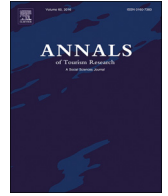




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Reframing informal tourism entrepreneurial practices: Capital and field relations structuring the informal tourism economy of Chiang Mai

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the types of capitals possessed by informal tourism entrepreneurs and locates their value within the field relations that orders their contribution to the tourism system. Bourdieu's theory on fields and capitals was applied to ethnographic narrative accounts of stakeholders in tourism in Chiang Mai, Thailand to assess these roles. Informal entrepreneurs have limited access to resources and their perspectives are excluded from academic debates and policy initiatives. The paper identifies the dynamism, positive social capital, flexibility, and symbolic capital of informal entrepreneurs. These are related to the field conditions that determine and structure their contribution to tourism destinations. The analysis reveals the importance of collaboration between informal entrepreneurs and other stakeholders, concluding with recommendations for policy makers.

Introduction

The informal economy provides essential products and services, and generates employment, particularly in developing countries (Chen, 2006). Informal entrepreneurs enhance the competitiveness of regional economies through their input in the provision of tourism goods and services, and their involvement in strategic networks and supply chains (Jones, Mondar, & Edwards, 2006). Yet while the formal economy is represented as a positive force in the economy, characterised as *modern*, *developed* or *advanced*, the informal economy is denoted mostly in negative terms, as *traditional*, *underdeveloped* and *backward* (Williams, 2008). Therefore, often, the views of informal entrepreneurs have been marginalized. The issues affecting informal entrepreneurs are frequently unobserved in academic or professional discussions.

The aim of this article is to explore informal tourism entrepreneurs' positions in the tourism system through an analysis of the 'structural fields' in which they operate. It focuses on an investigation into the range of capitals they possess and explores how these are determined by the actions of a range of other actors in the system (the formal tourism industry sector, NGOs and Government), which represent the 'structural field' relations. The paper examines the extent that informal entrepreneurs are excluded from policy actions, particularly those processes aimed at developing entrepreneurialism in tourism, to highlight the missed opportunity this represents for growing entrepreneurial activity. Through a focus on these issues, the paper seeks to contribute in number of ways. Firstly, it aims to highlight the complexity of political and socio-economic issues in tourism governance of informal economic activity,

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particularly in a developing country context, to inform policy development to support entrepreneurial activities. Secondly, recognizing the unequal power relations among stakeholders in the sector, the paper applies Bourdieu's theory of fields and capitals to better understand the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion within the system.

Whilst Bourdieu's theory of capital has been successfully applied to explain tourism phenomena, the extension of the theory into fields of power has yet to be undertaken. Bourdieu's concepts of fields of power helps us to go beyond the identification of the types of capitals possessed by people working in the informal tourism sector. We develop a conceptual model of the linkages between informal entrepreneurs and other stakeholders and, suggest ways to learn from and connect the different fields and capitals to benefit society and economy as a whole.

The context for this study is Thailand, which is Southeast Asia's second largest economy, yet with the highest ratio of revenue evolving out of the informal economic sector (Bloomberg Business, 2015). Chiang Mai (literally meaning *new city*) is the second largest city of Thailand. The city has a fortunate location near to many cultural attractions, which appeal to international tourists. It is also a transfer hub to northern destinations and a popular backpacker centre with a unique cultural heritage. Chiang Mai is the provincial capital city and attracts many migrants from surrounding rural areas as well as neighbouring countries.

In addition, due to high elasticity in the supply of rural labour in Thailand, there is a continuous movement from the agricultural sector into manufacturing and service sectors (Nakanishi, 1996). However, the formal economy in Chiang Mai lacks capacity to absorb them. The attractive characteristics of the informal economy such as, relative low entry barriers, labour intensive, small-scale activities, pull unemployed workers towards the sector (Todaro, 2000). In particular, the tourism industry offers low/semi-skilled jobs, a variety of indirect positions, and often requires minimal education and formal qualifications. As a result, the informal tourism economy has absorbed much of the labour surplus in Chiang Mai, presenting an interesting location to analyse these perspectives and practices.

Informal entrepreneurship

The informal economy is a complex phenomenon and one that has attracted interdisciplinary attention from a range of perspectives including, sociology of work and economic sociology, anthropology, geography and development studies and entrepreneurship. There are many different terms used to describe it, including the 'black' economy, invisible or shadow economy and the irregular economy (Losby et al., 2002). Whilst the different approaches have led to contrasting emphases on varying aspects of the informal economy, they share some common defining characteristics including, that exchange activities are undertaken, which are unrecorded in government auditing and accounting systems. The breadth of cash or non-cash economic activities is very broad, including, paid but not taxed, unpaid exchanges, and both legal and/or illegal activities, in addition to varying types of labour market conditions. Although the informal economy concept emerged in the context of less developed countries, more recently, research has focused on the phenomenon in advanced economies (cf Sassen, 1997). Economic restructuring to tertiary, service economies, the extension of neoliberal labour market policies, and the effects of the global financial crisis, are some of the reasons behind an expansion in informal economic activities.

