultural revitalization encompasses the authentic roles and tourism development. Figure 1 presents the grounded theory model derived from the research findings. The following sections detail the themes and codes of the key attributes of Indigenous perspectives on cultural revitalization. These insights are supported by quotes from Indigenous people, gathered through two separate focus groups: one with elders and the other with youth. This approach aims to clearly explain and illustrate these attributes while highlighting the interconnections among them.

4.3.1 Authenticity issues

4.3.1.1 Dzeng weaving and traditional crafts

- Dzeng weaving

In 2016, Dzeng weaving was recognized as a Vietnamese national intangible cultural heritage by the Ministry of Culture Sports and Tourism (2016). Dzeng weaving (dệt Dzèng) is undoubtedly the most famous and distinctive traditional practice of

the Ta Oi people. Moreover, it is deeply connected to the everyday labor of the Ta Oi, serving as a continuation of ancestral customs passed down through generations and as their primary means of livelihood. The Ta Oi take great pride in their traditional attire. The Ta Oi elders state that Dzeng weaving is a tangible representation of their tribe:

“If people see Dzeng weaving, it means they see the Ta Oi people” (R01 – focus group 1).

This cherished tradition permeates everyday life and is integral to every ceremonial and significant event.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the use of traditional Dzeng weaving attire in everyday life is gradually declining. Based on interview findings, senior Ta Oi people expressed:

“We now only use Dzeng woven costumes for rituals and festivals, but for everyday wear, we opt for Kinh¹ clothing due to its convenience and affordability” (R05 – focus group 1).

The younger generation further explained that they find modern Kinh clothing much easier to wear in daily life, while traditional costumes made from Dzeng textiles are reserved exclusively for festivals and rituals (R18 – focus group 2).

By given a solution to cultural revitalization, with the aim of promoting tourism growth, a series of Dzeng weaving workshops were organized. According to the younger people:

“We are enthusiastic about returning to their customary lifestyle in order to safeguard their cultural heritage and foster tourism development, despite the greater comfort modern conveniences may offer” (R09 – focus group 2).

From their responses, both the old and young groups said:

“we are ready to wear traditional costumes to welcome tourists and perform arts to serve tourists.” (R06, R20 – focus group 2).

They also claimed that the community’s primary objective is to revitalize the Dzeng weaving industry by using traditional hand-woven techniques and materials to meet the needs of tourism. Elderly Ta Oi people said:

“...to serve tourism, we really want to restore the Dzeng weaving craft using traditional hand-woven methods and materials” (R01 – focus group 1).

Young Ta Oi people interviewed also said:

“We want to weave Dzeng in the traditional way to preserve the culture and to have the opportunity to both promote the culture and sell products to the outside market and serve tourists.” (R16 – focus group 2).

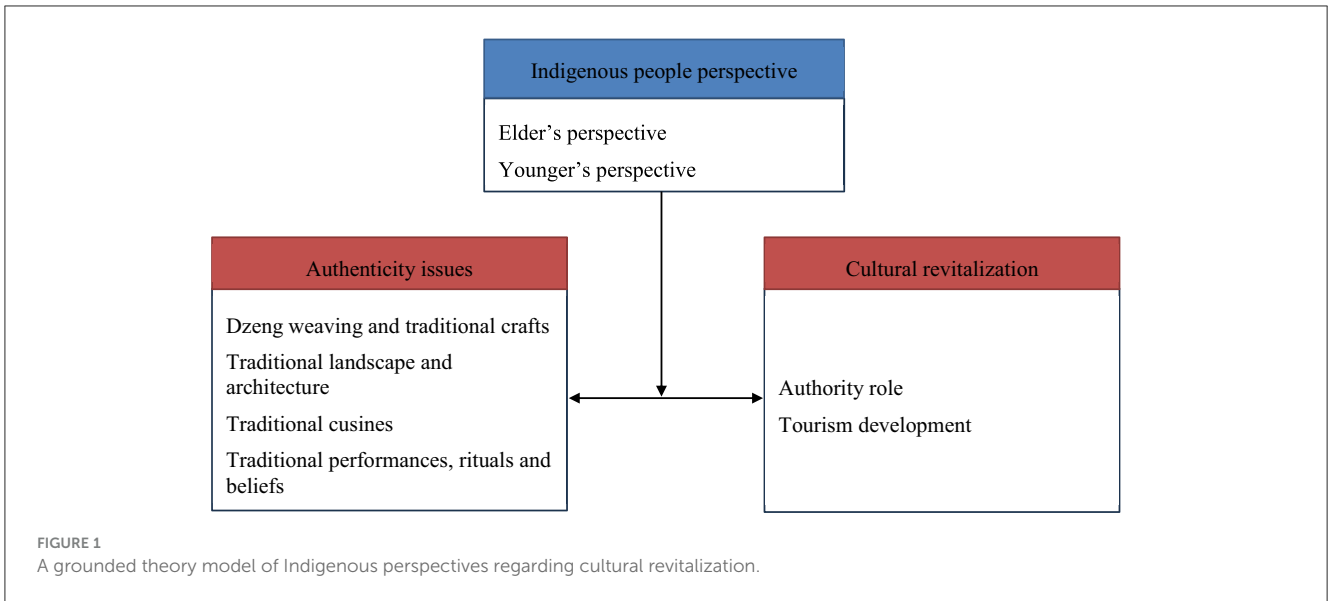
1 The Vietnamese Kinh people, accounting for roughly 85.32% of the population of Vietnam, are officially designated and recognized as the Kinh people (ngó'i Kinh) to differentiate them from other minority groups living in the country.

