

Phitsanulok's Readiness for Development along the Luang Prabang–Indochina–Mawlamyine Economic Corridor (LIMEC)

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: The Luang Prabang–Indochina–Mawlamyine Economic Corridor (LIMEC) seeks to enhance regional integration across Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar through multidimensional collaboration in economic, political, and sociocultural domains. Established in 2015, LIMEC has prioritized trade, investment, tourism, education, healthcare, and logistics, supported by cooperation between governments, private enterprises, and cross-border networks. Phitsanulok Province, located in lower northern Thailand, is increasingly recognized as a pivotal hub within LIMEC and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Its location at the intersection of key regional corridors provides strategic advantages for connectivity, logistics, and trade. However, unlike other cooperative frameworks such as Ayeyawady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) or Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), LIMEC lacks an institutionalized governance structure or systematic mechanisms for coordination. This absence of institutional frameworks hinders policy alignment between national and local levels, constrains investment flows, and restricts long-term collaboration. Accordingly, this study evaluates Phitsanulok's readiness to align with LIMEC's strategies by employing border studies theory, focusing on governance practices, interdependence mechanisms, and cross-border initiatives to foster sustainable regional development.

Methodology: A qualitative design was adopted, combining documentary analysis with in-depth, semi-structured interviews involving provincial administrators, policy planners, and development officials in Phitsanulok. Content analysis was used to interpret data, examining three critical areas: governance and institutional capacity, regional interdependence, and the province's strategic fit within LIMEC's developmental framework.

Main Results: The findings highlight three dimensions of readiness. In the political dimension, although governance structures exist, interviewees unanimously identified persistent challenges: policy fragmentation, inconsistency, and discontinuity. Economically, Phitsanulok's location and infrastructure offer robust advantages for logistics, trade, and tourism. Nevertheless, the modernization of

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logistics systems, fiscal continuity, and investment coordination remain incomplete. Socio-culturally, the province possesses rich cultural assets and entrepreneurial potential that could support tourism and creative industries; however, these resources are not yet systematically integrated into sustainable development plans. Collectively, these dimensions reveal both substantial opportunities and enduring constraints that must be addressed through targeted reforms and institutional innovation.

Discussions: Phitsanulok's role within LIMEC rests on three interconnected pillars. First, cross-border collaboration and infrastructure development are crucial for enhancing trade flows and achieving integration. Second, consistent policies and long-term strategic leadership are essential for sustaining growth, especially in addressing implementation gaps across political transitions. Third, mobilizing local cultural heritage through tourism promotion and product innovation can significantly expand economic opportunities for communities. Yet, challenges persist due to limited funding, institutional fragmentation, and policy discontinuity. These highlight the necessity of coordinated action among central government, provincial authorities, private enterprises, and local communities to ensure synergy in development.

Conclusions: The study determines that Phitsanulok is strategically positioned to emerge as a regional hub within LIMEC. Realizing this promise necessitates enhanced governance, more precise budget allocation, and sustained policy coherence. The enhancement of political, economic, and cultural capabilities relies on multi-tiered governance that integrates the state, market, and community. Through entrenched autonomy, robust institutions, and transnational collaboration, Phitsanulok may advance towards more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient regional development.

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Introduction

The Luang Prabang-Indochina-Mawlamyine Economic Corridor (LIMEC) (see Figure 1) emerged from academic research entitled A Policy Synthesis of Land Transportation Logistics Development on Lower Northern Thailand through Laos - Vietnam – Guangxi, China. This study, conducted by Dr. Boonsub Panichakarn from the College of Logistics and Supply Chain at Naresuan University, emphasized the significance of the Lower Northern Region and Phitsanulok Province as crucial sites for establishing an economic corridor (Panihakarn et al., 2015). The proposed LIMEC route links Luang Prabang, Xayaburi, and the Phu Du Border in Laos, traversing Uttaradit, Phetchabun, Phitsanulok, Sukhothai, Tak, Mae Sot

(see Figure 2), and the Myawaddy Border, concluding in Mawlamyine, Myanmar (Pounpunwong, 2025). The corridor facilitates economic interactions across all dimensions economic, political, and socio-cultural establishing seamless connectedness across the states. Established in 2015, LIMEC currently focuses on five key sectors: commerce and investment, tourism, education, health, and logistics. The development is propelled by collaboration between the private and public sectors in the provinces of Uttaradit, Tak, Phetchabun, Sukhothai, and Phitsanulok in Lower Northern Thailand, in conjunction with neighboring regions, including Laos' Xayaburi and Luang Prabang provinces, as well as Myanmar's Kayin and Mon States (Sukhotho, 2018). LIMEC is overseen by a group consisting of representatives from both sectors, which has led international conferences on the corridor's growth from 2015 to 2024, focusing on cross-border trade, tourism, exhibitions, and transport network enhancement (Jansombat, 2020).

Figure 1

LIMEC Route (Jansombat, 2020)

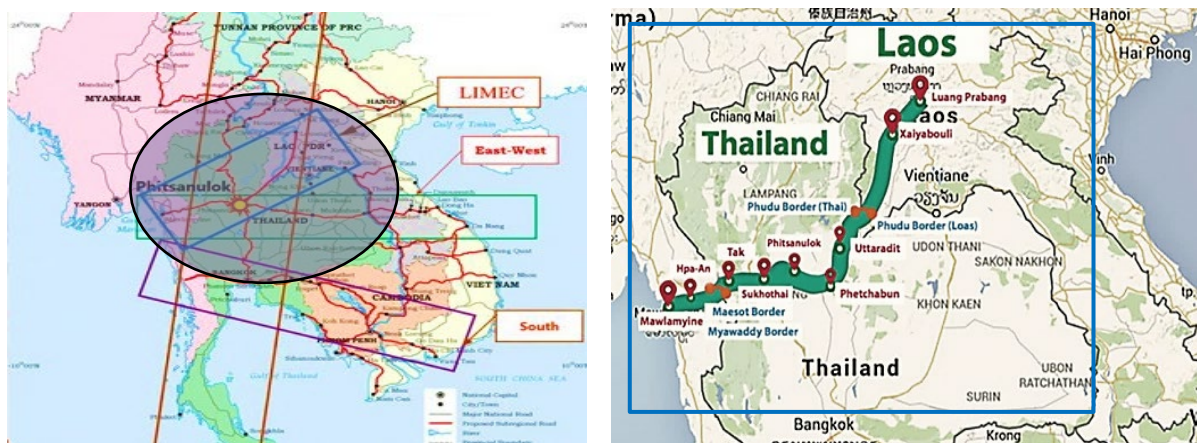
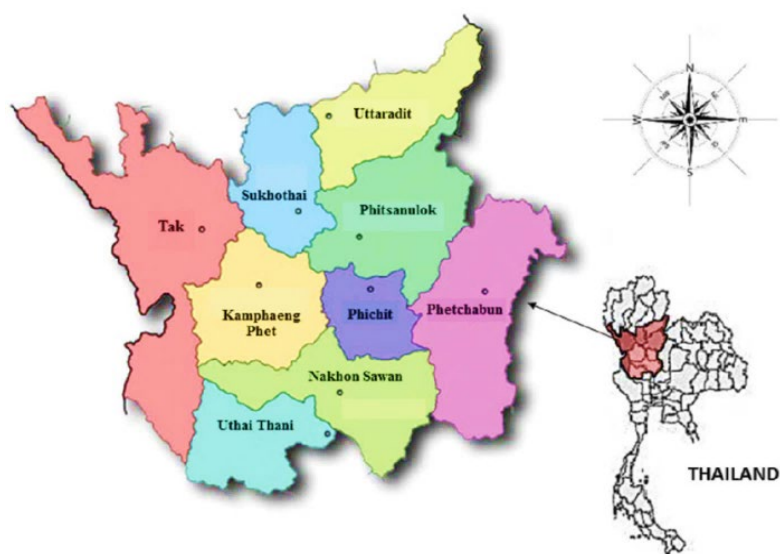