From a management studies perspective, much of the research on the informal economy activities emerged in the context of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship enhances economic growth (Carree & Thurik, 2010), creates jobs (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2008) and fosters innovation (Luke, Verreynne, & Kearins, 2007). Nevertheless, a substantial amount of entrepreneurship appears informally outside state regulatory systems (Williams & Nadin, 2010). In a recent review, Williams & Youssef identify four main schools of thought emerging (2013): the modernization perspective that views informal entrepreneurship as a historical legacy, which is expected to rapidly disappear with the advent of the modern formal economy (Geertz, 1963). Secondly, the structuralist perspective, which positions informal entrepreneurship as a necessity-driven endeavour arising when people are excluded from the formal economy (Sassen, 1997; Gallin, 2001). Thirdly, the neoliberal perspective that considers informal entrepreneurs as voluntary entrants taking rational economic decisions to escape from the high costs and bureaucracy of the formal economy (De Soto, 1989). Finally, the poststructuralist perspective views informal entrepreneurship as a lifestyle choice (Chakrabarty, 2000; Getz & Petersen, 2005), and is often based on an examination of the 'sharing economy' business models (Guttentag, 2015).

This discussion points to a number of salient issues. Firstly, the informal economy encompasses a range of positions, activities and motivations, rendering it a complex and multi-dimensional field. Secondly, the binary distinctions between formal/informal entrepreneurship represent a false logic, as increasingly, entrepreneurs can be seen to engage in some less formal or informal activities alongside their role in the formal, structural economy (e.g. Al-Mataani, Wainwright, & Demirel, 2017; Çakmak, Lie, & Selwyn, 2018), blurring the distinctions between formal and informal economic practices. Thirdly, recent debates on the sharing economy show that the rhetoric around informal economic activity is shifting towards a more positive characterisation, and yet in the less developed world such informal activities are still primarily constructed as pejorative.

Informal economy issues in tourism have been studied using all four perspectives outlined above. Some have focused on vendors (Wahnschaf, 1982; Tan, 2004), poverty reduction and pro-poor tourism (Slocum, Backman, & Robinson, 2011), beach resorts (Henderson & Smith, 2009), and resilience of informal entrepreneurs (Biggs, Hall, & Stoeckl, 2012). Others have examined informal business travellers (Timothy & Teye, 2005), human resource development and employment (Liu & Wall, 2006), and cooperative behaviours between cabdrivers and vendors (Damayanti, Scott, & Ruhanen, 2017). Yet others have focused on macro issues such as, 'sharing economy' business models such as Uber and Airbnb (Guttentag, 2015), and on informal micro-finance institutions (Ngoasong & Kimbu, 2016).

In these studies, tourism has often been constructed as a catalyst for the economic development of the global South (Truong, 2014). However, the focus of much research has been on the formal tourism economy and somewhat hopeful that informal activities

will ultimately diminish through improvements in developing countries' economies (Wahnschaft, 1982; Crick, 1992). With similar intentions, international agencies have undertaken considerable initiatives to formalise the tourism economic system in developing countries. However, the focus on pro-poor approaches to informal labour market activities in developing world contexts has led to a situation whereby people's strengths (e.g. skills, capacities, good health) have been largely neglected in favour of a focus on the stimulation of entrepreneurial activities. Thus, informal entrepreneur's capital is not well understood, and so we have little sense of the potential positive contributions offered by their activities to tourism development in the broader context.

The role of international agencies and national governments also presents a limitation in terms of understanding informal entrepreneur's capital. The formal tourism economy has been treated generally as the dominant priority (Kermath & Thomas, 1992; Henderson & Smith, 2009) and formal tourism agents have been able to use their power to force informal enterprises out of principal tourist sites (Tan, 2004). Despite the acknowledged contribution of informal enterprises to national economies, governments have largely supported formal enterprises (Robson & Obeng, 2008), with fewer financial or legal actions offered to support informal entrepreneurs. In practice, (inter)national non-governmental organisation (NGO's) undertake some of the activity not provided by national governments, acting as intermediaries between governments and the informal sector, and delivering training programmes.

However, informal entrepreneurs are often not involved in designing these programmes. The omission of the preferences and priorities of informal entrepreneurs has resulted in being excluded as key stakeholders in these activities. Whilst we might argue that informal entrepreneurs have limited access to common property resources, they may have important skills, resources, qualities and attributes that could be utilized more successfully to enable them to contribute to broader economic development initiatives. In this sense Bourdieu's notions of fields and capitals offers a useful framework to investigate these issues.

Fields and capitals

Bourdieu's primarily concern was to elucidate a "theory of practice". To understand a social phenomenon or to explain interactions between people, Bourdieu argued it is not enough to look only at outcomes (what happened) but also to examine the *field* in which interactions, transactions and events occurred (Bourdieu, 2005). Further, he suggests a three-level approach to study the field of the phenomenon.

First, it is necessary to examine the field in relation with other fields, in particular the field of power. Bourdieu (1998) defines the field of power as the social space that consists of multiple fields such as the economic, political, bureaucratic, scientific, cultural and others. In these fields, different actors and stakeholder groups operate and interact with each other to obtain a position in which they possess a sufficient amount of different forms of capital to dominate the corresponding social space. Ultimately, in the field of power, political power derived by government, and other mediating institutions such as the monarchy, international business and so on are the most powerful actors (Grenfell, 2008).

Secondly, it is necessary to map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by social actors who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority within the field. The positioning of actors is related to the *capitals* they hold. Bourdieu (1986) extends the term 'capital' into four different forms: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. *Economic capital* refers to accumulated wealth in financial assets; *social capital* to durable networks of relationships through which individuals can mobilize power and resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 119). *Cultural capital* consists of cultural attributes incorporated into a disposition expressed in mental and physical features (an embodied form), possession of esteemed cultural material objects (an objectified form), and formal qualification and credentials provided by educational institutions showing skills and knowledge (an institutional form). Finally, *symbolic capital* to a "degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*)" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 7). As a result, capital is the main medium through which the field operates and is used by actors to vie for a position in the field.

