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Activating Cultural Capital through Public Space: Learning City Approaches to Socio-economic Development in Chachoengsao Old Town, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Limited scholarship has examined how secondary cities with rich cultural heritage can mobilise cultural capital within public spaces to generate socio-economic outcomes. This study addresses this gap by investigating how cultural public spaces in Chachoengsao Old Town, Thailand — a UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities member since 2020 — can be activated as place-based, intergenerational learning environments contributing to local socio-economic development. Employing a three-phase qualitative methodology integrating secondary data review, systematic urban mapping, and comparative case analysis of Khon Kaen as a benchmark UNESCO Learning City, the study identifies three interconnected deficiencies: spatial disconnection between cultural assets and learning infrastructure, programmatic over-reliance on festival-based activation limiting year-round learning continuity, and institutional fragmentation between municipal governance and community actors — collectively constraining the socio-economic contribution of Chachoengsao's tangible and intangible cultural capital. Drawing on Bourdieu's cultural capital framework, Oldenburg's third place theory, and UNESCO lifelong learning principles, evidence-based spatial, programmatic, and institutional recommendations are proposed for urban planners and policymakers seeking to leverage cultural public spaces as drivers of inclusive socio-economic development. Findings offer transferable principles for secondary cities navigating the intersection of cultural heritage conservation, Learning City policy, and urban economic regeneration.

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Highlights:

- Cultural capital activation strengthens learning environments and socio-economic development.
- Heritage public spaces facilitate intergenerational learning and community participation.
- Institutional integration enhances Learning City implementation and heritage-based regeneration.
- Place-based learning transforms cultural assets into sustainable economic resources.

Contribution to the field statement:

This study advances Learning City research by demonstrating how cultural capital embedded in heritage public spaces can support socio-economic development in secondary cities. By integrating cultural heritage, public space, and lifelong learning perspectives, it provides a transferable framework for heritage-led regeneration, place-based learning, and inclusive urban economic development.

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1. Introduction

Rapid urbanisation in Southeast Asia has intensified the need for more balanced, inclusive, and sustainable forms of urban development. Within this regional context, secondary cities play a critical role in decentralising growth, strengthening rural–urban connections, reducing spatial inequality, and

supporting sustainable urbanism across ASEAN (ASUS, 2022). As local governments increasingly seek to translate the Sustainable Development Goals into urban policy and practice, the Learning City concept has emerged as an important framework for linking education, culture, public space, and sustainable development. In Thailand, this approach is particularly relevant to SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and SDG 11, which emphasises inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. However, existing SDG 4 indicators remain largely oriented toward formal education, whereas lifelong learning extends beyond classrooms and institutional education systems into everyday social, cultural, and spatial environments.

Learning City development therefore requires a broader understanding of learning as an urban process embedded in community life, public space, cultural practice, and local knowledge. Iamtrakul et al. (2022) argue that effective Learning City development depends on a diverse and inclusive learning ecosystem capable of responding to the social and economic characteristics of different urban residents. This perspective suggests that learning resources should not be limited to formal educational institutions but should also include community facilities, cultural assets, public spaces, and locally embedded knowledge systems that support lifelong learning and urban sustainability (Zhuang et al., 2017; Iamtrakul et al., 2022; Thummaphan & Sripa, 2023). Within this framework, cultural heritage represents more than a preserved historical resource; it functions as a form of cultural capital capable of connecting generations, strengthening local identity, supporting informal learning, and generating socio-economic value.

For many secondary cities, the central challenge is not only to conserve cultural heritage but also to activate it as a living resource for learning, community engagement, and local development. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning introduced the Learning City framework to promote the mobilisation of a city's educational, cultural, institutional, and spatial resources in support of lifelong learning for all citizens. In addition, the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities provides an international policy-oriented platform for exchanging knowledge, inspiration, and best practices among member cities (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2017).