Figure 2

The Lower North of Thailand (Wachirawongsakorn, 2016)

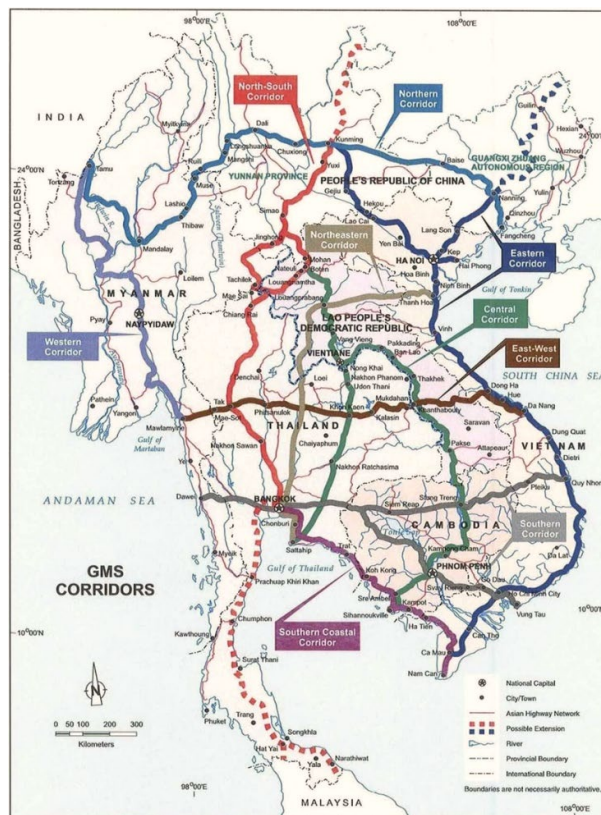


Phitsanulok Province serves as a pivotal center within LIMEC, acting as the primary hub for the Lower Northern Region and a vital nexus within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) (Panihakarn et al., 2015). It interlinks Thailand with adjacent nations Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia,

Vietnam, and China through two principal corridors: (1) the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC), which connects Da Nang, Vietnam, traverses Laos, enters Thailand at Mukdahan, and proceeds through Phetchabun and Phitsanulok to Mae Sot and Mawlamyine; and (2) the North-South Economic Corridor (NSEC), encompassing R3A, R3B, and R5 routes, which link Southern China, Laos, and Myanmar, with Phitsanulok serving as a pivotal junction. Moreover, Phitsanulok's strategic location corresponds with other regional frameworks such as BIMSTEC and ACMECS, hence augmenting its importance (Pounpunwong, 2025) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

GMS Economic Corridors (Baumüller, 2010)



The examination of the Phitsanulok Provincial Development Plan (2023–2027) and the Lower Northern Provincial Cluster Development Plan (2023–2027) highlights the province's crucial significance within LIMEC. The geographic and strategic benefits encompass a strong transportation infrastructure, an emerging logistical hub bolstered by airport growth and road improvements, and the opportunity for cultural and historical tourism. These assets establish Phitsanulok as a crucial connectivity center for Indochina and GMS (Strategy Administration Office for Cluster 1 of the Lower Northern Provinces, 2023).

Phitsanulok's central role within LIMEC, however, is accompanied by several persistent challenges. At the policy level, unclear national strategies and limited budgetary support have constrained provincial initiatives, while frequent shifts in leadership have undermined policy continuity. Infrastructural and logistical limitations such as outdated transport systems and unfinished cross-border connections further obstruct its capacity to emerge as a fully integrated

logistics hub. At the same time, although the province possesses rich cultural resources, insufficient tourism infrastructure prevents it from fully leveraging cultural exchange and cross-border tourism. These issues highlight the necessity of a deeper investigation into how policy, economic strategies, and cultural capital can be effectively integrated to enhance Phitsanulok's competitiveness under the LIMEC framework.

Previous studies by researchers such as Jansombat (2020), Sukhotho (2018), and Panihakarn et al. (2015) have substantially advanced LIMEC's conceptual and practical evolution. Their research highlighted regional interconnectedness via logistics, commerce, and tourism. Nonetheless, an examination of LIMEC's advancement in 2024 uncovers significant obstacles, notably the lack of a specialized agency to supervise its expansion and the absence of integration into a prominent regional framework, such as ACMECS or BIMSTEC (Pounpunwong, 2025). Thus, LIMEC is predominantly propelled by private-sector activities, with minimal government involvement.

The present research. In light of these issues, the research entitled Phitsanulok's readiness for development along LIMEC is essential. This study assesses the readiness and constraints of public and private parties in advancing LIMEC's growth, offering insights into effective collaboration and strategic alignment for sustainable economic and cultural integration.

Objective

This study seeks to assess the readiness of governmental entities, at both provincial and local tiers, in Phitsanulok Province to conform to and react to development strategies that include political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects within the context of LIMEC. This study specifically examines border studies as a conceptual framework to investigate the region's interdependence, governance issues, and prospects for cross-border collaboration.