However, it is insufficient to study a field as an aggregate of individuals' capital possessions, because the power that capital provides depends on the structure of the field in which it is activated (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007). Thus, a *capital's* value is elicited from the related field where it is recognized, acknowledged and attributed as a 'currency' of exchange and, affords its owner a position within the field according to its defining principles (Grenfell, 2008). These principles have their own *logic of practice*, defined by what is thinkable and achievable within the field. Finally, as a third step, Bourdieu suggests analysing the *habitus* of social agents, the characteristics of individuals including their background, life- and professional worlds in conjunction with their relationship to the field and its logic of practice.

Thus, the field is a multi-dimensional concept denoting the world in which social actors are embedded, and toward which they orient their actions. Martin (2003) suggests three points of a field, namely a cartographic map of positions, relational forces of social actors, and the contest among them as they vie for position within it. Although, Bourdieu mentions all these aspects, the contestation is most significant, as illustrated by his frequent use of a football game metaphor. When a football game is visualized, a field has a square form with internal divisions and external borders. The players have pre-set positions. In order to play a game it is not simply enough for a player to know the specific rules but s/he needs to possess basic skills in addition. Each player decides on his/her actions (e.g. where to go and what to do) with regard to his/her position in the field. Also the surface of field (e.g. grass, artificial turf, weather conditions) determines to an extent what players can do and how the play is played.

Ultimately, Bourdieu suggests, as in football, that a social field consists of positions occupied by social agents (people or institutions) and what happens in the field depends upon its conditions and boundaries. Social agents not only act in one particular field, rather they occupy different positions in different fields at the same time. He suggests that while there are some relationships and transference between these fields, each field possesses its own logics, rules, and principles. Bourdieu further suggested "...a field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and others who are dominated. Constant,

permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field” (Bourdieu, 1998: p.40). This power dimension defines the strategies of social actors and the positions occupied in one field and across fields.

In tourism studies, the idea of the field has mainly been applied to knowledge production, the *intellectual field* (Bourdieu, 1969). With the “knowledge force field”, Tribe (2006) described the path from tourism to tourism knowledge, and how positionality, personhood of a researcher, disciplinary norms, and societal ideologies mediate this path (further developed by Belhassen & Caton, 2009). Whilst researchers have recently called for tourism studies to engage more fully with practice-based approaches to tourism (de Souza Bispo, 2016; Lammers, van der Duim, & Spaargaren, 2017), there are few examples. Pappalepore, Maitland, and Smith (2014) is an exception of an analysis of creative fields in urban contexts through the application of Bourdieu’s notion of distinction.

Therefore, the different types of fields and their relations with tourism offer great potential to explore social practices, and examine which fundamental and specialized forms of capitals are active in fields, and the positions of social agents within them.

In a very recent study, Ahmad (2017) argues, “organizational analysis in the tourism industry within a broader sociological framework has largely received scant scholarly attention” (p.47). He examines power struggles and contestations within and between travel agencies in India using Bourdieu’s framework of relational analysis. In Ahmad’s study, travel agencies import capital and habitus from their previous social and professional arenas to organizational fields to form and shape their habitus in the tourism field. It is clear that Bourdieu’s theory of practice offers great potential to tourism research, and in particular the relational structures in the field of the informal economy, to which we now turn.

Methods

A multiple method, qualitative approach was adopted to understand the interactions of informal entrepreneurs in the tourism economy, and to situate their status in the field within the wider contexts of the relational fields of other actors in the system. The approach combined ethnographic fieldwork with narrative interviews and policy analysis to gain an understanding of the field and insights into how individuals made sense of their positions, in relation to others, and of the situations they encountered.

Ethnographic fieldwork (including a non-participant observation of informal entrepreneurs during their work) was conducted in Chiang Mai, Thailand over three periods between 2015 and 2016. This included the following; observing informal entrepreneurs in their fields, acting as a tourist in interactions with tourism professionals, participating in training sessions offered by non-governmental organisations and analysing media sources about informal entrepreneurship with the assistance of Thai sociology scholars (see Table 1 for details).

Narratives, which individuals use to make sense of past, current and future events, provide insights into people’s interests and agenda’s (Cobb, 2006). Narrative approaches have been used widely in tourism studies to explore people’s lived experiences and their identities (McCabe & Foster, 2006). People express their positions, interpretations of others and objects, and emotions through storied experiences (Mishler, 1995). As a result, narratives are an essential tool to understand the perspectives of tourism stakeholders and the way they produce social reality (Gergen, 1988). Interviewing followed a semi-structured approach whereby respondents were asked to share his/her subjective story of as experience in a chronological sequence of events, often in informal interview contexts. In particular, with informal entrepreneurs, a biographic interview method was used to explore individual experiences, lived situations and life histories.

A judgment sampling method was used to capture a variety of perspectives towards informal entrepreneurship. More precisely, a maximum variation sampling aimed to capture a variation of perspectives towards informal entrepreneurship. Participants were chosen according to their particular characteristics in relation to the aims of the study. To allow participants to express their emotional and personal experiences, the prime challenge was to build a trusting relationship with people in the field. Apart from two interviews (conducted in Thai with a Thai sociology scholar), all the interviews were conducted in English.

The main tranche of data consists of field notes, policy documents from public organisations, handbooks, curricula, and promotion materials from NGOs, travel brochures from tourism enterprises, maps, photos, family stories, media stories, and 32 interviews and conversations collected from informal entrepreneurs, their business partners and relations, from other key informants in the public and private sector and residents. Table 2 outlines participant profiles, some demographic details, the number of interviews, and media analysis conducted across the fieldwork periods.