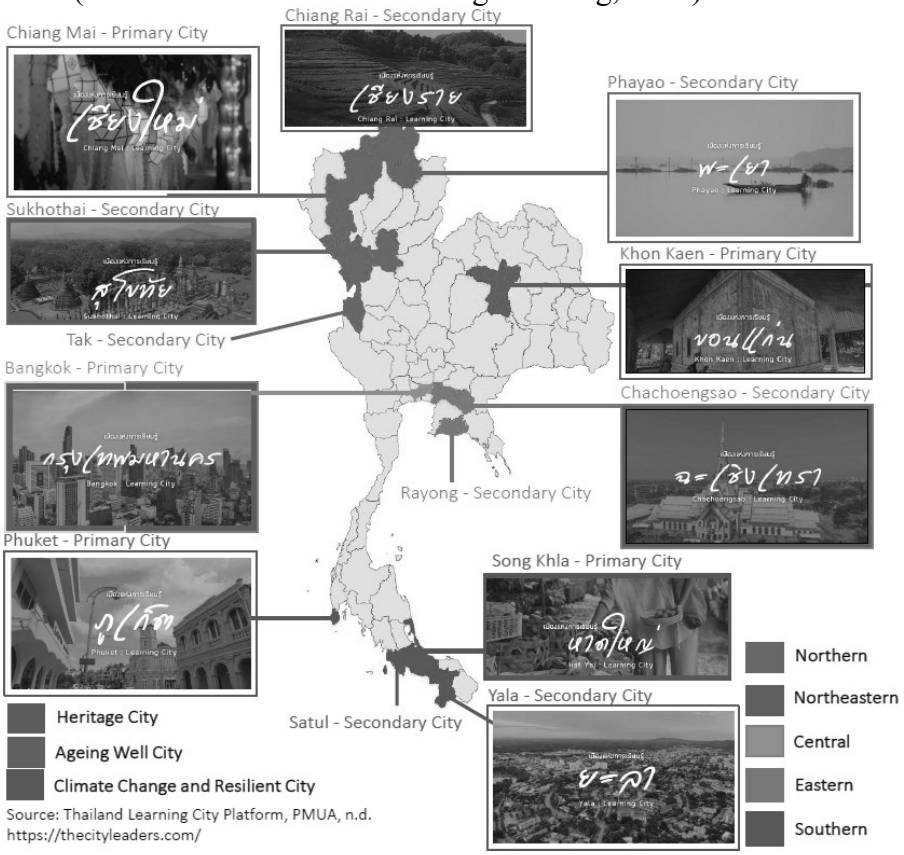

Figure 1. Provinces in Thailand that are UNESCO GNLC members.

In Thailand, the Learning City framework has been implemented through the Programme Management Unit on Area-Based Development under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, which coordinates Learning City projects under three thematic models: Heritage City, Ageing Well City, and Climate Change and Resilient City. These models have been applied across thirteen cities, including both primary and secondary cities that are members of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (PMUA, 2023). Chachoengsao, designated as a Heritage City, possesses a rich concentration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including historic temples, riverside communities, traditional shophouses, local knowledge systems, and cultural festivals. These assets provide significant potential for developing place-based and intergenerational learning environments that contribute to lifelong learning, cultural continuity, and local socio-economic development (PMUA, 2026).

Chachoengsao, a secondary city in eastern Thailand, has been a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities since 2020 under the leadership of Mayor Kolayut Chaisang. UNESCO's recognition of Chachoengsao as a Learning City was supported by the Knowledge Center of Chachoengsao initiative, developed in collaboration with TK Park since 2015, which aimed to provide residents with access to learning resources through the model of living libraries for local communities (EEF, 2024). Despite this recognition, the implementation of the Learning City framework in several Thai secondary cities, including Chachoengsao, remains constrained by limited public understanding, uneven spatial implementation, and insufficient integration between learning infrastructure and everyday urban life.