Review of Literature

This study utilizes border studies as a framework to evaluate the readiness of Phitsanulok Province for development within LIMEC roughly 250 kilometers from the Phu Du checkpoint in Uttaradit Province and around 240 kilometers from the Mae Sot checkpoint in Tak Province. It serves a strategic function as the central province of the Lower Northern Region. This position enables Phitsanulok to serve as a transportation and logistics hub, connecting border gateways with Thailand's central economy and enhancing its significance in transnational connectivity. This functional role supports the application of border studies, as Phitsanulok can be understood as a functional borderland facilitating political, economic, and socio-cultural exchanges throughout GMS. The research area encompasses the border regions of ACMECS. This strategy aims to promote cooperative development within LIMEC and to transform borderlands into vibrant hubs of transportation, governance, commerce, and cultural collaboration.

Borders serve as fundamental elements of modern nation-states, delineating the extent of state authority and acting as mechanisms to manage adjacent regions. Thippimol and Saijampa (2011) contend that the establishment of borders promotes both cooperation and tension, frequently leading to disputes over sovereignty and conflicts over resources. Buadaeng (2012) elaborates on this concept by characterizing borders not just as geographic boundaries but as *interaction zones* that encompass enduring political, economic, and cultural connections that existed prior to the establishment of modern nation-states. Santhasombat (2008) highlights the fragmented and disputed characteristics of borders, whereas Walker (1999) recognizes them

as areas of increased state involvement. Yeung (2004) emphasizes their evolution into strategic economic areas within the context of globalization, where transnational corporations (TNCs) increasingly wield influence. Similarly, Sparke et al. (2004) analyze the impact of changing power dynamics between states and capital on the investment opportunities in borderlands. Pounpunwong (2025) further contextualizes border regions within the reorganization of rural economies under capitalism, perceiving them as avenues for connecting peripheral and central economies through state policy and capital expansion.

The insights presented position LIMEC as an essential hub for connectivity, collaboration, and development across various domains. Based on this theoretical foundation, the literature can be categorized into three thematic areas.

Initially, regional economic interactions underscore the significance of regional integration in fostering connectivity and trade. Capannelli et al. (2009) underscore the swift trade integration occurring in Asia via mechanisms like the Chiang Mai Initiative. Nonetheless, uncertainties persist concerning the fairness of regional advantages when policy frameworks vary among member states.

Secondly, cross-border commerce and the development of border regions are regarded as essential drivers of growth. Renliang et al. (2024) demonstrate the potential of cross-border economies in the GMS to reduce poverty and foster shared prosperity. Meanwhile, Sohaimi et al. (2024) emphasize initiatives such as the IMT-GT and Malaysia's NCER as exemplary models for boosting investment in border regions. Concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of trade and special economic zones in reducing disparities, particularly in the absence of adequate infrastructure and supportive government policies.

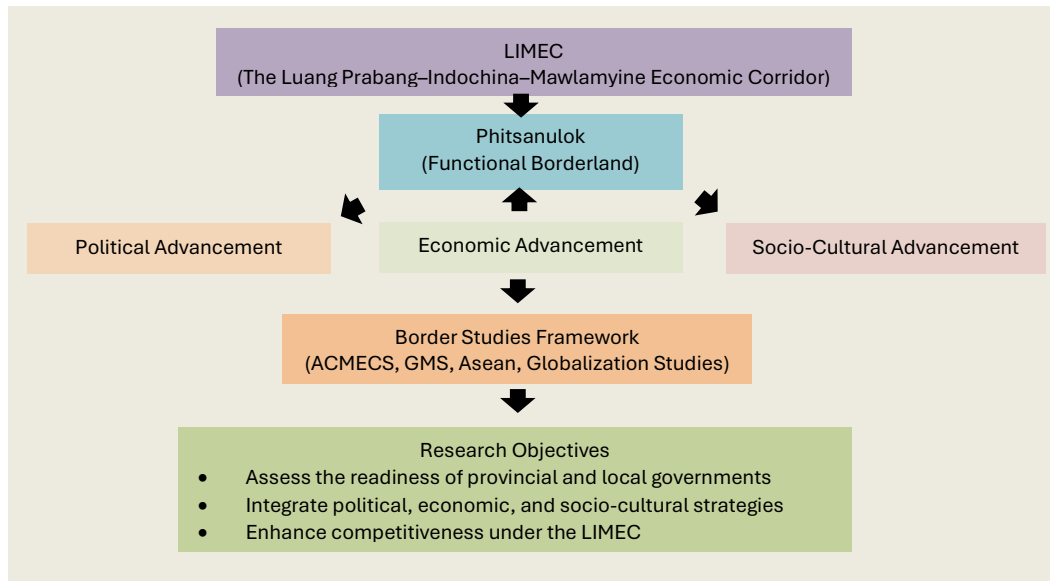
Thirdly, globalization and evolving border dynamics transform borders into active areas of collaboration instead of fixed separations. Sparke et al. (2004) argue that states and transnational corporations exert influence in border zones, thereby converting these areas into crucial centers for commerce and regulation. Sangkhamanee (2012) emphasizes the political and economic roles in labor management and investment facilitation, supporting Paasi (2022) perspective that borders are dynamic and socially constructed spaces.

The examination of these studies underscores the strategic significance of Phitsanulok Province within LIMEC. Literature highlights that attaining sustainable development in border regions necessitates cohesive policies, enhanced infrastructure, and inclusive strategies that reconcile economic benefits with the requirements of local communities (Berzi, 2017). The insights presented establish a conceptual foundation for this study's framework, which emphasizes three interconnected dimensions of readiness: Political Advancement, Economic Advancement, and Socio-Cultural Advancement. Additional dimensions, including technology, environment, and security, are recognized but considered as integral components within these three domains. This guarantees that the framework stays consistent with the theoretical foundations of border studies and the empirical findings from Phitsanulok, providing a thorough perspective for evaluating readiness under LIMEC.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 4

Conceptual Framework (Pounpunwong, 2025)