Table 1
Fieldwork overview.

Ethnographic research	Narrative interviews	Participant observations	Media analysis	Participating training sessions
March 2015	8	Street observations	Yes (of minor significance)	With local NGO
March - April 2016	18	Participation in the tours Weekly participation in professional meetings with local NGOs, informal entrepreneurs	Yes	With residents
May 2016	6	Street observation	Yes	
<i>Total</i>	32 narrative interviews		3 media analyses	

Table 2
Participant profiles of narrative interviews.

Period	Participant profiles	Participant demographics	Nr. of interviews	Media analysis
March–April 2015	Manager NGO	Female, Thai, 43 years old	2	
	Field coordinator NGO	Male, expatriate, 36 years old	1	
	Informal entrepreneur	Female, Burmese, 32 years old	1	
	Sociology scholar	Female, Thai, 41 years old	1	1
	Tour operator	Male, expatriate, 57 years old	1	
	Tour operator	Male, expatriate, 31 years old	1	
	Business partner of an informal entrepreneur	Male, Thai, 35 years old	1	
March–April 2016	Sociology scholar	Female, Thai, 42 years old	1	3
	Region manager Royal institution	Male, Thai, 35 years old	1	
	Informal entrepreneurs	Mixed gender, Burmese migrants, age between 23 and 42	7	
	Informal entrepreneurs	Mixed gender, Thai, age between 26 and 44	5	
	Residents	Male, Thai, 26, 31, 45 years old	3	1
May 2016	Formal business owner	Female, Thai, 49 years old	1	
	Government officers from different ministries	Mixed gender, Thai, 26, 33, 46, 55 years old	4	
	Formal business owner	Male, Thai, 34 years old	1	
	Sociology scholar	Female, Thai, 42 years old	1	2
	Informal entrepreneur	Male, Thai, 35 years old	1	

An interpretive approach was taken to analyse the data. The analysis aimed at a holistic perspective to assess how the relations within the field and the various capitals intersected, overlapped or were distinct. To interpret meanings, we analysed the underlining discourse, as well as the context of each story and narrator, focusing on metaphors, symbols and insights. Subsequently, the narratives were compared with the purpose of detecting similarities, contradictions in content and interpretation (Feldman, Sköldbberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004). Finally, the stories were categorised as small, intermediate and big stories illustrating insights, understandings and interpretations of different layers of stakeholder's fields.

Narratives of informal entrepreneurs contributed *the small story* (Bamberg, 2006), their perceptions of different types of capital, relationships with other stakeholders and field-based perspectives. They were asked questions including; how they see their own capitals, what do they see as the main challenges in their fields and if and how they overcame these issues, what was their strategy to improve their positioning in these fields? The intermediate stories represent reflections from rational and pragmatic activities of NGO executives and private sector organisations and were the results of semi-structured interviews (Verloo, 2015). The big stories represent the macro-level government and policy perspectives, which were analysed through policy documents, master and national development plans, and include explanations from public resources and researchers' diagonal analysis of secondary public resources (Freeman, 2006; Bamberg, 2006). Furthermore, interviews with policy makers and analysis of policies towards informal entrepreneurs sought to explore the perceived level of informal entrepreneurs' capitals and the extent these were incorporated into the design of policies.

Findings

Small stories

There is a great variety of products and services offered by informal tourism entrepreneurs in Chiang Mai. These include handicrafts (e.g. bamboo hats, silverware, jewellery), semi-finished items, which are supplied to other manufacturers (e.g. wooden cutlery, decoration items), or to hotels and catering firms (semi-finished meals, vegetables). In terms of services, these include; transportation and guiding, entertainment (e.g. dances, music shows), homestays. In many cases, informal entrepreneurs are not competing with formal agents but complementing the product and service portfolio offered in a sub-contractor type of situation. Informal entrepreneurs' backgrounds vary widely across the areas and subsectors they are operating. Some have higher levels of cultural capital holding a graduate level diplomas, and work experience in formal sectors. One officer in the Ministry of Labour said:

“Many people lost their jobs in late 90s. Some moved from urban areas to rural areas, some moved to informal economies. Since then the vendors in Bangkok increased to a quarter million. You can find everything by these vendors, from a snack to a well branded suit sold for 10.000 baht (equals to approximately 300 USD) in the finance district of Bangkok”

There is a range of motivations why informal entrepreneurs are active in the tourism economy of Chiang Mai. While for some this is an option (e.g. a lifestyle choice), for others, mainly immigrants, working in an informal tourism sector is the only available option.

Chiang Mai attracts many migrants from rural Northern Thailand and as well as from neighbouring countries like Myanmar. Both domestic and foreign groups of migrants have few opportunities to obtain employment in the formal sector. Lacking institutionalized cultural and social capital suitable to the field, such as a diploma from a well-known education institution and/or connection to powerful people or groups, which may enable them to gain access to the formal sector, create barriers to alternatives. And yet, they

often have strong community relations, which accumulates internal positive social capital. One domestic migrant said: *“We live and work as of an ‘extended’ family”*. (female Burmese homestay owner, March 2015).