In Chachoengsao, the Learning City framework has increasingly been associated with the activation of cultural capital. The old town has become a key research area for exploring how cultural assets can support learning city development. According to Professor Duangrudee, Head of the Chachoengsao Learning City Research Project, the current mechanism for advancing the Learning City in Chachoengsao Old Town has been structured into three phases. The first year focused on raising awareness and initiating learning opportunities for urban communities, including the early development of learning spaces. The second year emphasised learning for economic development through a Festival Model, using public events and festivals to encourage collective learning in open spaces. In 2025, the third year of the project shifted toward strengthening residents' understanding of the cultural capital already embedded within the city (PMUA & Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University, 2025).

However, despite its designation as a Heritage Learning City, Chachoengsao continues to face several challenges in implementing the Learning City concept effectively. According to the Chachoengsao Learning City Progress Report, these challenges include limited access to inclusive learning spaces for diverse population groups, low public awareness and understanding of the Learning City concept, and the absence of a clearly articulated community identity in some areas (PMUA & Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University, 2025). Although the city contains abundant natural and cultural resources, many of these assets have not yet been systematically identified, categorised, spatially connected, or activated as learning resources.

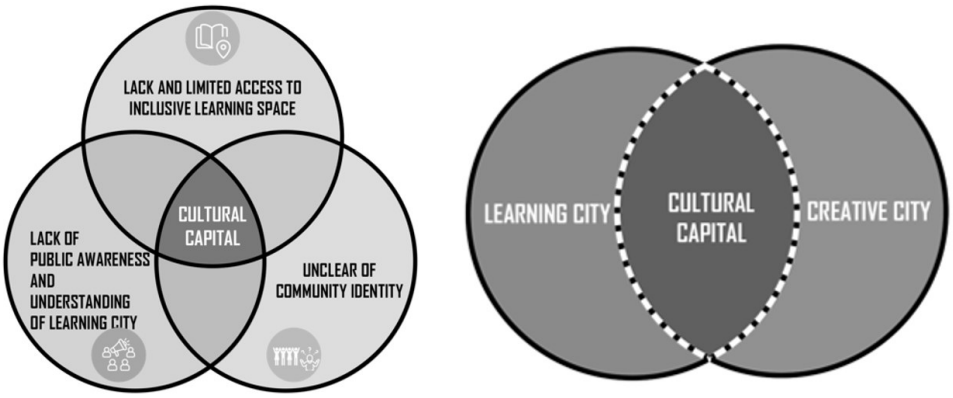

Figure 2. Problem Statement: Unclear Cultural Capital—clear cultural capital can bridge urban development from a Learning City to a Creative City.

Three interconnected problems are particularly significant. First, learning facilities are primarily concentrated within formal educational institutions and administrative areas, while many heritage spaces remain underutilised as everyday learning environments. Second, existing learning activities are largely event-based and centred on seasonal festivals, which limits continuity and produces fragmented rather than sustained learning opportunities. Third, collaboration among local government agencies, educational institutions, and community stakeholders remains insufficiently institutionalised, weakening the city's capacity to transform cultural heritage into a coherent learning ecosystem. As a result, Chachoengsao's cultural assets have not yet been fully leveraged as cultural capital capable of generating wider social and economic benefits.

This situation reflects a broader gap in Learning City scholarship. Although previous studies have examined Learning City policies and lifelong learning strategies, limited attention has been given to the spatial and institutional mechanisms through which cultural heritage can function as place-based learning infrastructure, particularly in secondary cities across Southeast Asia. Despite growing recognition of the UNESCO Learning City framework as a mechanism for sustainable urban development (UNESCO UIL, 2015; Thummaphan & Sripa, 2023), three major gaps remain. First, Learning City scholarship has focused predominantly on metropolitan cities, leaving secondary cities with rich cultural heritage underrepresented (Iamtrakul et al., 2022; Zhuang et al., 2017). Second, while cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Hale et al., 2023) and culture-led regeneration scholarship (Evans, 2005; Tommarchi & Jonas, 2024) have independently advanced understanding of heritage's socio-economic potential, their spatial operationalisation within Learning City policy frameworks has not been systematically addressed. Third, existing heritage urbanism research has critiqued top-down and tourism-oriented approaches (Munasinghe, 2022) but has offered limited practical guidance for community-driven, place-based alternatives.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how heritage public spaces in Chachoengsao Old Town can be activated as place-based and intergenerational learning environments. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Oldenburg's theory of third places, and UNESCO's lifelong learning principles, the study examines how cultural heritage can be transformed from a preserved asset into an active learning resource that supports community participation, lifelong learning, local identity, and socio-economic development. The study is guided by three research questions. First, how are cultural capital assets distributed across Chachoengsao Old Town, and to what extent are they spatially integrated with existing learning infrastructure and public spaces? Second, how do city festivals and cultural activities activate public spaces as intergenerational learning environments, and in what ways do these experiences influence local residents' perceptions and understanding of the Learning City concept? Third, what urban design and governance strategies can strengthen the role of cultural public spaces as drivers of place-based learning and socio-economic development in the context of a Thai secondary city?