The conceptual framework emphasizes political, economic, and socio-cultural advancements as the three fundamental dimensions, as they align directly with the research objectives of evaluating the preparedness of provincial and local governments, integrating strategies across these areas, and improving competitiveness under the LIMEC. Political advancement signifies the necessary institutional and governance capabilities required to execute and harmonize development strategies. Economic advancement pertains to the infrastructure, investment, and cross-border trade opportunities that are vital for regional competitiveness. Socio-cultural advancement highlights the importance of social capital and cultural identity, which are essential for fostering cooperation and legitimacy among communities. Dimensions such as environment or security, although pertinent, were omitted as they do not constitute the primary focus of this study. This research is anchored in border studies frameworks (ACMECS, GMS, ASEAN, and globalization studies) that highlight interdependence, governance, and collaboration within the three selected areas. The framework establishes a clear connection between the study's objectives, its conceptual foundation, and the anticipated findings, demonstrating that the readiness for LIMEC integration in Phitsanulok must be examined through the interrelated dynamics of political, economic, and socio-cultural development.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, integrating key elements to comprehensively investigate the subject matter. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University (Certification No. PSRU-EC 2024/031)

Respondents

Field Data Acquisition: Comprehensive interviews were performed with six important informants, meticulously chosen through a purposive sampling technique based on their responsibilities and significance to the research subject. The participants comprised the Governor of Phitsanulok Province, the Provincial Agricultural Officer, the Provincial Commerce Officer, the Provincial Culture Officer, the President of the Phitsanulok Provincial Administrative Organization, and the President of the Phitsanulok Chamber of Commerce.

Instruments

The principal research instrument was a semi-structured interview form designed to generate in-depth information while maintaining consistency across respondents, thereby allowing flexibility to probe specific issues aligned with the research objectives. To complement and triangulate the interview data, secondary sources were systematically employed, including the 20-Year Phitsanulok Provincial Development Plan (2018–2037), the LIMEC framework, the Lower Northern Region 1 Development Plan, and selected governmental and private sector reports directly relevant to political, economic, and socio-cultural development. Scholarly publications and peer-reviewed articles were also incorporated, selected through academic databases (e.g., Thaijo, Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science) based on their recency, relevance to developmental state theory, border studies, globalization, and regional integration, and their contribution to the conceptual framework of this study. The combination of these instruments ensured both empirical depth and theoretical rigor, reinforcing the validity and reliability of the findings.

Procedures

1. Identification of Relevant Sources: The study began with the identification of key documentary sources, including official plans and frameworks such as the 20-Year Phitsanulok Provincial Development Plan (2020–2039), the LIMEC framework, and the Lower Northern Region 1 Development Plan.
2. Collection of Governmental and Private Documents: Relevant policy documents, reports, and records from both governmental agencies and private sector organizations were systematically gathered to ensure a comprehensive coverage of data.
3. Review of Supplementary Materials: Additional resources were collected, including books, academic literature, research reports, and peer-reviewed articles from domestic and international publications, to provide a broad analytical foundation.
4. Data Organization: All collected documents were categorized by type (policy plan, framework, academic study, or report) and arranged chronologically and thematically for systematic analysis.
5. Contextual and Theoretical Analysis: The organized data were examined critically to extract contextual insights and to establish theoretical substantiation for the study's conceptual framework and objectives.

Data Analysis

The author employed qualitative content analysis as the primary approach for data interpretation. Content analysis is a systematic method that identifies patterns, themes, and meanings within textual and visual data, with emphasis on contextual interpretation rather than mere frequency counts. In this study, the data sources included interview transcripts, field notes,

and secondary documents, which were carefully transcribed, organized, and segmented into meaningful units. An inductive coding process was then applied to identify recurring ideas, which were refined into categories aligned with the three dimensions of readiness: political, economic, and socio-cultural.

To enhance credibility, the author applied methodological triangulation by comparing and synthesizing evidence across all data sources. This ensured that findings reflected multiple perspectives rather than a single viewpoint. The resulting categories were grouped into broader themes, highlighting relationships among political, economic, and cultural factors. Finally, the themes were interpreted within the framework of border studies and contextualized in Phitsanulok's development under LIMEC. Findings were presented descriptively, offering detailed explanations and linking empirical evidence to theoretical insights, thereby ensuring credibility, dependability, and transferability of the research

Findings

The key findings can be classified as follows:

The Readiness of Provincial and Local Government in Phitsanulok Province for Political Advancement along LIMEC

The Revised Development Plan for the Lower Northern Region Cluster 1 (2023–2027) and the Phitsanulok Province Development Plan (2023–2027) provide essential information concerning Phitsanulok's readiness to integrate with the Louangphabang-Indochina-Mawlamyine Economic Corridor (LIMEC) development. The key points can be classified as follows:

Augmenting Competitiveness in Political and Administrative Governance

The collaboration between Phitsanulok Province and the Lower Northern Region Cluster 1 seeks to create regional cooperation networks that facilitate economic and infrastructure development associated with LIMEC. This is achieved by establishing effective integrated administrative systems in partnership with nations in GMS, with a particular emphasis on enhancing legislation and policies concerning cross-border trade, investment, and infrastructure (Phitsanulok Provincial Office, 2023). Local administrative organizations prioritize the enhancement of management systems to facilitate economic development, particularly through infrastructure initiatives associated with LIMEC (President of the Phitsanulok Provincial Administrative Organization, personal communication, September 7, 2024) (see Figure 5).

Enhancing International Political Relations

Phitsanulok Province is essential in cultivating political relations with adjacent nations, including Laos and Myanmar, by prioritizing the enhancement of infrastructure and transportation networks to facilitate commerce, investment, and intercultural collaboration under the LIMEC framework. Principal initiatives encompass the establishment of logistical networks and trade centers to entice investments from BIMSTEC and GMS member nations (Phitsanulok Provincial Statistics Committee, 2023).

Advancing Regional Leadership

The evolution of Phitsanulok as a regional hub requires enhancing its political and administrative leadership. This entails the integration of sociological and cultural advancement with political strategies. Promoting local customs and culture seeks to bolster sustainable tourism and economic competitiveness (Phitsanulok Provincial Cultural Office, 2022).

Furthermore, information obtained from the interview with the Deputy Governor of Phitsanulok highlights the political factors affecting LIMEC partnership. The alignment of provincial and municipal development plans with national policies is essential for guaranteeing coherent and sustainable operations. The Deputy Governor emphasized the significance of cooperation among the Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), municipalities, and other entities to enable strategic integration for Phitsanulok's readiness within LIMEC. Infrastructure development, including highways, dual-track trains, and logistics networks, is prioritized to enhance connection between Phitsanulok and adjacent nations. These initiatives seek to augment the province's economic capacity. A significant issue in LIMEC cooperation is the ambiguity in national-level policy, which may impede project execution (Deputy Governor of Phitsanulok Province, personal communication, September 30, 2024; President of the Phitsanulok Provincial Administrative Organization, personal communication, September 7, 2024). Consequently, political readiness among government institutions in Phitsanulok should prioritize enhancing policy clarity at the national level to successfully bolster provincial initiatives. Monitoring progress is ongoing through joint working groups involving the central government and the Lower Northern Region Cluster, with discussions in the House of Representatives regarding the formation of a special committee to examine the growth of the northern special economic zone (Kochanun, 2024) (see Figure 6).