This form of social capital is used extensively in their business models. For instance, if one informal entrepreneur provides a homestay to tourists, another supplies catering items, one organizes tours, another offers transportation, yet another guides tourists during their tours, and so on. This community spirit and solidarity increases the level of information exchange among informal entrepreneurs and strengthens the resilience of their enterprises. Some of the informal entrepreneurs collaborate with formal enterprises (e.g. providing handicrafts to souvenir shops and hotels, catering items to hotels and travel agencies, transport and guiding services to tour operators). Many of them call this collaboration “fortunate” and perceive these ties with the formal sector to be more valuable than those with other informal entrepreneurs.

An informal transport provider and tourist guide stated:

“I get almost 60 percent of my customers from a formal local travel agency. The rest of my customers reach me through the homestay owners in Chiang Mai. I think my good attitude, foreign language knowledge, experience in working with foreign tourists, knowledge about the indigenous cultures (i.e. his cultural capital) help me to stick my customers to my business.”

male from Chiang Mai, April 2016

Particularly, women are very active in initiating an informal start-up business in tourism in Chiang Mai. They are highly motivated and adaptable to changes in market conditions. A young female vendor said: *“Thai women are not shy and can sell, Thai men are lazy and shy, they can’t sell”*. (female vendor from Isaan, April 2016).

Alongside their domestic labours, women run informal businesses in any spare time. Additionally, children are everywhere in informal enterprises, helping out and undertaking small tasks. Women divide the tasks across family members in accordance with their skills and availability, and they often have to take care of extended family members such as grandparents, nephews and nieces.

Informal entrepreneurs accumulate different forms of cultural capital. One such essential skill is perceived to be experience of the world of work. Time spent in work leads to an accumulation of experience in which one builds up experience in the field and learns about the rules of the system (i.e. *logic of practice*). Access into the tourism sector is not difficult, and in most cases no registration is needed. One café owner in Chiang Mai said: *“The local administrators would visit a new starter only after a couple of years and corruption is a big issue.”* (female from Lampang, March 2016).

When informal entrepreneurs meet a Thai person for the first time, their initial response is: *“are you a rachakarn* (i.e. Thai for governmental official) *or are you from a rathabaan* (i.e. Thai for a governmental grouping or institution)”. Many of the informal entrepreneurs approached were sceptical of public agents and their explanations of rules and regulations regarding business practices. They were also frustrated about endemic corruption throughout the public administration. A female informal tourist guide argued that:

“I miss the legitimization of my work and enterprise by the local government. Many times the tourist police see my enterprise and myself as an annoyance and marginalize me in the sector. In spite that I know much better social issues in the tribes surrounding Chiang Mai than any other formal travel agents and guides. For instance, Chinese traders at the Night Market copy authentic items, which are produced by indigenous tribes and ‘good sold’ to tourists. They let produce silk fabrics, textiles (e.g. clothes, bags, table turners, plate mates), umbrellas, wood carvings, lacquerware, mulberry products, silver ornaments, ceramics massively in China and supply to the channels those offer them in the night markets and/or in the walking streets of urban areas in Thailand.”

female from Changwat Phayao, April 2015

Increasing competition amongst vendors at the night bazaar and Sunday Walking Street market is an important issue for entrepreneurs. Many complain that tourists cannot see the difference between hand-made traditional items produced in the tribal villages around Chiang Mai and mass produced imitation designer labels from China (conversations with several vendors at Sunday Walking Street Market, April 2015). Some types of informal entrepreneurs, specifically local artisans and designers, are not able to protect their intellectual and aesthetic capitals against copying of their products. However, in some cases, informal entrepreneurs benefit from this chaotic situation by competing directly in the open market. Informal entrepreneurs see economic capital as the most essential capital to start-up a business. First they have to save money, or borrow from relatives. It is rarely possible for them to access loans from banks and other financial institutions. One home stay owner said: *“the micro finance institutions in Chiang Mai did not reach the bottom, that’s why they are not successful.”* (male homestay owner: Chiang Mai, March 2016).

In their relationships with NGOs, informal entrepreneurs have a mixture of perceptions. While some complained that NGOs are dominated by the state system and want to exert control over the rural people in line with prescribed economic development programmes, others appreciate the training and support provided by development agencies. A male artisan producing silverware to a shop owner on the high street said that:

“I followed a training module provided by a development agency. In this course, a private designer explained us how we can adapt our designs and make them much more demanding by international tourists. After following this course, I have been selling almost twice more silverware to my customers than before.”

male: Chiang Mai, March 2016

Surprisingly, many of the informal entrepreneurs in this study were less interested in growing their businesses beyond their current form. Public policies such as *self-reliance*, *sufficiency economy* and/or the spiritual Buddhist philosophy seem to have a great impact on forming the attitudinal perspectives of people. Only a few of the informal entrepreneurs we spoke to wished to extend their business and sell products to formal businesses at coastal regions for example.

Informal tourism entrepreneurs in Chiang Mai expressed their need for knowledge and experience from formal actors in the form of support in designing, packaging and marketing, economic capital in the form of financial aid such as credit, social capital in the form of collaboration with formal sector agents, and protection of their symbolic and cultural capitals in the form of patents and copyrights provided by public organisations. In terms of their future worries, they identified national politics, tourism sector developments and the increasing of imitation “good sold” (copied) products by Chinese traders.

Intermediate stories

A significant number of development agencies and NGOs are involved in the informal tourism sector in Thailand. In a recent thesis, Hummel (2015) explains broadly the process of NGO activities in the larger context of Southeast Asia. The essential belief of these organizations is that tourism can be a tool for community development in Thailand. A senior manager at one local NGO argued: “...through tourism, communities can speak out their inherent and current problems and these silent voices will be heard by the government agencies”. (female from Bangkok, March 2015).