TABLE 2 Themes and codes.

Themes	Code	Key words
1. Authenticity issues	a. Dzèng weaving and traditional handicrafts	
	<i>Dzèng weaving</i>	Traditional weaving methods, natural materials and hand dyeing, a symbol of cultural identity
	<i>Traditional handicrafts</i>	Wicker (rattan, bamboo), mat weaving, hand weaving skills and natural materials.
	b. Traditional landscapes and architectures	
	<i>Traditional landscapes</i>	Living space is clustered in villages, close to natural mountains and forests, as well as farming areas.
	<i>Traditional architectures</i>	Community House, Long House, Stilt House with distinctive architecture, natural materials (bamboo, wood), and traditional symbolic patterns, the symbol of community cohesion.
	c. Traditional cuisine	
	<i>Traditional food</i>	Unique's recipe and natural ingredients
	<i>Beverage (Wine)</i>	Special extraction technique from tree trunks.
	d. Traditional arts and rituals, customs	
<i>Traditional arts</i>	Lively dances and songs A variety of musical instruments (including percussion, stringed instruments and wind instruments) are handcrafted from natural materials. Performed in festivals for entertainment purposes.	
<i>Rituals, festivals</i>	Aza Koonh festival, the ceremony, praying for new farming season. Yang festival, praying for favorable conditions in agricultural activities. The whole community participates, worshiping ceremony eating, drinking, dancing, singing.	
<i>Customs, beliefs</i>	Wedding customs, unique activities Funeral, reburial	
2. Cultural revitalization	a. Authority role	Authority, government, policy
	b. Tourism development	Tourism, tourism development, tourist

Due to social changes, Dzeng weaving has significantly changed from its form. Elderly Ta Oi people recall:

“Weaving threads were once meticulously crafted from cotton trees, which involved selecting the breed, planting cotton trees, caring for them, spinning the thread, hand weaving and dyeing it with natural colors with Ta Dam (Pang) trees” (R07 – focus group 1).



Today, however, they rely on industrial wool purchased from the Kinh people, elderly Ta Oi people said:

“We buy industrial wool from the Kinh people because it is cheap and convenient, and the technique of growing cotton to make Dzeng yarn has also disappeared. Also, because of the convenience and low cost, we use industrial dyes to dye the fabric instead of manually dyeing it from the Ta dam tree (Pang tree) like before.” (R03 – focus group 1).

As a result, Dzeng weaving items have lost some of their traditional significance in the eyes of the Ta Oi people. While “young Ta Oi women still know how to weave Dzeng,” they “lack mastery of the intricate procedures and operations that were once integral to the craft” (R07 – focus group 1).

To preserve and pass down weaving experiences from mothers and grandmothers and to prepare future generations, a group of older women in A Roang village have formed learning groups. These groups foster friendships as they gather daily to share and exchange memories of their mothers and grandmothers. By attracting women from neighboring villages, these learning groups have transformed weaving from a domestic task into a communal activity that represents cultural identity and facilitates commercial exchange. The growth of tourism has further encouraged them to share their weaving experiences and memories with visitors. This reconstruction of weaving traditions generates the cultural capital needed for tourism. It is similar to the research on restoring traditional weaving and costumes for sustainable tourism development (Duxbury et al., 2021; Bui, 2024). The example of the Ta Oi people underscores the importance of social memory in preserving weaving traditions and enhancing the cultural capital of the local economy.

- **Traditional crafts**

Traditional crafts are a defining aspect of the Ta Oi people’s Indigenous identity, serving as benchmarks of their unique culture.

Previous research highlights that these traditional crafts are vital components of tourism products (Koirala, 2016). According to the elderly Ta Oi:

“Weaving (rattan weaving, bamboo weaving, mat weaving) is a familiar traditional craft of the Ta Oi people. From the available materials in the mountains and forests, such as rattan, bamboo, and mats, through the skillful hands of the people, the weaving profession creates modern applied products such as mats, baskets, baskets, trays, roofing sheets, and daily items.” (R04 – focus group 1)

In particular, the first to mention is the An Cha Mat weaving profession:

“...a very precious type of mat with a meticulous weaving process, the mat is woven from split and dried Thau Gia tree fibers, and is dyed with A Chot tuber powder, mainly used to invite guests to sit, as wedding gifts for daughters, spread out during festivals for the village elder to sit and perform worship ceremonies.” (R02 – focus group 1).

However, with the modern pace of life, only a few people continue the mat weaving profession as before, and these mats have yet to be incorporated into tourism products. Participants in tourism noted:

“...because the time to make the product is very elaborate and the raw materials to make mats and dyeing are also exploited from deep forests, so tourists cannot experience most of the processes to make mat products” (R15 – focus group 2).