Nevertheless, the findings reveal that LIMEC's overall progress is still primarily driven by private-sector initiatives, with limited involvement from the governments of Thailand, Laos, and especially Myanmar. This imbalance poses risks to long-term sustainability, as the absence of strong state support undermines the establishment of stable cross-border cooperation. The situation is further complicated by Myanmar's internal instability, particularly in Mon and Karen States, where many of LIMEC's key stakeholders are located. These challenges highlight that Phitsanulok's political readiness, while notable, cannot alone ensure the success of the corridor. The province's efforts must be complemented by the readiness of other strategic nodes along LIMEC and supported by trilateral governmental cooperation. Without stronger institutional mechanisms and national-level engagement, LIMEC risks fragmentation and overreliance on private actors, leaving it vulnerable to political and economic volatility (Phitsanulok Provincial Office, 2023; President of the Phitsanulok Provincial Administrative Organization, personal communication, September 7, 2024; President of the Phitsanulok Chamber of Commerce, personal communication, September 30, 2024).

Figure 5*LIMEC Conference Collaboration (Phitsanulok Provincial Office, 2023)***Figure 6**

Developing The Lower Northern Cluster 1 into the Driving Force for the Trade Economic Corridor (LIMEC) - Agenda of the House of Representatives Meeting, Thursday, February 8, 2024 (Phitsanulok Provincial Office, 2023)



The Readiness of Provincial and Local Governments in Phitsanulok Province for Economic Advancement along LIMEC

Phitsanulok Province has made substantial preparations for its involvement in LIMEC, emphasizing logistics connectivity and economic integration. Phitsanulok serves as a vital logistical nexus linking Laos, Myanmar, and India, having established infrastructure including highways, dual-track trains, and border checkpoints such as Phu Du and Mae Sot (Phitsanulok Province Commerce, personal communication, October 2, 2024). These routes enable cross-border commerce, especially in agricultural commodities such as maize and cassava, which are significant imports and exports between the province and its neighboring regions (Pounpunwong, 2025) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

The Route Between Mae Sot-Myawaddy (Thailand-Myanmar) and Phu Du-Pak Lai (Thailand-Laos) (Jansombat, 2020)



The findings highlight that Phitsanulok's agricultural products, particularly maize and cassava, play a significant role in cross-border trade under the LIMEC framework. These crops are exported primarily through the Mae Sot checkpoint in Tak Province for trade with Myanmar and the Phu Du checkpoint in Uttaradit Province for trade with Laos. While provinces such as Uttaradit and Tak also produce agricultural commodities, Phitsanulok is emphasized because of its function as a regional logistics hub. The province hosts collection, processing, and distribution centers that aggregate products from surrounding areas before channeling them across borders. This logistical capacity enables Phitsanulok to contribute large volumes of exports transiting through border checkpoints and ensures its farmers are directly integrated into regional supply chains. Thus, the case of Phitsanulok demonstrates how cross-border agricultural trade stimulates broader economic participation by linking local producers to transnational markets within the LIMEC framework.

Notwithstanding this advancement, obstacles in logistics systems, such as antiquated transport software and insufficient infrastructure, persist in impeding efficiency and expansion (President of the Phitsanulok Chamber of Commerce, personal communication, September 30, 2024). The collaboration between the governmental and commercial sectors is essential for Phitsanulok's economic readiness. Joint committees consisting of the Chamber of Commerce, industry associations, and tourism organizations have been formed to enhance regional trade and investment (Phitsanulok Province Commerce, personal communication, October 2, 2024). International conferences and networking events enhance commercial relations with adjacent nations, fostering growth potential (Deputy Governor of Phitsanulok Province, personal communication, September 30, 2024). Frequent alterations in provincial leadership have disturbed policy consistency, compromising long-term development objectives (President of the Phitsanulok Provincial Administrative Organization, personal communication, September 7, 2024).

Stakeholders have recognized a significant challenge: the lack of a coherent national strategy for incorporating LIMEC development into Thailand's overarching economic ambitions. Present initiatives are confined to the regional level, without adequate support and budgetary allocation from the federal government (Governor of Phitsanulok Province, personal communication, September 30, 2024). This misalignment hinders the province's capacity to enhance its trade and investment opportunities, particularly in critical areas such as agriculture and logistics (Deputy Governor of Phitsanulok Province, personal communication,

September 30, 2024). Notwithstanding these challenges, Phitsanulok's economic potential is indisputable. The province is ideally situated to emerge as a significant logistical center in the Mekong subregion, facilitating trade and investment exchanges among Laos, Myanmar, and India. Expanding agricultural processing industries, including rice, cassava, and sugarcane, could substantially increase export value. Phitsanulok presents prospects for attracting international investment in manufacturing, processing, and tourism, thereby reinforcing its position as an economic hub (Director of the Phitsanulok Provincial Agricultural Extension Office, personal communication, September 30, 2024).

To properly actualize its potential, Phitsanulok must tackle several critical areas. Initially, national policy support is crucial, necessitating explicit incorporation of LIMEC development in strategic plans and augmented budget allocation for infrastructural enhancements. Secondly, the province must update its logistics systems by investing in sophisticated software and technologies to optimize cross-border trade. Third, promoting agricultural processing businesses by investment in large-scale facilities can enhance the value of local food and increase exports. Ultimately, maintaining policy consistency at the provincial level is essential for fostering sustained economic growth (President of the Phitsanulok Chamber of Commerce, personal communication, September 30, 2024).

In conclusion, although Phitsanulok has significantly advanced in its preparation for LIMEC development, it is essential to tackle difficulties such as policy discontinuity, inadequate national assistance, and logistical inefficiencies. By capitalizing on its strategic location and enhancing its agriculture and logistical industries, Phitsanulok may establish itself as a prominent economic center in the Mekong region.