In general, the Thai government focuses on strategies for economic development through tourism, whereas NGOs focus more on social and environmental issues. This varies extensively, from community development (interview with Community Development Monks in Development of Highland Communities, Chiang Mai, March 2016), rural development (interviews with several scholars from Chiang Mai University in March, April 2015 and 2016), tourism development (CBT-I managers, April 2015), poverty alleviation (Japanese NGO operating in Isan, March 2016), to preserving cultural heritage, natural heritage, sustainability (reported in several NGO’s annual activities results from 2012, 2014 and 2015), and resolving conflicts (volunteers of Friend of Woman Foundation in March 2016). In one case, an NGO articulates its vision as:

“...providing support and facilitate cooperation among stakeholders from grassroots to international levels, in order to strengthen the capacity of Thai communities to manage tourism sustainably”.

Community Based Tourism Institute Thailand, 2015

In their daily routines, CBT-I workers target the whole community (interview with CBT-I managers, April 2015), help ethnic communities promote their products to visitors with the purpose of increasing informal entrepreneurs’ cultural and social capitals, assist tour operators in reaching these communities and in seeking collaboration among tourism stakeholders. However, in many of these projects, the NGO targets the whole community rather than individual entrepreneurs. Informal entrepreneurs do not receive specific individual support. In addition to the provision of workshops and training, some smaller foundations (e.g. a British volunteer who lives with a local tribe) attend Travel Mart (i.e. annual national tourism fair in Bangkok), and promote informal entrepreneurs’ products, offer tourist information to individual tourists (e.g. brochures of several volunteer tourism organisations), certify homestays for their accommodation offers (according to a local NGO worker connected to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, May 2016), collaborate with universities to support them in their research activities within local communities and organizing field trips (examples provided by scholars from Payap University in Chiang Mai and CBT-I managers, April 2015 and 2016). However, tour operators in Chiang Mai complained (e.g. interview with an international Tour operator on March 30th, 2015 and interviews with local Thai travel agents in April 2016) about tour-operating activities offered by local NGOs that compete for their business.

Access to formal education amongst actors working in the informal economy is very limited, since upper secondary level vocational education is not free in Thailand. Local NGOs offer training to this group and during one of these workshops (March 24 h, 2016), the instructor explained the tourism market changes in Thailand, government regulations, and the importance of good communication skills to informal entrepreneurs who operated micro enterprises in the city Chiang Mai and surrounding villages.

For instance, if a tour operator from Chiang Mai wishes to collaborate with an ethnic community consisting of many informal entrepreneurs, it has to first complete a self-assessment “Community Based Tourism Standard Checklist” consisting of hundreds of questions required by the Community Based Tourism Network Association (CBTN Handbook, March 2015). The checklist defines how a private tour agency must undertake its transactions with these communities. As a result, many formal tour agencies avoid these bureaucratic regulatory frameworks and decide against collaboration with informal entrepreneurs in these communities.

Nevertheless, the formal private sector actors in Chiang Mai believe that informal entrepreneurs can increase diversity in the tourism network system and strengthen formal sector supply chains. According to a formal travel agent:

“...informal entrepreneurs can contribute to a tourism value chain and collaborate with other formal private tourism stakeholders. However, many of these informal entrepreneurs miss foreign language skills, organization, marketing and customer relations skills, which are essential to work in a tourism sector. Due to these reasons, no any informal enterprise is able to provide a whole tour and guide tourists alone.”

International male tour operator, Chiang Mai, April 2015

Nevertheless, the formal sector agents see the role of informal tourism entrepreneurs as limited and argue the conditions in the tourism field are too complicated for an informal entrepreneur to organize all aspects of business independently. Another formal local travel agent said:

“...informal entrepreneurs may, for instance, provide transportation, trekking trails, and homestays but they cannot answer all questions of tourists and solve problems if occur. Moreover, they have no standard in the service they offer. They have to collaborate with other formal tourism enterprises.”

Male tour operator, Chiang Mai, April 2015

As a result, although the private sector stakeholders recognize the importance of informal entrepreneurs' capitals, and their contribution to tourism value chains, they believe informal entrepreneurs cannot function alone without collaborating with formal tourism sector entrepreneurs.

Big stories

The political system of Thailand is complex and this influences policy towards business and entrepreneurialism. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy where governmental power is distributed to departments in the public sector. Some state agencies are established by the constitution and autonomous, some are in the formal structure of government, and others are directly or indirectly liable to the executives of the Royal family. As Bourdieu, Wacquant, and Farage (1994) suggest, these agencies construct the state as a "bureaucratic field" where it successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical and symbolic violence over the people. However, underpinning all policymaking is religious practice and beliefs. A Thai political scientist working at a public department financed by the Royal family said:

"Buddhism is very influential on the Thai's thinking and behaviour, and you can see Buddhism's influence in every corner of governmental organizations."

The Thai state exerts its legitimate power by introducing specific organizational mechanisms and rules. For instance, registration of tourism businesses, tour guides, tour leaders, related fees, responsibilities and penalties (policy document: Tourism Business and Guide Act, BE 2551, 2008). An earlier document (Tourism Business and Guide Act, BE 2535) prescribes Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) the authority to license all tourism businesses throughout the country. In addition, other institutions under ministries of Interior, Labour, and Commerce determine the locations for vendor sites, or policing the total prohibition of hawking at tourism destinations. However, many informal enterprises operate at the margins of these laws and frequently outside them. Although it is not always explicitly mentioned, almost all the public institutions aim to formalize informal enterprises and to control them through public ordinances. According to a senior manager at a governmental institution: "...society cannot be left uncontrolled and individuals cannot be left in their ways of doing business in the markets."