Despite this, the Ta Oi people are eager to

“improve the products and processes to integrate mat weaving into tourism, aiming to both preserve the traditional craft and enhance tourist experiences” (R15 – focus group 2).

Ta Oi elders said:

“Experienced elders will teach the profession to young people, which is something we often do.” (R04 – focus group 1).

In addition, handicrafts that require little time to make and can produce products immediately, such as bamboo and rattan weaving, are being performed by the Ta Oi people to serve tourists as a way to preserve traditional crafts.

“The artisans are mainly the elderly, even the village elders and deputy village elders participate in bamboo and rattan weaving performances to serve tourists.” (R10 – focus group 2).

It can be seen that the traditional crafts of the Ta Oi people are gradually recovering to serve local tourism development.

4.3.1.2 Traditional landscape and architecture

- *The village landscape*

In this study, the village landscape is defined as a form of cultural value for tourism development. Previous research has highlighted the significance of traditional village landscapes in preserving cultural identity and attracting tourists (Zhao et al., 2024), focusing on protecting ancient rural villages because they are popular as tourist attractions. The village’s identity and the relevance of preserving landscape features are likely to attract visitors (Carneiro et al., 2015). According to Ta Oi elder:

“...the village landscape is a long-standing familiar living space of the Ta Oi people, following a communal lifestyle in villages, close to the natural mountains and forests, and close to farming areas.” (R01 – focus group 1).

The village landscape of the Ta Oi people in A Luoi district has not escaped the rapid modernization affecting other ethnic minority villages in Vietnam. Fundamental infrastructure is well-established, with expanded roads paved with concrete or asphalt. While modern infrastructure has improved their quality of life, the Ta Oi people note that it has also led to the destruction of their traditional cultural landscape. Despite these changes, Ta Oi elders strongly prefer to remain in their traditional villages, where they have deep-rooted connections, rather than relocate to newly constructed settlements. A Ta Oi elder explained:

“At first, we moved to the modern village built by the government, but after a short time, we returned to live in our familiar traditional village” (R02 – focus group 1).

Young people also said:

“Although we like the new things of modernity, we still want to live in the familiar traditional village space of our Ta Oi people.” (R10 – focus group 2).

In the interviews, all Ta Oi people expressed their desire for government support in building and renovating the traditional village landscape. They aim to restore the important social and cultural governance institutions of the Ta Oi people and develop this space into an Indigenous tourism product for

visitors to experience. This reflects the community’s commitment to preserving cultural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism development.

- *Traditional architecture*

The traditional architectural structures of the Ta Oi people, notably the Roong (Rôn/Roon) house and the long stilt house, hold significant cultural value and are essential to understanding their heritage. The Roong house is a communal structure of great importance, serving as a fundamental cultural institution within the village and symbolizing the community’s strength and resilience (Nguyen, 2019). According to the Ta Oi elders, the architectural design of the Roong house includes:

“traditional decorative motifs and sculptures that are deeply imbued with their cultural identity. The Roong house is built in the middle of the village to gather villagers during festivals and communal activities.” (R02 – focus group 1)

And:

“It plays an institutional role in promoting community cohesion”(R03 – focus group 1).

In addition to the Roong house, the long stilt house—also known as “dêng achoar” – was historically the residence of the Ta Oi people. Constructed from bamboo or wood, this traditional dwelling

“holds significant cultural value as a traditional dwelling constructed from bamboo or wood. It is a communal living space where multiple generations reside together, sharing various aspects of life, including food and agricultural labor” (R01 – focus group 1).

The architectural design, including motifs and decorative sculptures, embodies the distinctive cultural values of the Ta Oi people. However, the traditional architectural styles of both Roong houses and long stilt houses have nearly disappeared in recent times. A community member noted:

“Longhouses existed only in the past. These structures have disappeared due to a shortage of timber and the influence of modern lifestyles. Recently, only a few stilt houses remain, scattered and in a state of significant deterioration” (R06 – focus group 1).

Currently, most Ta Oi people live in solid buildings made of bricks and cement, a style originating from the Kinh community. Despite this shift, young Ta Oi individuals:

“...still express a strong desire to experience living in the traditional house at least once” (R11 – focus group 2).

They believe that the traditional long house is better for fostering community solidarity, as it allows multiple generations and families to share resources like food and labor, even though it is less convenient than modern houses (R16 – focus group 2).

4.3.1.3 Traditional cuisine

- **Traditional food**

According to senior Ta Oi people, the foods that best embody their ancient traditions:

“The ‘A Tam’ meat and ‘A Tam’ fish consist of minced meat or fish wrapped in leaves and grilled over charcoal, and ‘A Quat’ cake, a traditional marriage cake made from sticky rice wrapped in tree leaves and cooked. These dishes have traditional cooking methods and natural ingredients from mountains, forests, rivers, and streams.” (R07 – focus group 1).

These dishes are prepared using traditional cooking methods and natural ingredients from mountains, forests, rivers, and streams. While these foods no longer appear in the daily meals of the Ta Oi people, they have been revived to serve tourists. This revival aligns with prior research emphasizing the role of traditional cuisine in cultural preservation and tourism development to meet tourist demand (Giampiccoli and Kalis, 2012; Grubor et al., 2022), community members have quietly begun preparing these forgotten traditional foods. The younger expressed:

“After a long interruption due to its complexity, we have studied and successfully recreated ‘A Quat’ cake to serve and captivate tourists” (R16 – focus group 2).

