

A Study on Recreational Value Enhancement Feasibility of Rural Regeneration

Chun-Chu Liu^{1*}, Ya-Ling Su¹ and Yi-Ting Lu¹

Abstract

This study employs literature documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, and collaborative innovation to evaluate the feasibility of enhancing recreational value in rural regeneration. Focusing on the Xingang Community in Yongan District, Kaohsiung, the research integrates field investigation, stakeholder engagement, and literature review to examine how local conditions and community characteristics can be incorporated into regeneration strategies. The findings highlight the importance of collaborative governance, emphasizing initial conditions, trust-building, stakeholder commitment, and consensus as key determinants of successful cooperation among government, academia, and local communities. The study demonstrates that strengthening recreational value can foster economic diversification, cultural preservation, and ecological sustainability. It concludes with strategies for industrial development, infrastructure improvement, and cultural conservation, offering policy recommendations to advance rural revitalization in Taiwan.

JEL classification numbers: Q1, Q13, R11.

Keywords: Literature Documentary Analysis, In-Depth Interview, Collaborative Governance, Rural Regeneration, Recreational Value.

¹ College of Continuing Education, Chang Jung Christian University. *Corresponding author.

1. Introduction

Since 1997, the Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan, has successively promoted cross-century agricultural construction plans, the New Agriculture Movement, and the New Agricultural Innovation Promotion Program. All of these policies aim to revitalize Taiwan's agriculture and rural areas while achieving the goal of sustainable development. These policy implementations have significantly contributed to the development of rural Taiwan. Under this trend, many rural areas in Taiwan have shifted toward tourism and leisure-based transformations. As a result, research on rural development and leisure agriculture has flourished, focusing on business performance evaluations, development strategies, sustainability indicators, and regional assessments. This demonstrates the growing attention paid to rural development from industry, government, and academia (Lin & Huang, 2002; Peng & Mao, 2004; Liu & Lin, 2005; Zhang & Zhou, 2011; Wu et al., 2012; Liang, 2017; Wu & Liu, 2017).

Leisure agriculture holds unique significance for rural development and offers outdoor recreation options for the public. Given that rural areas are primary agricultural production bases, leisure agriculture combines pastoral landscapes and ecological environments with primary production (agriculture, forestry, fishery, and animal husbandry) and rural culture to provide recreational opportunities. Therefore, the development of recreational industries in rural areas can become a key direction for rural advancement. Unlike general tourism, leisure agriculture relies on irreplaceable local resources, making it a distinct field worthy of in-depth exploration.

This study focuses on Xingang Community in Yongan District, Kaohsiung - one of the "Gold Medal Villages" in the second Gold Medal Rural Village Competition organized by the Council of Agriculture - as the primary research subject. Several reasons justify selecting Xingang Community. Firstly, the community boasts rich natural and cultural resources, providing a solid foundation for enhancing recreational value. Known for its distinctive fishing village atmosphere, traditional industries, and ecological environment, Xingang Community can attract tourists while delivering tangible economic benefits to residents.

Secondly, its geographic advantage - close to downtown Kaohsiung and accessible transportation - makes it a convenient destination for urban visitors. As urbanization intensifies, the demand for rural recreation increases. Xingang can meet this need through the development of leisure agriculture and ecotourism, facilitating rural economic diversification.

Moreover, community residents demonstrate a strong willingness and active participation in rural regeneration. In recent years, locals have taken part in various environmental protection and community building projects, reflecting their commitment to improving their quality of life - an essential social foundation for implementing this research.

Lastly, Xingang Community's achievement in being awarded the Gold Medal in 2021 affirms its success in rural development and community building. The award

involves stringent criteria, including environmental protection, cultural heritage, and community engagement. The community's selection highlights its developmental potential and model value, making it an ideal case study.

In sum, Xingang Community presents a solid foundation for this study due to its rich resources, favorable location, active participation, and notable achievements.

2. Research Design

This research adopts a humanities and social sciences perspective to delve into the issue of sustainable development in Taiwan's rural areas. It includes a comprehensive review of related literature and an analysis of the current status of rural-related policies. Furthermore, field investigations were conducted in award-winning "Gold Medal Villages," accompanied by in-depth interviews with key rural stakeholders - such as community residents, farmers, and local government representatives - to better understand the current situation and challenges of rural areas.