Accordingly, the study has three objectives. The first is to analyse the spatial distribution and integration of cultural capital assets, public spaces, and learning facilities in Chachoengsao Old Town. The second is to evaluate the effectiveness of existing Learning City mechanisms, including festivals and cultural programming, in activating public spaces as intergenerational learning environments. The third is to develop evidence-based urban design and governance recommendations for leveraging public heritage spaces as catalysts for socio-economic development within the Learning City framework. Methodologically, the study combines secondary data review, urban mapping, policy analysis, and comparative case study research, using Khon Kaen as a benchmark UNESCO Learning City to identify transferable lessons for Chachoengsao.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it advances understanding of the relationship between cultural capital, public space, and place-based learning within the Learning City framework. Practically, it highlights the importance of community-driven and bottom-up approaches to decentralising learning opportunities and shifting the perception of learning from formal education toward informal, spatially embedded, and intergenerational urban learning. By clarifying how cultural capital can be spatially, programmatically, and institutionally activated, the study provides a foundation for heritage-based Learning City development in Chachoengsao and offers transferable principles for other secondary cities seeking to connect cultural heritage conservation, lifelong learning, and socio-economic resilience.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Identifying Learning approaches for learning space typologies

A: Theory and Definition of Learning

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "learning" refers to the activity of obtaining knowledge, emphasizing that learning emerges through various forms of activity undertaken by the learner. These activities may include formal instruction, hands-on experimentation, dialogue and interaction, or everyday practices that naturally lead to new understanding. Similarly, the Royal Institute Dictionary of Thailand defines "learn" as understanding the meaning of something through experience, highlighting that experience plays a central role in shaping comprehension. Such experiences may involve direct encounters, social interaction, exposure to environments and places, or accumulated insights over time.

Together, these definitions illustrate that learning is a process grounded in both activity and lived experience, occurring not only within formal educational settings but also through everyday engagement with one's surroundings and community.

B: Theory of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is the continual pursuit of knowledge and personal development throughout the lifespan. It extends beyond formal education to include non-formal and informal learning that occurs in everyday life and everywhere. According to UNESCO, lifelong learning is a guiding principle for building inclusive, resilient, and knowledge-based societies, positioning learning as accessible to all regardless of age, background, or setting. Longworth (2003) argues that lifelong learning societies must support individuals in acquiring competencies not only for employment but also for citizenship, cultural understanding, and personal fulfilment. Thus, lifelong learning systems emphasize flexibility, learner autonomy, and diverse learning spaces outside the traditional classroom.

Lifelong learning can range from individual learning to community learning, which encourages everyone to participate in learning and sharing experiences together.

C: Theory and concept of Place-Based Learning (PBL)

Place-based learning (PBL) is an educational approach that uses the local environment. Its culture, geography, economy, and communities as a foundational context for learning. As Gruenewald (2003) explains, PBL seeks to connect learners with their surroundings by grounding learning in real issues,

local knowledge, and community participation. By doing so, it encourages learners to develop a deeper understanding of place, identity, and stewardship.