“We proactively seek to learn from the elderly how to prepare ‘A Tam’ meat and ‘A Tam’ fish dishes in the traditional way to serve tourists.” (R11 – focus group 2).

This initiative reflects findings by Everett (2009), who noted that engaging younger community members in traditional culinary practices can enhance cultural sustainability and tourism appeal.

- **Drinks (alcohol)**

Regarding drinks, Doac wine (tuvak) and Dinh Dinh wine (pardin) are two traditional beverages sourced directly from nature with traditional wine extraction methods and raw materials from tree trunks consumed during Ta Oi celebrations. The Ta Oi younger said:

“Water sourced from Doac and Dinh Dinh trees, while preserving the bark of the Apang (bell tree), can serve as a substitute for milk when a mother is unable to provide enough for newborns or the elderly and sick.” (R13 – focus group 2).

These typical foods and traditional knowledge have successfully created interesting experiences for tourists. Ta Oi elder believed:

“Local cultural and community tourism activities are currently exploiting the cultural activities of the Ta Oi people such as traditional cuisine: bamboo rice, charcoal sticky rice, ‘A Quat’ cake, grilled fish with ‘A Tam’ leaves and meat, ‘A Tam’ fish, Doac wine, grilled dishes, etc.” (R08 – focus group 1).

One participant working in tourism said:

“In the ‘Ta Oi Rhythm of Life’ experience tour program, the activities of exploiting wine on trees (including Doac wine and Dinh Dinh wine) are being used very effectively to serve tourism today because this is an experience that makes tourists feel very excited.” (R15 – focus group 2).

Hence, we might consider tourists as consumers of a food legacy that evokes the cultural knowledge and culinary customs of Indigenous people. This highlights the potential of Indigenous communities to adapt, recover, and revive their traditional agricultural practices and food consumption in response to changing conditions.

4.3.1.4 Traditional art performances, rituals, and beliefs

- **Traditional art**

The traditional art of the Ta Oi people is a unique cultural and spiritual value of the community. People say that they have

“a rich set of musical instruments, including 30 different types, including percussion, strung, and wind instruments, handcrafted with natural materials, as well as vibrant traditional dances and songs” (R12 – focus group 2).

According to the elders of the Ta Oi community, the Ta Oi people continue to uphold distinctive traditional dances and songs, such as the “Bo boch” love dance, the “Cha chap” happy entertainment song, the “Tac Arnoch” antiphonal singing between two individuals or communities without words, the “Ram a zdut” dance (a joyful dance for women), and the “A dor” dance (a joyful dance for men), etc. The dances and music of the Ta Oi people are frequently showcased during festivals for recreational purposes (R06 – focus group 1). Prior research examines the significance of traditional music and dance in maintaining cultural identity among Indigenous communities (Good et al., 2020). Traditional arts serve as a medium for transmitting history, values, and social cohesion. For instance, studies have highlighted that preserving intangible cultural heritage is crucial for sustaining cultural diversity and fostering mutual understanding (Lenzerini, 2011).

However, younger Ta Oi people stated:

“The folk art activities of the Ta Oi people are being frequently reconstructed and showcased to support local cultural, sports, and tourism endeavors” (R19 – focus group 2).

Despite these efforts, most attendees at these performances have been from the older generation, with only a small number of young people participating

“due to their limited knowledge of traditional folk instruments such as gongs, trumpets, and drums.” (R08 – focus group 1).

Instead, they tend to engage with and contribute to modern music (R20 – focus group 2). This trend aligns with previous research, indicating that globalization and modernization often

lead to a decline in the transmission of traditional arts among younger generations. [Harianto et al. \(2023\)](#) consider that every society has the duty to preserve and maintain its culture with the help of the younger generation as the heirs of that culture. In addition, the importance of teaching traditional arts to the younger generation must also be identified. It is necessary to ensure that younger generations are exposed to their culture ([Sanmee, 2024](#)).

Recognizing the importance of imparting traditional music to the younger generation as a way to preserve and revitalize their culture, a group of Ta Oi elders has formed an unofficial mobile club independent of governmental administration. In addition to engaging in cultural and creative endeavors, they also create traditional musical instruments for widespread performance and pass on their knowledge to the younger generation. The club gathers many enthusiastic, dedicated, and skilled craftsmen are responsible for safeguarding and passing on the centuries-old Ta Oi legacy.

These findings emphasize the critical role of community-led efforts in cultural preservation and the intergenerational transmission of intangible cultural heritage. By actively involving both elders and youth in the revival of traditional arts, the Ta Oi people are taking significant steps to sustain their cultural heritage amidst modern influences.

- *Rituals and beliefs*

Interview findings demonstrate that rituals such as the “Aza Koonh” harvest festival and the new rice celebration hold significant spiritual value for the Ta Oi people. The elders said:

“It is the most important ritual, it is the Ta Oi New Year, the ritual of worshipping Yang (the supreme deity of the Ta Oi people), to pray for favorable conditions in agricultural activities” (R06 – focus group 1).