The research methods are described as follows:

2.1 Literature Documentary Analysis

The core of the literature documentary analysis lies in the systematic and precise approach to processing data. This method generally involves four main steps:

1. **Reading and Organizing:** Collecting and initially categorizing all materials relevant to the research topic.
2. **Description:** Providing a summarized and expressive overview of the contents.
3. **Classifying:** Further categorizing the information based on research needs.
4. **Interpretation:** Conducting an in-depth analysis and integrated synthesis to form scientific understanding and logical inference of the research phenomena.

This method enables researchers to clarify the research background, understand theoretical trends, and inform specific research designs, tool selection, and methodological applications. It not only helps reconstruct past events but also explains current phenomena and predicts future possibilities.

2.2 In-Depth Interview

In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method often used to collect first-hand information in case studies. This method emphasizes deep interaction with interviewees to capture their perspectives and personal experiences related to the research topic. In social research, in-depth interviews are widely employed to gather opinions from community stakeholders - such as rural residents, farmers, and local officials - offering a multi-angle analysis of the phenomena under study.

One of the key advantages of in-depth interviews is the richness and detail of the data collected, particularly on sensitive topics. In a trusting interview environment, respondents are more willing to share personal insights. Researchers can also

observe emotional reactions and adjust questions accordingly to obtain more useful data. However, this method has its limitations: interviewers require professional training, must master interviewing skills, and must possess an in-depth understanding of the interviewees' fields. It is also essential for interviewers to remain neutral and avoid interfering with the data's objectivity.

2.3 Collaborative Governance

Based on an in-depth analysis of 137 public-private collaboration cases, Ansell & Gash (2007) proposed a theoretical model explaining the success or failure of collaborative governance. This model identifies key variables that play crucial roles in shaping the success of collaborative processes.

The core variables influencing the effectiveness of collaborative governance include:

- **Initial Conditions**
- **Institutional Design**
- **Facilitative Leadership**
- **The Collaborative Process Itself**

The model assumes that certain factors significantly influence the advancement of collaborative processes. These include:

- **Facilitating face-to-face dialogue**
- **Gradually building trust**
- **Strengthening commitment to the process**
- **Promoting consensus building**

These interwoven elements contribute to a virtuous cycle of collaboration, deepening trust, commitment, and shared understanding among participants as the process unfolds.

3. Research Findings and Analysis

Based on the collaborative governance model proposed by Ansell and Gash (2007), the success of collaboration hinges on several critical variables that influence the collaborative process. These variables include face-to-face dialogue, trust-building, commitment to the process, and the achievement of consensus. The effective interplay of these elements helps foster a cyclical and progressive collaborative governance structure, thereby deepening trust, mutual commitment, and shared objectives among stakeholders.

Through literature review, field interviews, and observations, this study systematically analyzed these core factors, revealing how they interact within collaborative processes to promote cooperative relationships. These findings offer both theoretical insights and practical guidance for implementing successful rural regeneration efforts.

3.1 Initial Conditions

From the perspective of initial conditions, the researcher observed that most organizations involved had already established relatively stable working relationships with public-sector entities. However, only a few had previously collaborated with academic institutions. These prior interactions laid a strong foundation for future cooperation and encouraged greater willingness among stakeholders to engage in collaborative efforts.

Such accumulated experience allowed participants to coordinate resources more effectively, integrate professional knowledge, and build trust and consensus. This model emphasized interdependence among participants and provided a meaningful reference for future collaborative projects.

In rural regeneration projects, interactions among local governments, central authorities, universities, and local businesses created a mutually supportive environment. Local governments acted as executors of localized policy, bridging the gap between central resources and on-the-ground implementation. Central authorities provided policy direction and funding support to empower local governments. Meanwhile, local governments coordinated central resources and engaged with community stakeholders to ensure successful policy localization and implementation.

3.2 The Collaborative Process

(1) Face-to-Face Dialogue

In the case of Yongan District's rural regeneration and recreational value enhancement, community members and local business operators consistently emphasized the importance of dialogue. Through regular meetings and personal visits, stakeholders were able to deeply understand the challenges faced by local businesses—especially concerning resource utilization and policy comprehension. Meetings became a vital platform for stakeholder communication. Their primary functions included:

- **Promoting mutual understanding** between the public sector and local operators.
- **Reviewing and revising proposals**, and
- **Building consensus** around shared visions for rural regeneration.