The Readiness of Provincial and Local Authorities in Phitsanulok Province for Socio-Cultural Advancement along LIMEC

Phitsanulok Province has made considerable efforts to prepare its social and cultural aspects in accordance with LIMEC. Through the synthesis of data from interviews with principal players, the operational report of the Phitsanulok province Culture Office, and strategic development plans at the province and cluster levels, numerous significant initiatives and difficulties have been discerned. A primary objective is the promotion and preservation of local culture to enhance cultural tourism. Phitsanulok is distinguished for its extensive cultural heritage, featuring distinctive customs such as the Worship Ceremony of Phra Buddha Chinnarat, the Pak Thong Chai tradition, and the Land of King Naresuan the Great Festival (see Figure 8). These activities not only underscore the province's cultural uniqueness but also provide opportunities to attract international tourists, especially from neighboring countries such as Laos, Myanmar, and India. Cultural exchange programs and international cultural festivals have been established to strengthen relations between Phitsanulok and LIMEC nations. The development of cultural and natural tourist sites, including cultural events, has been a strategic priority. Locations such as Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat and Phu Hin Rong Kla National Park (see Figure 9) have been designated for improvement as significant cultural and historical sites. These attractions are being incorporated into international travel routes connecting Phitsanulok with adjacent nations, thereby enhancing its status as a regional tourism center. The plans involve establishing cross-border tourism circuits linking Phitsanulok with significant entrance sites, including the Phu Du border in Laos and routes to Myanmar.

Phitsanulok has prioritized the promotion of cultural products under its comprehensive economic development strategy. Local crafts, processed agricultural products, and other items

grounded in traditional knowledge are being enhanced to augment their market worth and competitiveness. Initiatives like the promotion of OTOP (One Tambon One Product) commodities and Geographical Indication (GI) items, such as Nam Dok Mai mangoes and Bang Krathum dry bananas, correspond with LIMEC's objectives of enhancing regional trade and investment (President of the Phitsanulok Chamber of Commerce, personal communication, September 30, 2024). Another essential element is promoting international cultural collaboration. Collaborative initiatives, including cross-border cultural displays and artist exchanges with Laos, Myanmar, and India, seek to strengthen cultural connections. These programs not only foster mutual understanding but also facilitate deeper socio-economic integration among LIMEC countries.

Importantly, this research underscores that traditions deeply rooted in local identity such as the Worship Ceremony of Phra Buddha Chinnarat (see Figure 10) and the Pak Thong Chai tradition (see Figure 11) can serve not only as community-centered practices but also as distinctive cultural markers for international visitors when effectively curated and promoted. While their spiritual and symbolic meanings resonate most strongly with local communities, careful packaging through international tourism campaigns, cross-border tour packages, and cultural cooperation programs can transform these traditions into attractive experiences for regional and global tourists. Aligning these cultural practices with LIMEC's broader socio-cultural objectives would enable Phitsanulok to convert its heritage into a sustainable driver of international tourism and regional collaboration (Phitsanulok Provincial Industry Office, 2021).

Despite these achievements, Phitsanulok encounters numerous problems. A significant concern is the absence of a definitive national plan for LIMEC integration, which constrains development initiatives to regional tiers. Moreover, deficiencies in tourist-related infrastructure, including unfinished transit links connecting to adjacent countries, impede the complete realization of cross-border cultural exchanges and tourism advancement (President of the Phitsanulok Chamber of Commerce, personal communication, September 30, 2024). Stakeholders, comprising the Deputy Governor of Phitsanulok and members from the province commerce office and chamber of commerce, have underscored the necessity for enhanced cooperation from the national government to rectify these deficiencies. Phitsanulok's social and cultural advancement under LIMEC necessitates concentrated efforts in multiple domains. These encompass the improvement of tourism infrastructure, the development of sustainable cultural tourism frameworks, and the utilization of local history to entice both tourists and investors (Deputy Governor of Phitsanulok Province, personal communication, September 30, 2024). Developing proficient human resources in cultural and tourist management is also crucial for the sustained success of these activities (Phitsanulok Provincial Industry Office, 2021).

In summary, Phitsanulok Province is strategically poised to emerge as a cultural and economic center in the Mekong Subregion. By enhancing its social and cultural activities, effectively curating distinctive traditions for international appeal, and tackling current difficulties, Phitsanulok may optimize its potential within the LIMEC framework, thereby aiding regional integration and sustainable development.

Figure 8

Pak Thong Chai Traditional (Phitsanulok Provincial Cultural Office, 2022)



Figure 9

Phu Hin Rong Kla National Park (Phitsanulok Provincial Cultural Office, 2022)

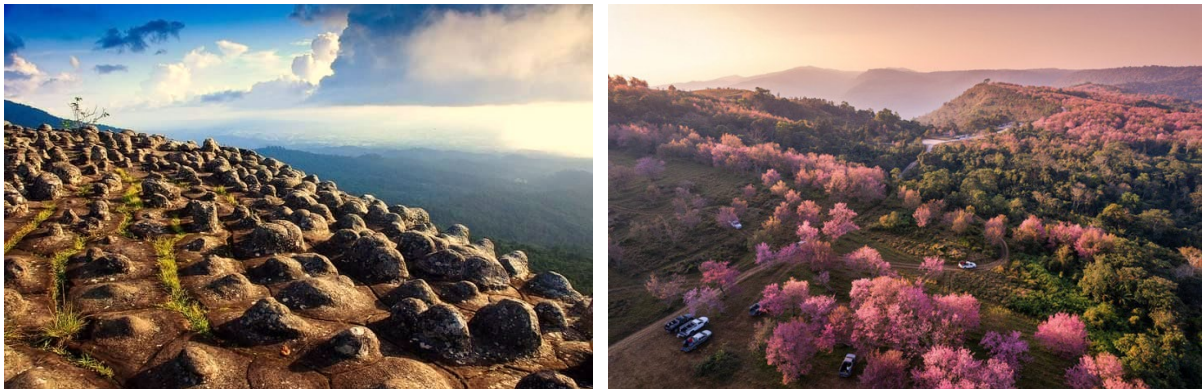


Figure 10

The Worship Ceremony of Phra Buddha Chinnarat (Phitsanulok Provincial Cultural Office, 2022)



Figure 11

The Land of King Naresuan the Great Festival (Phitsanulok Provincial Cultural Office, 2022)



Discussion

This analysis employs theoretical frameworks of borderlands to assess Phitsanulok Province's readiness for development along LIMEC. These frameworks illuminate the complex interconnections among the state, politics, and capitalism systems, providing a multifaceted view of readiness and strategic initiatives. Academic contributions are incorporated to enhance depth, highlighting both agreement and disagreement in current discussions on borderland dynamics. The discourse is organized into five principal themes:

Borderlands as Areas of Restricted State Authority and Intricate Governance

The notion of borderlands designates these regions as marginal territories where the central government's authority is frequently insufficient, resulting in sociopolitical intricacies and varied relationships. Santhasombat (2008) emphasizes that borderlands often serve as focal points for cross-border commerce and commercial activity, which are only partially regulated by the state. In Phitsanulok, border checkpoints like Phu Du and Mae Sot facilitate trade across Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, exemplifying the intricate dynamics of border-related economic regulation. The infrastructure development in Phitsanulok, including highways, dual-track trains, and logistics networks, illustrates a strategy aimed at enhancing trade and economic integration. This methodology corresponds with the views of Sparke et al. (2004) about borderlands in the context of globalization, indicating that these areas are influenced not only by state authority but also by transnational companies (TNCs). These firms utilize borderlands as crucial areas for transnational trade and global economic endeavors (Walker, 1999). Phitsanulok's role as a logistics and economic center exemplifies how border regions can function as catalysts for transnational capitalist growth under LIMEC.