This approach is especially relevant in urban contexts where social, cultural, and ecological relationships shape lived experience. PBL supports intergenerational learning and community empowerment because it values local voices and situates learning within everyday public environments.

2.2 Theory and concept of Public Space as a 'Third Place'

A: Theory and Definition of Public Space

UN Habitat defined public space as multi-functional areas for social interaction, economic exchange and cultural expression among a wide diversity of people. From a learning perspective, public space is necessary for the community to be a living classroom. Offering a socio-cultural value through a learning experience.

B: Theory of Public Space, Jan Gehl 2011

Gehl (2011) mentioned that "Public spaces are spaces where socialisation happens" such as parks, plazas, and streets, which serve as vital platforms for social interaction and informal learning. Gehl categorises outdoor activities into three types: necessary activities (e.g., commuting), optional activities (e.g., relaxing, walking), and social activities (e.g., conversations, communal events). Well-designed public spaces encourage optional and social activities by offering comfort, safety, and aesthetic quality.

Gehl's perspective highlights that public space is not merely physical infrastructure but a key facilitator of social life, democratic expression, and community cohesion, making it a fundamental setting for informal and lifelong learning.

C: Third Place Theory, Ray Oldenburg, 1989

Ray Oldenburg, an American urban sociologist, introduced the concept of the Third Place in 1989 to describe informal gathering spaces that exist apart from the home (the first place) and the workplace (the second place). These settings, such as cafés, parks, and libraries, serve as community hubs where people connect, socialize, and develop a shared sense of place and belonging. Within the framework of learning cities, third places become valuable environments for informal and intergenerational learning, allowing local knowledge and cultural wisdom to be exchanged naturally across generations.

2.3Culture as Education– Defining Cultural Heritage as a Cultural Capital

UNESCO defined Tangible Cultural heritage includes artifacts, monuments, groups of buildings and sites, and museums that have a diversity of values, including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific, and social significance. Intangible cultural heritage includes the practices, knowledge, and expressions that communities recognize as part of their cultural identity, as well as the associated objects and spaces. This heritage is passed down from generation to generation and changes over time, strengthening identity and respect for cultural diversity.

The concept of Cultural Capital provides an important perspective for understanding cultural heritage not only as a legacy to be preserved, but also as a valuable asset that can be mobilized for learning and development. Drawing on Bourdieu's framework, both tangible and intangible cultural heritage can be transformed into different forms of cultural capital through processes of knowledge transmission, participation, and social recognition. (Bourdieu, 1986) Tangible heritage, such as historic buildings, monuments, cultural landscapes, and heritage districts, has become objectified cultural capital when utilised as resources for education, tourism, place-making, and urban identity formation. At the same time, intangible heritage, including local knowledge, traditions, language, performing arts, and cultural practices, becomes embodied cultural capital when it is transmitted through families, communities, and everyday social interactions, shaping individuals' skills, values, and cultural understanding.

This perspective aligns closely with the Learning City framework, particularly under the Heritage City theme, where cultural heritage serves as a foundation for lifelong learning. Rather than viewing heritage solely as an object of conservation or tourism purposes, the Learning City approach recognises heritage as a living educational resource that enables people of all ages to learn from their local environment, history, and cultural practices. Through place-based learning, intergenerational knowledge exchange, cultural events, and community participation, heritage assets function simultaneously as cultural capital and socio-economic resources; as Munasinghe (2022) argues, heritage-led development carries implications for local economic systems, investment, labour, consumption, and social equity — extending far beyond tourism promotion alone. Recent studies have demonstrated that cultural capital can strengthen community development by fostering social cohesion, local participation, and place attachment. (Hale et al,2023; Naknawaphan&Naknawaphan, 2025) In this sense, a heritage-based learning city functions as a Heritage-led regeneration mechanism that simultaneously safeguards cultural heritage and activates it as a shared learning asset, generating socio-economic value while supporting sustainable urban development and lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens. (Evans, 2005; Landry,2012; Munasinghe, 2022; Tommarchi & Jonas,2024)