This desire to bring the informal sector *under control* has created a plethora of rules and regulations, allowing almost every public institution to intervene in the informal economy. Often this consists of long explanations of the government's expectations, codes of conduct, and how to exercise social rights in daily lives (i.e. being aware of possible socio-cultural impacts of tourism on these communities). The burden of regulation creates barriers for informal entrepreneurs to access resources to build their business. It creates barriers to collaboration, limits their access to capital requirements, and brings extra costs to informal entrepreneurs operations.

These 'top-down' rules and policies, which are defined by central government institutions, are static and inflexible, offering little scope to other stakeholders and requiring compliance. Whilst the government requires informal actors to be sustainable by means of maintaining their traditions, simultaneously, through several master plans, it pushes for modernization. As a result, these plans and development programmes do not induce commitment and produce high failure rates. Another important issue is the scope for official corruption. Throughout, corruption was mentioned by almost all the stakeholders as a frustration, leading to a lack of trust of public agents.

The Thai state determines ideal attitudes and behaviours. For instance, promoting policies based on traits such as *self-reliance* to the poor encourages them to be self-sufficient in tough social and economic conditions. However, these policies have received criticism as Walker noted; "sufficiency economy became the moral underpinning of 'sufficiency democracy' – a system in which elite morality would triumph over populism and money politics" (Walker, 2010, p. 262). This symbolic violence becomes natural over time as Bourdieu et al. (1994) suggest; "by realizing itself in social structures and in the mental structures adapted to them, the instituted institution makes us forget that it issues out of a long series of acts of institution (in the active sense) and hence has all the appearances of the natural" (p.4).

Discussion

Informal entrepreneurs enter into tourism markets with economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals, though they are not often acknowledged by state agents (Bourdieu, 1986). Additionally, there needs to be a fit between an informal entrepreneur's capital and the field in which s/he is operating (Grenfell, 2008). A misfit between the conditions of a field and the capitals possessed by an individual, such as; lack of formal job market information, negative social capital such as racial discrimination in the job market, forces individuals towards the informal sector. Our analysis reveals how this misalignment constrains the activities of informal entrepreneurs in tourism. However, some forms of capital act as stimuli for entrepreneurialism (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), including; cultural capital in embodied and objectified form, easing access to the field in a sector; positive social capital; economic capital in the form of start-up loans from family and community members.

The findings stress the importance of relationships between informal entrepreneurs and other stakeholders. Any stakeholder on their own can hardly be expected to possess all the necessary capitals to achieve success. Therefore, collaboration is the *sine qua non* for every stakeholder in tourism. The analysis revealed the importance of collaboration between formal and informal entrepreneurs and the benefits yielded to all parties. Firstly, informal entrepreneurs are usually highly motivated and adaptable to changes in the market. Secondly, through collaboration, formal entrepreneurs can increase diversity in their network and strengthen the supply chain, which can lead to process or product innovation (Williams & Shaw, 2011). Thirdly, collaboration can lead to more inclusive

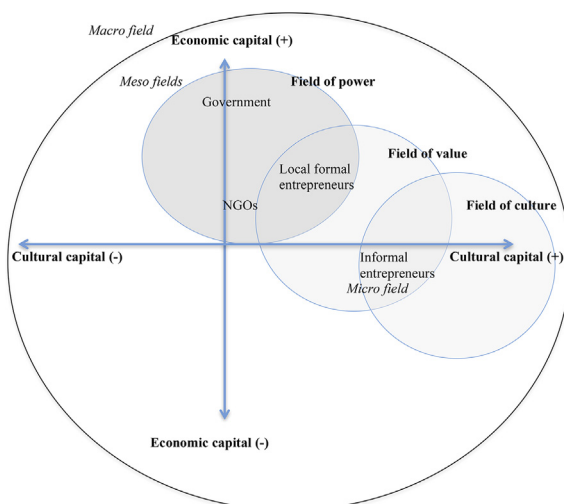


Fig. 1. Fields, capitals and stakeholders.

value chains in tourism (Zhang, Song, & Huang, 2009). Formal organizations gain trust from local communities and appreciation from their customers through a perceived greater social responsibility (Park, Lee, & Kim, 2014). Finally, collaboration between multiple stakeholders including informal entrepreneurs may lead to public-private partnerships wherein the skills and expertise of informal entrepreneurs can be integrated and upskilled.

Having studied the field-based and thus socially conditioned interactions, the focus can now turn to model the social fields using economic and cultural capitals in order to map the structural relations of stakeholders in the fields of power, value and culture (Bourdieu, 1998). According to Bourdieu (1998), social fields could be plotted as made of opposing forces, which is *chiasmatic*. In such a diagram, he suggests “as one pole the economically or temporally dominant and culturally dominated positions, and at the other, the culturally dominant and economically dominated positions” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 270). Applying Bourdieu’s fields and capitals, the following model captures the position of informal entrepreneurs in relation to other stakeholders. In Fig. 1, the economic capital axis is shown as vertical, since it brings more status and power to its holder than the cultural capital, though both are highly important in a social field. In such a figurative expression of fields, the level of forces (i.e. from plus to minus) does not show the amount the actors hold but their effects on the actors’ positioning (e.g. how advantageous is holding cultural capital in a specific field).