During the festival, the entire Ta Oi community participates in both ceremonial worship and festive activities, including eating, drinking, dancing, and singing. However, the Ta Oi people are reluctant to perform this ritual to attract tourists due to its profound meaning. They believed:

“Spiritual and mystical ritual that cannot be separated from the Ta Oi cultural land or performed for tourists” (R02 – focus group 1)

Therefore, they concerned:

“we are afraid of violating the sacred, afraid of Yang’s punishment” (R01 – focus group 1).

This perspective aligns with prior research indicating that the commodification of sacred rituals for tourism can lead to cultural degradation and stage authenticity ([Taylor, 2001](#)).

In addition to communal rituals, traditional practices of the Ta Oi people are expressed through family events such as burial traditions, grave cleaning, and weddings. Elders recounted that in the past:

“their traditional weddings lasted for many days, had many wedding gifts, and had the custom of stabbing buffaloes. Funeral customs were special with the custom of exhuming graves” (R03 – focus group 1).

However, due to the radical nature of some activities no longer suitable for modern life, these rituals have been simplified and are not replicated for tourism development. This approach is consistent with broader trends where modernization and legal frameworks influence the modification of traditional rituals ([Shi et al., 2022](#)).

Young people also said:

“Our current funeral and wedding customs have reduced the cumbersome and costly ritual procedures compared to before.” (R12 – focus group 2)

In sum, tourism development in the A Luoi district has allowed the Ta Oi people to perform and reconstruct their cultural heritage. However, from their perspective, although their traditional cultural values have been lost or altered due to the influence of modernized society, these values are now being revived and recreated, holding genuine significance within the framework of modern society as part of Indigenous cultural tourism.

4.3.2 Cultural revitalization

4.3.2.1 Authority role

The development of tourism in mountainous regions, including the Ta Oi community, is closely tied to government policies and support mechanisms. The role of the local and national governments has been crucial in preserving and promoting the cultural identity of Indigenous peoples while fostering tourism development. Government authorities have introduced various initiatives to safeguard cultural practices, such as restoring traditional craft cooperatives and organizing events showcasing Ta Oi culture, including folk music, culinary practices, and traditional arts.

Tourism activities of the Ta Oi people are closely linked to policies to preserve and promote the cultural identity of Indigenous peoples and tourism development policies of A Luoi district. The Ta Oi elders said that the government has paid attention to the work of preserving and promoting culture:

“They focus on organizing the teaching of folk songs, folk dances, folk music, building traditional craft cooperatives, recreating traditional music and culinary practices to introduce and promote Ta Oi culture in activities such as the Vietnamese Ethnic Community Village, Hue Festival, Hue Craft Village Festival, Festival of Mountainous Ethnic Groups in Thua Thien Hue Province, Cultural Exchange of Vietnam–Laos Border Provinces...” (R02 – focus group 1).

Such top-down approaches align with findings from prior studies, which argue that government intervention is often instrumental in protecting Indigenous culture for tourism purposes but may also risk marginalizing local voices if not handled inclusively ([Kunasekaran et al., 2017](#)).

Additionally, the government has supported the construction of cultural spaces like the A Roang Community House to help preserve traditional values:

“In addition to the financial support policy to build the A Roang Community House, the government also asked for philanthropists to invest in buying musical instruments, establishing culinary groups, Dzeng weaving, cultural and artistic activities, weaving, and accommodation for people” (R17 – focus group 2).

However, while these efforts have been appreciated, there are concerns about the cultural authenticity of certain restored structures like the Roong houses, which have been modernized with new materials, thereby compromising their traditional spirit:

“Many community houses have not effectively preserved their historical ideals. In some locations, community houses are built using concrete or depart from traditional designs, thereby compromising the Ta Oi culture’s spirit. The historic ornamental motifs of traditional Roong buildings are at risk of disappearing.” (R05, R08 – focus group 1).

Aligning with authority role with cultural revitalization, Ta Oi people are aware that the traditional cultural values of the Ta Oi people are gradually fading away. Therefore, they feel very happy and excited because, with the government’s conservation and development strategy, many cultural values that have almost disappeared are restored, and at the same time, they are respected and honored as artisans or groups holding traditional knowledge:

“We want to preserve the values of Zeng weaving in the form of traditional hand weaving and restore traditional materials such as cotton thread and beads. Festivals, rituals, worship, worship Giang and gods, traditional cuisines such as wild boar and stream fish. Mobilize people to unite, join hands to build roads and houses, preserve family traditions, clan, house rules, hierarchy, and lineage” (R03 – focus group 1).

In addition, the young Ta Oi group also recognizes the role of traditional values and wishes to gain knowledge to continue the values of their ancestors. However, they also believe that traditional values need to be developed to meet the needs of modern life:

“We still want to keep the typical values of Ta Oi, but things related to life convenience can use modern products” (R18 – focus group 2).

Ta Oi people increasingly recognize their active role in preserving and revitalizing their culture, using it as a resource for tourism development and improving their livelihoods. Furthermore, presenting Indigenous culture to tourists fosters awareness among the Ta Oi people of their cultural identity and significance, thereby enhancing their sense of responsibility, pride, and commitment to preserving and restoring their culture. This reflects the findings of Maddison (2012), who emphasizes the need for Indigenous voices to be included in cultural policy deliberations to ensure cultural revitalization efforts align with community aspirations.