2.4 Synthesizing Cultural Heritage, Public Space, and Lifelong Learning within the Learning City Framework

The theoretical framework of this study integrates three complementary bodies of literature to explain how cultural public spaces can be activated as learning environments within Chachoengsao Old Town. First, lifelong learning and Learning City theories provide the policy and educational foundation for understanding learning as a continuous process extending beyond formal institutions (UNESCO UIL, 2015; Longworth, 2003). Second, public space and third place theories clarify the social role of open, accessible, and community-oriented spaces in supporting interaction, participation, and informal knowledge exchange (Gehl, 2011; Oldenburg, 1989). Third, the concepts of cultural heritage and cultural capital position tangible and intangible local assets as educational resources that can strengthen identity, intergenerational transmission, and socio-economic development (Bourdieu, 1970; UNESCO). As illustrated in Figure 3, these theoretical perspectives are translated into the context of Chachoengsao Old Town by framing the area as a historical heritage classroom where cultural assets, local awareness, and social engagement can be connected through urban design approaches such as culture-powered public space, placemaking, and tactical urbanism.

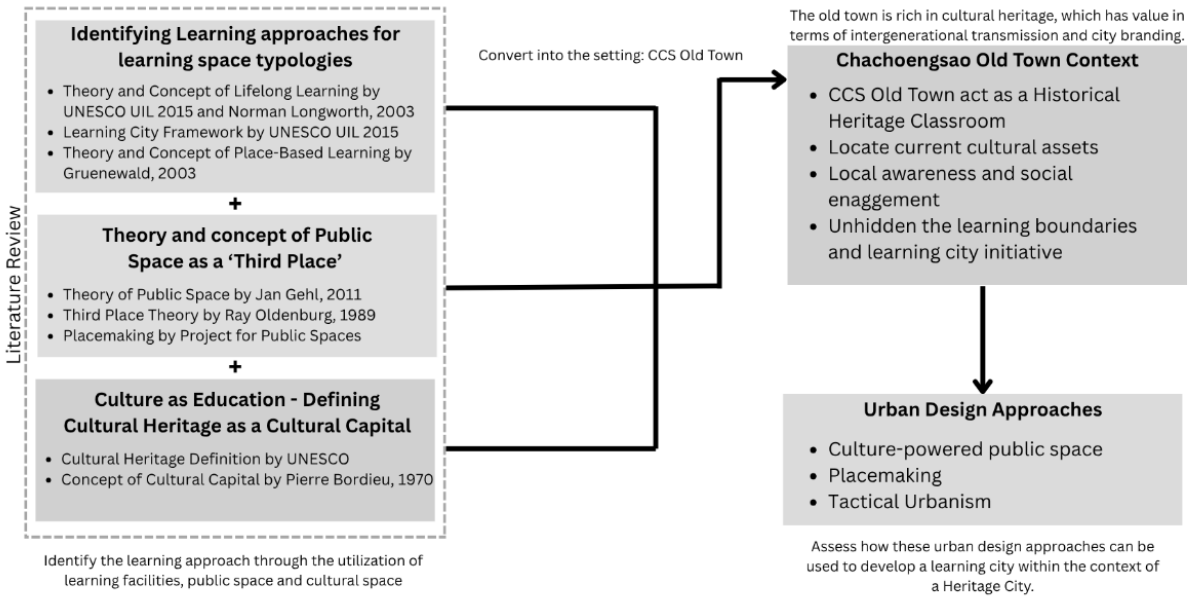

Figure 3. Theoretical Framework.

The theoretical framework is divided into three current problems about Chachoengsao Learning City implementation – Learning Space, Public Space as a Third Place and Culture as Education through Cultural Capital. This theoretical framework combines concepts of lifelong learning, public space as a third place and culture as education to explain how urban environments can enable intergenerational, place-based learning. It builds on UNESCO's Learning City principles and incorporates Jan Gehl's understanding of public space use, positioning public areas as social and cultural settings for informal learning. Oldenburg's Third Place concept further highlights the role of accessible gathering spaces in fostering belonging and knowledge exchange.