Face-to-face communication effectively resolved questions from local operators and ensured a collaborative environment involving industries, communities, and government agencies - an essential step toward enhancing recreational value in rural areas.

(2) Trust-Building

Trust and commitment were considered critical components of the collaborative governance process. According to interviewees, the Soil and Water Conservation Bureau (SWCB), district offices, local business operators, and academic institutions gradually built mutual trust through past collaboration, particularly in workshops and community activities.

The SWCB played an essential role not only by providing resources but also by actively exploring the challenges faced by rural communities, such as aging populations, agricultural difficulties, and the need for industrial transformation. These dialogues increased awareness and support for local industries.

Academic institutions and business operators expressed high levels of commitment by participating in workshops and public discussions. Over time, they developed a shared vision for Yong'an District's rural regeneration and recreational development. This mutual trust enabled smoother collaboration and facilitated the sustainable development of the region.

Trust-based partnerships among district offices, SWCB, universities, and business operators became a driving force for regeneration. Universities, fulfilling their social responsibilities, supported the planning and implementation of rural regeneration projects by providing intellectual and technical resources. Local businesses, while focusing on industry development, relied on universities and government agencies for policy and technical support. This close-knit collaboration not only advanced the project but also enhanced the area's recreational value.

(3) Commitment

Ansell and Gash (2007) emphasized that commitment to the process is one of the core variables in collaborative governance. In Yong'an's case, local government agencies and academic institutions demonstrated strong professionalism, especially in administrative planning and policy proposal development. They played leading roles in facilitating and coordinating the regeneration process.

Nevertheless, challenges remained. Different stakeholders held varying interpretations of the regeneration goals. Some local business operators, particularly those with smaller operations or fewer resources, lacked clarity about their roles and responsibilities. In some cases, they viewed regeneration as a traditional subsidy program and overly depended on government resources.

Through continuous coordination - especially under the guidance of local governments and academic partners - business operators gradually recognized that enhancing recreational value requires not only external support but also their own long-term commitment and active participation.

Such commitment was evident in their willingness to invest time, upgrade industries, and create job opportunities. In turn, public agencies and academic institutions provided necessary policy guidance and resources. Together, they helped unify the vision for Yong'an's regeneration and shaped a stable, long-term collaborative model conducive to achieving sustainable rural development.

(4) Reaching Consensus

The collaborative governance model stresses that consensus must be built upon clearly defined goals and shared values. In this study, the establishment of clear objectives and consensus among stakeholders was crucial for success.

Participants had to fully understand their roles:

- **District offices** acted as administrative coordinators.
- **Local businesses** contributed industry expertise and innovation.

- **Universities** offered academic support and long-term development strategies. Clarifying each party's role helped optimize resource sharing and reduce coordination problems. Through structured division of labor and role awareness, the project could be more effectively managed and streamlined.

In summary, the success of rural regeneration and recreational value enhancement in Yongan District depends on stakeholders' clarity of purpose and mutual recognition of shared values. Such consensus builds trust and commitment, ensuring efficient integration and use of resources and ultimately achieving the common vision of sustainable rural revitalization.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Effectively enhancing the recreational value of rural areas can not only stimulate local economic development and improve residents' quality of life, but also protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources of the countryside, thereby realizing the vision of sustainable development. In an era marked by fast-paced urban life and increasing workplace stress, people increasingly seek holidays and leisure time as a means to escape routine, relax their minds and bodies, and regenerate their energy.

As people's incomes rise and transportation becomes more convenient, the desire to connect with nature and engage in leisure activities is also growing. Rural areas rich in natural beauty are responding to this trend. If such areas are properly planned - leveraging their geographic uniqueness and scenic advantages - they can serve as holiday retreats for urban and industrial populations. This, in turn, would increase societal dependence on agriculture and the countryside, encouraging both rural residents and the broader public to value and preserve rural landscapes and ecological environments.