4.3.2.2 Tourism development

Tourism development based on the Ta Oi people’s cultural values has presented both challenges and opportunities. The government’s focus on leveraging Indigenous culture as a tourism asset has resulted in greater interest in preserving traditional practices. Projects like the A Luoi District Tourism Development Plan, which focuses on exploiting traditional cultural values for tourism growth, have created a framework for integrating cultural heritage into the local tourism economy.

“Development plan and project of A Luoi District: bringing visitors to the locality, supporting the creation of clean and beautiful areas to welcome visitors, displaying products, spaces, and ways of doing tourism. Resolution of the A Roang Commune Party Committee on developing tourism combined with preserving culture. The A Roang Cooperative was established, and people invested their own capital to produce Dzeng. In addition, they also received support in terms of facilities from organizations, individuals, and charities...” (R11 – focus group 2).

This aligns with findings by Sailesh and Reddy (2024), who argue that Indigenous tourism often revitalizes cultural elements by providing economic incentives for their preservation.

The enthusiasm of the Ta Oi community, especially the younger generation, in participating in tourism activities is a testament to the potential of tourism as a tool for cultural revitalization:

“Ta Oi people are the main human resource for tourism... we are happy, enthusiastic, and dedicated to tourism because we really want to restore the traditional values of the Ta Oi people to serve tourism, thanks to tourism, many Ta Oi cultural values are preserved, and the environment is protected” (R15 – focus group 2).

Besides:

“the homestay owners are local people, they are willing to share and create jobs for the people. Their staff are mainly family members, villagers, and even the elderly.” (R15 – focus group 2).

They express a strong desire to restore and showcase their cultural values, believing that tourism offers a path to economic improvement while preserving their heritage. As noted in prior studies by Ayaydin and Akgönül (2020), tourism development can lead to both the commodification and revival of cultural practices, depending on how the community negotiates their role in the tourism economy.

Both elders and younger participants emphasize that tourism development has allowed the community to revitalize traditional practices like Dzeng weaving and culinary arts, which might have otherwise been forgotten:

“... really want tourism to develop, bringing a better life and at the same time contributing to preserving and promoting the cultural values of Ta Oi for everyone to know” (R04 – focus group 1).

“Tourism development will bring a stable source of income to improve people’s lives both materially and spiritually, and it will also motivate them to participate more enthusiastically in contributing to tourism development while contributing to the restoration and promotion of traditional Indigenous cultural values of Ta Oi” (R19 – focus group 2).

Thus, the synergy between government policies and local tourism development efforts has been crucial in fostering the preservation and promotion of Ta Oi culture. However, the success of these initiatives depends not only on top-down governmental support but also on the active engagement of the Ta Oi people themselves, ensuring that cultural heritage remains both a source of pride and a sustainable economic resource.

5 Research implications

In contemporary society, rapid modernization, socio-cultural interactions, and lifestyle changes have led some Indigenous communities to experience a sense of disconnection from their cultural roots and identity (Richards, 2018; Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). This disconnect emphasizes the tension between tradition and modernity, where Indigenous cultures are perceived as being replaced by global societal norms (Salemink, 2001).

However, culture, as understood through the lens of constructivist grounded theory, is not a static entity. Instead, it is continuously reconstructed by those who live it, shaped through interactions and adaptations to changing environments. Our findings reflect that cultural traditions are not fixed but are progressively redefined by the community as they adapt to contemporary demands. By using constructivist grounded theory, this study acknowledges that knowledge is co-constructed between the researchers and participants (Charmaz, 2017), reflecting the subjective experiences of the Ta Oi people. The themes emerging from this study were not imposed from the outside but arose from the community’s lived experiences. This approach has allowed us to capture a nuanced understanding of how the Ta Oi people perceive the preservation and revitalization of their culture.

The study proposes the grounded theory model offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the interplay between authenticity issues and cultural revitalization, through the eyes of Indigenous elders and youth. Its usefulness withdraws from its capacity to assist tourism stakeholders in building culturally sensitive and sustainable tourism plans. Tourism practitioners can create experiences that preserve and promote Indigenous heritage while also encouraging community engagement by incorporating authenticity issues such as traditional crafts, cuisines, architectures, etc. This strategy is reproducible by tailoring its key components, authenticity issues and cultural revitalization, to the cultural contexts of various Indigenous groups. Furthermore, emphasizing multiple views ensures that the model is adaptable and inclusive, meeting the needs and aspirations of both older and younger generations. In addition, it also emphasizes that cultural preservation is not a top-down process; rather, it is co-created by the Indigenous community itself, with varying perspectives between older and younger generations influencing the approach. This ensures that while cultural traditions may evolve, they are still rooted in the values and identity of the Ta Oi people, making the

process of cultural revival both sustainable and meaningful in the context of tourism.