Cross-border Trade as a Stimulus for Economic Engagement

Cross-border trade, a fundamental aspect of LIMEC's goals in Phitsanulok, exemplifies the distinctive economic traits of border regions. Sangkhamanee (2012) posits that border zones, characterized by cultural diversity and interethnic exchanges, cultivate unique economic linkages that function beyond the complete jurisdiction of the state. The agricultural commerce of maize and cassava in Phitsanulok highlights the economic distinctiveness of the borderland. These operations exemplify the collaboration of private and multinational entities that leverage borderland dynamics to enhance the allocation of resources and goods. This unique type of economic connection underscores the borderland's function as a catalyst for economic integration, allowing for regional trading practices that are influenced by global dynamics. It also illustrates the conflict between the state's aspiration for regulatory oversight and the intrinsic adaptability of borderland businesses (Buadaeng, 2012).

Frontier Capitalism: Extending Capitalist Influence into Borderlands

The frontier capitalism framework views borders as areas where capitalism infiltrates to exploit unexploited resources, propelled by the movement of capital, labor, and goods. Within the framework of LIMEC, Phitsanulok is essential for facilitating cross-border trade and regional logistical networks that link the Mekong subregion. Yeung (2004) work underscores the significance of borderlands as critical hubs for global economic activities and investments. Phitsanulok's evolution into a logistics hub exemplifies the economic utility of borderlands as

arenas that promote the global proliferation of capitalism. Multinational firms are crucial in these dynamics, utilizing borderlands as operational centers to diminish the importance of state-imposed boundaries. Phitsanulok's strategic location inside LIMEC highlights its potential as a center for regional and global economic integration, emphasizing the transformative effects of frontier capitalism (Thippimol & Saijampa, 2011).

Policy Discontinuity and Political Obstacles in Borderland Development

A major obstacle to Phitsanulok's development under LIMEC is the inconsistency of national policies. Frequent alterations in provincial leadership and inadequate financial allocations have impeded the steady execution of long-term infrastructure initiatives (Leake & Haines, 2017). Buadaeng (2012) characterizes borderlands as areas where central state control is frequently disjointed, resulting in policy inconsistencies and resource misallocation that hinder development initiatives. This governance deficiency facilitates unrestrained capitalism's exploitation of borders for resource extraction and labor (Sangkhamanee, 2012). The absence of unified policies in Phitsanulok has hindered the sustained development of essential infrastructure for LIMEC's success, including logistics networks and transportation systems (Renliang et al., 2024).

Socio-cultural Effects of Economic Development in Border Regions

The incorporation of borders into capitalist frameworks impacts local communities, transforming traditional lifestyles and sociocultural institutions. Buadaeng (2019) elucidates how frontier capitalism disturbs rural dynamics by integrating them into capitalist economies. The advancement of LIMEC related initiatives in Phitsanulok, including cultural tourism and natural attractions, is altering the sociocultural environment. The promotion of traditional festivals and the enhancement of cultural heritage sites seek to attract regional tourists, especially from Laos and Myanmar. Although these projects offer economic prospects, they also pose a threat to the diversity of local cultures and may intensify social disparities (García-Álvarez & Trillo-Santamaría, 2013). The sociocultural aspect of LIMEC development necessitates meticulous oversight to harmonize economic advancement with cultural conservation, guaranteeing fair advantages for borderland populations (Chaowsangra, 2017).

The conceptual conclusions regarding Phitsanulok's preparation for LIMEC can be summarized as follows:

Political Readiness:

Phitsanulok's efforts to foster cross-border diplomatic relations with Laos and Myanmar align with Santhasombat (2008) assertion that countries should extend their influence into border areas. These diplomatic endeavors demonstrate the use of borderlands as platforms for political collaboration to exploit economic opportunities.

Economic Readiness:

Infrastructure development projects, such as dual-track railways and border-connecting roadways, highlight Yeung (2004) viewpoint of borders as vital economic connections. However, persistent issues such as policy inconsistencies and funding inadequacies underscore the challenges of leveraging boundaries for economic progress. And

Sociocultural Readiness:

The emphasis on cultural preservation and tourism corresponds with Buadaeng (2012) on the integration of local traditions into economic growth. The successful implementation, however, depends on addressing challenges such as inadequate funding and the risk of cultural commodification.

Furthermore, the researchers have disclosed their findings regarding the readiness of province and local government sectors in Phitsanulok to conform to the political, economic, and socio-cultural development associated with LIMEC. The researchers analyzed the research findings with a review of pertinent literature and studies, identifying both concordant and divergent outcomes, which are provided as follows:

The Focus is on Political and Local Administration Issues

The enhancement of political and geographical administrative competitiveness, together with the fortification of collaboration between local and national government entities, are essential elements in the preparation of Phitsanulok Province. Renliang et al. (2024) research examines the state's role in developing policies that correspond with local economic growth, highlighting the necessity of coordination among government entities and the application of state-market relations in the context of globalization. This study underscores the issue of policy discontinuity at the provincial level in Phitsanulok, attributable to frequent alterations in provincial leadership. National policies must be explicit and aligned with local development strategies to guarantee project sustainability. This encompasses the establishment of collaborative networks at local and regional tiers. The linkage between Phitsanulok Province and adjacent nations, including Laos and Myanmar, is crucial for fostering collaboration in economic, tourism, and cultural advancement. Sohaimi et al. (2024) research examines the formulation of policies to enhance special economic development zones along the Thailand-Malaysia border, highlighting that international cooperation is crucial for fostering economic development in border regions, consistent with the development objectives in Phitsanulok aimed at establishing cross-border collaboration. The matters of politics and local administration, the enhancement of competitiveness in political and spatial governance, and the fortification of collaboration between local and national government entities are essential elements in the preparation of Phitsanulok Province. Riain (2000) research examines the state's role in developing policies that correspond with local economic development, highlighting the necessity of coordination across government agencies and the effective use of state-market relations in the context of globalization. This study underscores the issue of policy discontinuity at the provincial level in Phitsanulok, attributable to frequent alterations in provincial leadership. National policies must be explicit and aligned with local development strategies to guarantee project sustainability. This encompasses the establishment of collaborative networks at local and regional tiers. The linkage between Phitsanulok Province and adjacent nations, including Laos and Myanmar, is crucial for fostering collaboration in economic, tourism, and cultural advancement. Sohaimi et al. (2024) research examined the formulation of policies to enhance special economic development zones along the Thai-Malaysian border, highlighting that international cooperation is essential for fostering economic development in border regions, consistent with the development objectives in Phitsanulok focused on establishing cross-border collaboration.