The model develops Bourdieu’s (1988) theory in which cultural capital (e.g. skills, knowledge, qualifications) is something that one acquires for equipping oneself and is reproduced by economic capital (e.g. all the financial assets one may possess). This model first articulates society as the macro field, shaped through the interactions among organized and unorganized power groups acting in the meso field. Each agent defines its positioning (micro field) within larger fields, and aims to establish valuable and legitimate capitals within that micro space.

In the field of power, governmental institutions dominate the organized power structure and legitimize it for its purposes (Bourdieu et al., 1994). This allows governmental institutions to accumulate economic capital through collection of taxes and makes it the decisive authority on defining the values of cultural capital. Thus, governments operate within the field of the formal private sector aiming to support their activities. However, in relation to the cultural field, government agencies need other actors (e.g. NGOs) to implement modernization policies downstream through society (Bourdieu, 1993).

The field of value is the field in which social actors such as private sector stakeholders and NGOs create value. The perspective of private sector stakeholders is clear and relevant to their aims. They wish their businesses to survive and achieve success and to accumulate capitals to gain more power, status, and profit. Nevertheless, they recognize that through stronger collaborations in the meso field, they could become more innovative by incorporating tacit knowledge from local people. Additionally, including informal sector workers would decrease costs, which would help them position themselves more competitively. Thus, private sector agents collaborate across fields of value, power and culture with stakeholders such as government, NGOs, local formal agents and informal tourism entrepreneurs.

NGOs, having various levels of economic and cultural capitals, struggle with defining their position in the meso field. Some NGOs (e.g. development agencies), which receive mainly international funding, have a broad focus and aim to increase impact in several fields through their operations in the tourism sector. However, in many cases they are sub-optimal, one of the important reasons is due to the lack of awareness of social conditions (e.g. logic of practice) in the communities they operate (Bourdieu, 1969). Other NGOs, which are familiar with social conditions, intervene in the markets with the aim of improving the position of informal tourism entrepreneurs in all fields. In these cases, they act as formal private sector stakeholders (e.g. organizing and selling tours), which leads to problems, particularly in the value field. They call for collaboration between formal and informal entrepreneurs. Additionally, the higher the number of NGO’s actions in all these fields, the more complex the fields become.

The positioning of informal tourism entrepreneurs is spread at the bottom in the value field. To illustrate this point, a group of informal entrepreneurs (e.g. designer, artisans) enters into the value field with high levels of cultural capital (e.g. designers) but

different levels of economic capital (e.g. lower for artisans). They are able to offer more competitive products and services than other entrepreneurs. However, this group's position is not fixed at a certain point in the field model. In relation to market conditions, informal entrepreneurs may adapt their strategies and levels of economic and cultural capital. Consequently, their positioning swings like a pendulum from the bottom of the value field to a higher level in the culture field (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007). If a group of informal entrepreneurs acts collaboratively with formal private sector stakeholders, this decreases their transaction costs, complements their products and services, and increases their position in the market, but leaves them little independent power in determining their own positioning in the fields. As a result, the informal tourism entrepreneur who has a high level of cultural capital, has to collaborate with a stakeholder in the value field to assist in the transformation of cultural capital into economic capital (Bourdieu, 2005).

Conclusions

A better understanding of the practical logic of fields and the structural relations within them can contribute to policy debates about how to integrate and optimize both formal and informal tourism economies for development (Williams & Yousseff, 2013). Informal entrepreneurs are more flexible than formal entrepreneurs and keen to collaborate with other stakeholders in the value field to achieve success, yet their capabilities have been neglected in academic debates as well as in the actions of governments and NGOs (Henderson & Smith, 2009). Their flexibility (e.g. adapting fast to the changing conditions in the market and re-positioning), and their portfolio of cultural, symbolic and social capitals, offers important assets to tourism stakeholder networks, the analysis of which extends our understanding of the contributions made by informal entrepreneurs to the wider economy (Chen, 2006).

Our study demonstrates that informal entrepreneurs in tourism possess a noteworthy level of cultural and social capitals. Public agents mostly underestimate the value of these exotica capitals. However, through possible collaborations between informal and formal entrepreneurs, these capitals may increase the value of existing capitals in the network and enhance the competitive positioning of stakeholders, bringing greater dynamism to the fields (Sassen, 1997). Such collaboration would help informal entrepreneurs to increase their knowledge in marketing, planning, and monitoring, which are organizational strengths of the formal sector (Ahmad, 2017; Damayanti et al., 2017).

The study responds to recent calls for practice-based approaches that examine complex social structures in tourism (De Souza Bispo, 2016; Lammers et al., 2017), and we show how Bourdieu's theory of fields can elaborate such practices. The model proposed offers scope for further research to understand how practices and actors are constrained or facilitated by complex, multi-dimensional interactions with interlocking actors in the field in which they operate (Ahmad, 2017). Future research could consider examination of informal entrepreneurs' habitus, including their background, professional and subjective life-worlds in conjunction with their relationship to the fields and their logic of practice. This can help us to understand the structuring elements of informal entrepreneurs' social actions in these fields, since habitus also operates within fields.

At the practical level, public organisations and NGOs need to encourage formal and informal entrepreneurs to collaborate more freely in the widest possible number of fields by allowing them to work in a hybrid form. In addition, government policies ought to shift in focus towards increasing the productivity of informal entrepreneurs by means of monitoring the value chains in the tourism sector, where informal entrepreneurs are effectively active. Successful informal entrepreneurs may possibly become more aware of the social value of their cultural and natural heritage and consequently become more concerned with preserving these resources. In this way a more sustainable tourism development may be realized in these communities over the long term.

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