5.1 Theoretical implications

5.1.1 Authenticity issue in cultural revival for tourism development

This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of culture and authenticity in Indigenous tourism by demonstrating how culture is continuously reconstructed rather than preserved in a static form (Vitasurya et al., 2018). Tourism’s impact on Indigenous culture can be viewed through two distinct lenses: it can either commodify and distort culture or promote its revitalization (Jennings, 2017). From a constructivist grounded theory perspective, this distinction is negotiated by the community members themselves. Tourism can lead to the commodification of cultural practices, transforming them into “actor” tailored to tourists’ expectations of authenticity (Wang, 2007). Conversely, it can be perceived positively, promoting cultural revitalization and serving as an opportunity for empowerment (Esman, 1984; Besculides et al., 2002; Kunasekaran et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2019; Charag et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2022).

The findings challenge the notion of “frozen” traditions by showing that Indigenous communities actively engage in co-constructing their cultural revival. The Ta Oi people’s approach to cultural preservation, choosing which traditions to maintain in their original form and which to adapt for tourism and demonstrates the fluid nature of authenticity, aligning with the constructivist grounded theory framework. For example, the revival of Dzeng weaving, traditional music, and culinary practices reflects a collective decision by the Ta Oi people to reinterpret and reintroduce these cultural elements to serve both their own community and tourism. While certain elements of Ta Oi culture are adapted for tourism, the sacred Aza Koonh ritual, for instance, is preserved exclusively for the community. This selective approach highlights that authenticity, as understood through constructivist grounded theory, is a fluid and negotiated concept. It is based on the community’s choices regarding which practices to preserve in their original form and which to adapt for modern use (Taylor, 2001).

However, Indigenous tourism prioritizes the desires of tourists in terms of seeking “authentic” experiences (Nielsen and Wilson, 2012). By focusing on the Indigenous perspective, the study reinforces that the community itself plays a critical role in determining the authenticity of its cultural practices. According to a number of researches, in order to serve tourists, the customary behaviors of Indigenous populations have been altered, posing a risk of cultural erosion and degradation (Ryan and Aicken, 2005; Reisinger, 2009). The commercialization and use of Indigenous culture as a mass tourism commodity may result in the erosion of authenticity and intrinsic cultural values (Kunasekaran et al., 2013). Authenticity have become a controversial topic, as traditional culture is developed, enacted, and amassed progressively over an individual’s lifetime. Furthermore, tradition is acknowledged only if it is embraced by the present, yet contemporary tradition must maintain a connection to the past (Etten, 2010). Culture is not a “frozen” phenomenon but is continually recreated and revitalized to align with contemporary life (Slaughter, 1989). Consequently, authenticity in this context is considered reliant

on the manner in which Indigenous individuals opt to depict their culture genuinely from their perspective (Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019). We claim that the restoration of Ta Oi cultural activities for tourism development is not detrimental to traditional culture but the tourism growth should be seen as fostering a hybrid culture, rather than merely replaced traditional culture with modernity culture. Thus, this study enriches the theoretical debate on authenticity in Indigenous tourism. Furthermore, the study highlights the agency of Indigenous communities in managing their cultural heritage, contributing to a deeper understanding of how Indigenous people navigate the pressures of modernization and tourism. As experienced in the Ta Oi context, authenticity is not defined by rigid adherence to historical practices but by the community's choices on how to present their culture to outsiders. In certain regions, Indigenous rituals, beliefs, and festivals are frequently replicated and altered into events or performances for visitors (Schmider et al., 2024). The constructivist grounded theory framework supports this interpretation, as it emphasizes the role of community agency in shaping the authenticity of cultural revival (Torabian and Arai, 2016; De Souza et al., 2024).

5.1.2 The role of the Ta Oi people in cultural revitalization for tourism development

This research highlights the crucial role of Indigenous agency in cultural preservation, and constructivist grounded theory helps to foreground their agency in this process. Rather than being passive recipients of government-led cultural policies, the Ta Oi people actively participate in the restoration and promotion of their traditions. This research investigates how the community co-creates their cultural narrative, actively shaping how their culture is both preserved and presented to tourists.

The central role of Indigenous communities in cultural preservation is widely acknowledged (Nielsen and Wilson, 2012; Diekmann and Smith, 2015; Weaver, 2015; Radel, 2018; Richards, 2018). Indigenous peoples' knowledge, perspectives, and experiences should be considered essential in the development of research and strategies for cultural preservation. However, top-down government programs often dominate the cultural preservation discourse, imposing external values on Indigenous communities (Korstanje, 2012; Pabel et al., 2017). Through the co-construction of knowledge in this study, it became evident that while government initiatives provide a framework for cultural preservation, the real drivers of cultural revival are the Ta Oi people themselves. Elders and community leaders have formed groups to pass down traditional knowledge to the younger generation, ensuring the sustainability of their cultural practices. The younger generation, in turn, contributes to this process by engaging with tourists, sharing their cultural heritage, and promoting Ta Oi traditions.