The State's Role in the Development Process and the Formulation of Economic Policy

The state is crucial in formulating and implementing policies that correspond with local and regional economic development objectives. According to Wade (2018) the state's involvement in the formulation and development of economic policies is examined. The state is crucial in formulating and implementing policies that correspond with local and regional economic development objectives. Wade (2018) in *The Developmental State: Dead or Alive?* underscores the crucial function of the state in emerging nations in regulating and bolstering the economy, particularly concerning regional development. This research pertains to the development of LIMEC, whereby the state significantly influences the formulation of plans and the creation of policies to bolster local competitiveness. The enhancement of infrastructure and logistics in Phitsanulok Province, including highways and dual-track trains, is crucial for facilitating economic connectivity among Laos, Myanmar, and India. Motana (2016) research underscores the necessity of establishing transportation routes to enhance transport and logistics in the region, which is consistent with Phitsanulok's development strategy to position the province as a logistical hub within the Mekong River Basin. Furthermore, international economic partnership, particularly among Laos, Myanmar, and India, is a central theme highlighted in both the literature study and the developments in Phitsanulok Province. Establishing regional cooperation networks is essential for fostering economic development. Capannelli et al. (2009) research indicates that regional economic integration, exemplified by ASEAN, influences trade and investment expansion in the Mekong River Basin, correlating with the advancement of LIMEC.

Societal and Cultural Concerns

Promoting cultural tourism in Phitsanulok province encompasses initiatives to enhance cultural tourist attractions, including the Phra Buddha Chinnarat Festival and the Pak Thong Chai tradition, which may align with the advancement of LIMEC. Hongsuwan (2016) research elucidates the significance of integrating local traditions with economic growth, particularly in tourism, where collaboration between the government and private sector can generate economic value from these traditions. The initiative in Phitsanulok seeks to draw tourists from adjacent nations by highlighting culturally significant places. This encompasses the creation of cultural products. Phitsanulok Province actively fosters the creation of products with local character, including OTOP and GI items, to enhance international market access. Chalayonnavin (2017) research advocates for the utilization of indigenous knowledge to bolster competitiveness in the global market, especially within AEC, which corresponds with Phitsanulok's economic development strategy aimed at augmenting the value of local products. The promotion of cultural tourism in Phitsanulok Province encompasses plans to enhance cultural tourist attractions, including the Phra Buddha Chinnarat Festival and the Pak Thong Chai tradition, which may be integrated with the development of LIMEC. Hongsuwan (2016) research elucidates the significance of integrating local traditions with economic growth, especially in tourism, where collaboration between the government and private sectors can generate economic value for local customs. Phitsanulok is endeavoring to entice tourists from adjacent nations by enhancing cultural tourist sites and generating cultural items. Phitsanulok Province actively fosters the production of items embodying local identity, such as OTOP and GI (Geographical Indication), to enhance international market reach Chalayonnavin (2017) research advocates for leveraging local wisdom to enhance competitiveness in the global market, especially within AEC, which

corresponds with Phitsanulok's economic development strategy focused on augmenting the value of local products.

In summary, the literature review and related research provide a clearer picture of Phitsanulok's readiness for economic, political, and cultural development along LIMEC. The findings align with existing theories and studies, particularly regarding infrastructure connectivity and cross-border economic cooperation. However, challenges remain, such as the lack of clear national policies and frequent leadership changes, which disrupt the continuity of long-term strategies. This synthesis underscores the importance of integrating research findings with practical development strategies. To ensure sustainable progress, Phitsanulok must address these challenges through enhanced coordination between local and national policies, strengthened regional cooperation, and strategic alignment of initiatives with the broader goals of LIMEC.

Conclusion

This study indicates that Phitsanulok Province exhibits considerable political, economic, and socio-cultural preparedness to enhance development along LIMEC, establishing itself as a regional logistics hub and a socio-cultural connector within ASEAN, GMS, ACMECS, and BIMSTEC. Political alignment and policy integration establish a robust foundation, while economic strengths in trade and infrastructure, coupled with cultural assets and tourism, bolster cross-border connectivity and facilitate people-to-people exchange. Nonetheless, ongoing challenges such as fragmented governance, limited resources, and gaps in national-local coordination present obstacles to effective implementation. Overcoming these challenges through enhanced multi-level collaboration, ongoing infrastructure investment, and cultural promotion is crucial to guarantee that Phitsanulok's preparedness leads to sustainable growth and significant regional integration.

Recommendations and Future Directions

To enhance Phitsanulok's position within LIMEC, this study suggests the creation of a national-level coordinating body to facilitate policy integration and provide consistent support. It also advocates for the expedited investment in infrastructure, including dual-track railways, improved border checkpoints, and advanced digital logistics systems. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of fostering cultural integration through sustainable tourism and the development of value-added industries such as OTOP and GI products. Through the integration of political coordination, economic modernization, and cultural advancement, Phitsanulok can strategically establish itself as a logistical hub and a socio-cultural gateway. This approach aligns provincial development with regional frameworks such as ASEAN, GMS, ACMECS, and BIMSTEC, promoting long-term and sustainable regional growth.

Author Contributions

WP: Conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing – original draft preparation, writing – review and editing, visualization, project administration, and funding acquisition.

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Chatgpt version 5.4 and Scopus AI to assist with language editing and polishing of the draft. The tool was used solely to improve clarity, grammar, and overall readability. The authors reviewed and revised the output as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Ethics

This study received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, Approval No. PSRU-EC 2024/031. All procedures followed relevant ethical guidelines, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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