Currently, many rural areas still face underdeveloped infrastructure, which results in insufficient public services, inconvenient transportation, and a generally deteriorating appearance. In addition, rural communities often lack the funds for promotional campaigns, making it difficult to attract visitors or generate adequate returns on investments in rural tourism. Yongan District shares these challenges. While local residents wish to retain the authentic essence of rural life, tourists increasingly demand greater convenience and liveliness.

In view of these circumstances, this study proposes the following recommendations:

4.1 Strategies for Promoting Rural Industrial Development

1. **Integrate local agricultural characteristics and lifestyles** into cultural activities or architectural design to highlight the uniqueness of rural industry. Develop local agricultural products into derivative goods or souvenirs and align them with leisure agriculture and local festivals. Organize related promotional events to expand markets and increase farmers' income.
2. **Adopt a strategic alliance approach** to integrate individual tourist spots into coherent travel routes or even regional-scale operations. This not only reduces

resource waste and enhances efficiency, but also enriches the diversity of leisure agriculture activities. Forming alliances systematically can also enhance rural branding and attract more tourists.

3. **Establish comprehensive rural leisure information platforms**, including homestay listings, recreational resources, travel routes, local history and culture, agricultural specialties, and folk events. Emphasize holistic and interactive information delivery to improve the convenience and appeal of rural tourism.

4.2 Strategies for Improving Infrastructure and Living Environment

Promote community renewal based on the needs of rural residents. Increase public investment to upgrade or construct rural infrastructure and recreational facilities - such as transportation systems, waste disposal, parks and green spaces, village walking trails, bicycle lanes, and homestays. Creating a pleasant rural environment not only benefits residents but also provides visitors with high-quality recreational experiences and stress relief.

4.3 Strategies for Preserving Rural Culture

Traditional artifacts and historical sites in rural areas are valuable cultural assets and symbolic traces of rural history. Preserving rural culture not only showcases the unique characteristics of the countryside but also strengthens emotional bonds among villagers. It is a crucial source of community identity and cohesion.

Urban and rural societies often differ markedly. Research shows that urban dwellers are drawn to the novelty and authenticity of rural life, which makes rural production and lifestyle inherently appealing for tourism. To highlight the rural character and historical significance, it is essential to enhance the preservation of rural heritage sites and traditional customs throughout the development of leisure agriculture. This approach enhances the cultural depth and recreational quality of rural tourism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. This research was supported by the 2024 Innovation Research Program of the Soil and Water Conservation Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture (Project No. ARDSWC-113-049). The authors acknowledge the Bureau of Rural Development and Soil and Water Conservation for financial support.

References

- [1] Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2007). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543–571.
- [2] Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan, Soil and Water Conservation Bureau. (2011). *Handbook for Promoting Rural Regeneration*. Nantou, Taiwan.
- [3] Liang, D.C. (2017). A structural equation approach to exploring the model of community organizational capacity and development aspects in rural regeneration: A case study of the development process in Yunlin County. *Journal of Rural Tourism Studies*, 10(1), 41–61.
- [4] Lin, J.S., & Huang, W.C. (2002). Analysis of the operational performance evaluation of leisure farms. *Agricultural Management Annual Journal*, 8, 1–37.
- [5] Liu, J.Z., & Lin, C.L. (2005). Research on the development of leisure agriculture in Houli Tai'an Village – Application of the DEMATEL method. *Journal of Agricultural and Forestry Science*, 54(4), 263–282.
- [6] Peng, X.P., & Mao, G.G. (2004). Research on development strategies for ecotourism in Taiwan's rural areas. *Land Issues Research Quarterly*, 3(2), 86–100.
- [7] Tainan City Yuejin Cultural and Historical Development Association. (2012). *Tainan City Yanshui District Tianliao Community Rural Regeneration Plan*. Tainan, Taiwan.
- [8] Wu, J.M., & Liu, S.H. (2017). Assessment of the sustainable development potential of leisure farms in the Kaohsiung area. *Huagang Journal of Geography*, 32, 60–77.
- [9] Wu, J.M., Liu, S.H., & Chen, Y.W. (2012). Assessment of the sustainable development potential of Zoumaze Farm. *Huagang Journal of Geography*, 29, 3–18.
- [10] Zhang, G.F., & Zhou, B.C. (2011). Research on the application of sustainable perspectives in rural community evaluation systems – A case study of Pingtung County. *Journal of Spatial Design*, 12, 23–34.