Currently, in several regions around the world, Indigenous guides remain undervalued, frequently labeled as "compatriots" or "barbarians," resulting in their state of powerlessness. This excluding attitudes have depicted Indigenous peoples as things or cultural artifacts, rather than as independent beings (Ruhanen and Whitford, 2019; Yeh et al., 2021). In the case of the Ta Oi people, tourism has provided a platform for the community to assert control over their cultural heritage. Despite the local

government's involvement in promoting tourism through policies, the community's efforts in preserving and showcasing their culture are primarily driven by internal initiatives. In particular, village elders, artisans, and community leaders have formed clubs to educate the younger generation about traditional practices, ensuring the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. This bottom-up approach has empowered the Ta Oi people to take ownership of their cultural narrative, using tourism as a tool for both cultural preservation and economic development. Moreover, the younger generation of Ta Oi people has embraced this responsibility. They actively participate in tourism activities, welcoming tourists into their homes and sharing their customs, rituals, and daily lives. This engagement has not only helped to preserve the Ta Oi culture but has also fostered a sense of pride and identity among the youth, reinforcing the community's commitment to cultural revitalization.

This active participation is in line with constructivist grounded theory, which highlights how cultural preservation is not a top-down process but is co-created by those who live the culture (Pezeshki et al., 2023). By centering the voices of the Ta Oi people, the Ta Oi people's active participation in shaping their cultural narrative underscores the value of Indigenous agency in tourism development, thus enriching the theoretical debate on Indigenous involvement in cultural preservation.

5.2 Practical implications

5.2.1 Empower Indigenous communities in cultural preservation

A key practical implication is the need for government and external stakeholders to work collaboratively with Indigenous communities rather than imposing preservation models. The Ta Oi people's involvement in reviving cultural traditions shows that Indigenous groups are the most effective custodians of their own culture. Empowering local communities through grassroots cultural initiatives – such as elder-led workshops and knowledge-sharing programs – can ensure cultural preservation that resonates with community values and priorities.

5.2.2 Enhance economic benefits for Indigenous communities

Tourism should not only be a means for cultural revival but also a tool for economic empowerment. The Ta Oi's involvement in community-based tourism ensures that economic benefits stay within the community, which enhances both cultural and economic sustainability. Policymakers and tourism developers should focus on community-centered tourism models, ensuring that Indigenous groups retain control over their cultural assets and are the primary beneficiaries of tourism-generated income.

5.2.3 Balance authenticity with adaptation in tourism

Tourism stakeholders must collaborate with Indigenous communities to create experiences that respect cultural values while adapting certain elements to meet tourist expectations. For instance, while the Ta Oi people have adapted Dzeng

weaving and traditional cuisine for tourism, they have safeguarded sacred rituals like the Aza Koonh festival, which are kept from commercialization. This model illustrates how tourism can be aligned with both cultural preservation and economic development, without compromising core cultural values.

6 Limitation and further research

This study focused on the Ta Oi community in A Luoi district, limiting the generalizability of its findings to other Indigenous groups. Additionally, the research relied on qualitative methods, which, while valuable for deep insights, may not capture broader trends or tourist perspectives quantitatively. Future research should expand to include multiple Indigenous communities in different geographic regions to provide comparative analyses. Quantitative methods, such as surveys of tourists and local stakeholders, could also be integrated to assess the broader impacts of tourism on cultural revitalization and authenticity, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics.

7 Conclusion

This study investigates the cultural revitalization of the Ta Oi Indigenous group in A Luoi District, demonstrating how traditional practices have been adapted to align with tourism development. Using constructivist grounded theory, the research emphasizes that the Ta Oi people are not passive preservers of culture but active agents in its reconstruction.

First, the findings reveal that several traditional practices, such as Dzeng weaving, culinary arts, and dance, have been revived but modified by external influences, particularly from the Kinh people. As can be seen that Ta Oi now use industrial materials instead of hand-grown cotton and natural dyes in Dzeng weaving's practices which like shifts seen in Moroccan weaving (Sadiqi, 2007). Ta Oi's traditional food's revival for tourism highlighting cuisine's role in both cultural preservation and meeting tourist demand. These adaptations demonstrate that cultural revitalization is not about preserving culture in a "frozen" state but involves a dynamic process of negotiation and adaptation to contemporary contexts.

Second, one of outstanding outcomes presents the active role of Ta Oi community in cultural revitalization process which aligning with previous studies that position Indigenous groups as the most effective stewards of their culture but contrasts with cases where Indigenous voices are marginalized. The Ta Oi forming independent groups to transmit knowledge reflects a commitment to bottom-up cultural preservation, a concept supported by constructivist grounded theory, the research's framework.

Finally, this research contributes to the ongoing debate on authenticity in Indigenous tourism, highlighting its fluid and negotiated nature, as understood through constructivist grounded theory. It emphasizes that authenticity is shaped by the community's choices on presenting their culture.

This study successfully highlights the role of Indigenous people in the relationship between authenticity issues and

cultural revitalization. One of emerging contributions is the exploration of differing perspectives between two generational groups (elders and youth) within the Ta Oi community, Vietnam. The results and methods of this study can be applied to other Indigenous case studies to investigate various aspects of Indigenous research related to cultural revitalization through Indigenous people's perceptions.

Data availability statement

The data analyzed in this study is subject to the following licenses/restrictions: Only the authors included in the original research are allowed to access the raw data, which includes interviews, recordings, and transcripts. Requests to access these datasets should be directed to Thu-Suong Thi Nguyen, nttsuongart@hueuni.edu.vn.

Author contributions

T-SN: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. D-HP: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. D-HD: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. M-NC: Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. T-TD: Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Software, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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