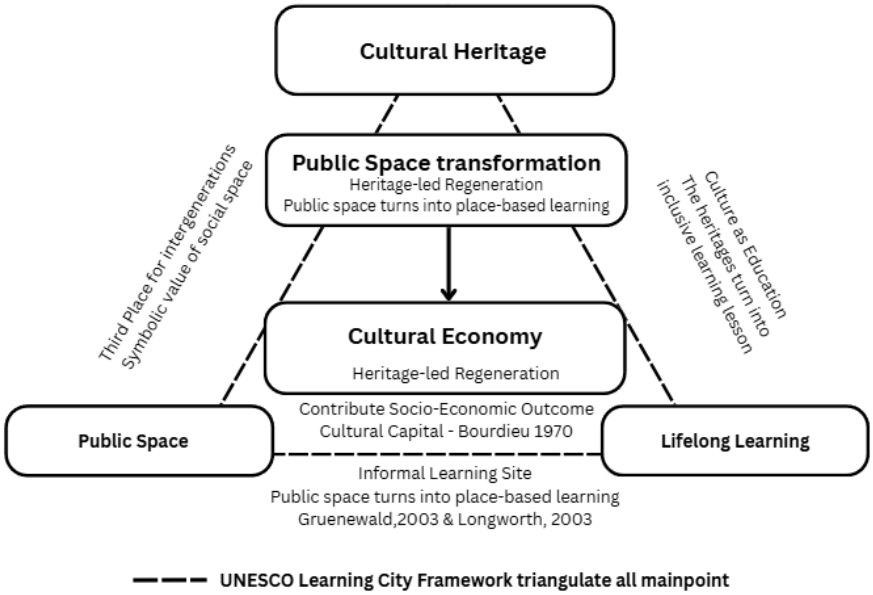

Figure 4. Conceptual framework linking the learning city framework, public space, lifelong learning, and cultural heritage in heritage-led regeneration.

The preceding literature suggests that cultural heritage, public space, and lifelong learning are not independent concepts but mutually reinforcing components of a learning city ecosystem. UNESCO's Learning City framework emphasizes that learning should occur throughout life and across diverse environments, extending beyond formal educational institutions into community settings and everyday urban spaces (UNESCO UIL, 2015). Within this framework, cultural heritage serves as a foundational learning resource. Tangible heritage, such as historic buildings, cultural landscapes, and heritage districts, provides physical settings for learning, while intangible heritage, including local knowledge, traditions, and cultural practices, provides educational content that can be transmitted across generations. Through the lens of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, these heritage assets become valuable resources that contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to social and economic development when actively utilized within community life. Public spaces play a critical mediating role in this process. Drawing upon Gehl's theory of public space and Oldenburg's concept of the Third Place, public spaces function as accessible environments where social interaction, informal learning, and community participation naturally occur. When heritage assets are integrated into public spaces, these environments can be transformed from passive cultural resources into active place-based learning settings. As Gruenewald (2003) argues, place-based learning connects individuals with their local environment through direct experience, community engagement, and contextual knowledge creation.

This transformation enables public spaces to support intergenerational learning, where cultural knowledge, memories, traditions, and local narratives are shared among different age groups. Through continuous participation in cultural activities, festivals, community events, and everyday interactions, cultural heritage is converted into cultural capital that strengthens local identity, social cohesion, and

civic engagement. Simultaneously, these learning processes contribute to broader socio-economic outcomes by enhancing cultural tourism, supporting local creative economies, increasing community capacity, and reinforcing place attractiveness.

Therefore, this study conceptualizes heritage public spaces as a bridge between cultural heritage and lifelong learning. Within the Learning City framework, the activation of heritage assets through place-based and intergenerational learning transforms public spaces into living classrooms, enabling the accumulation of cultural capital and contributing to sustainable socio-economic development. This relationship forms the conceptual foundation of the study and guides the investigation of how Chachoengsao Old Town can leverage its cultural heritage to advance the Learning City concept

3. Methods

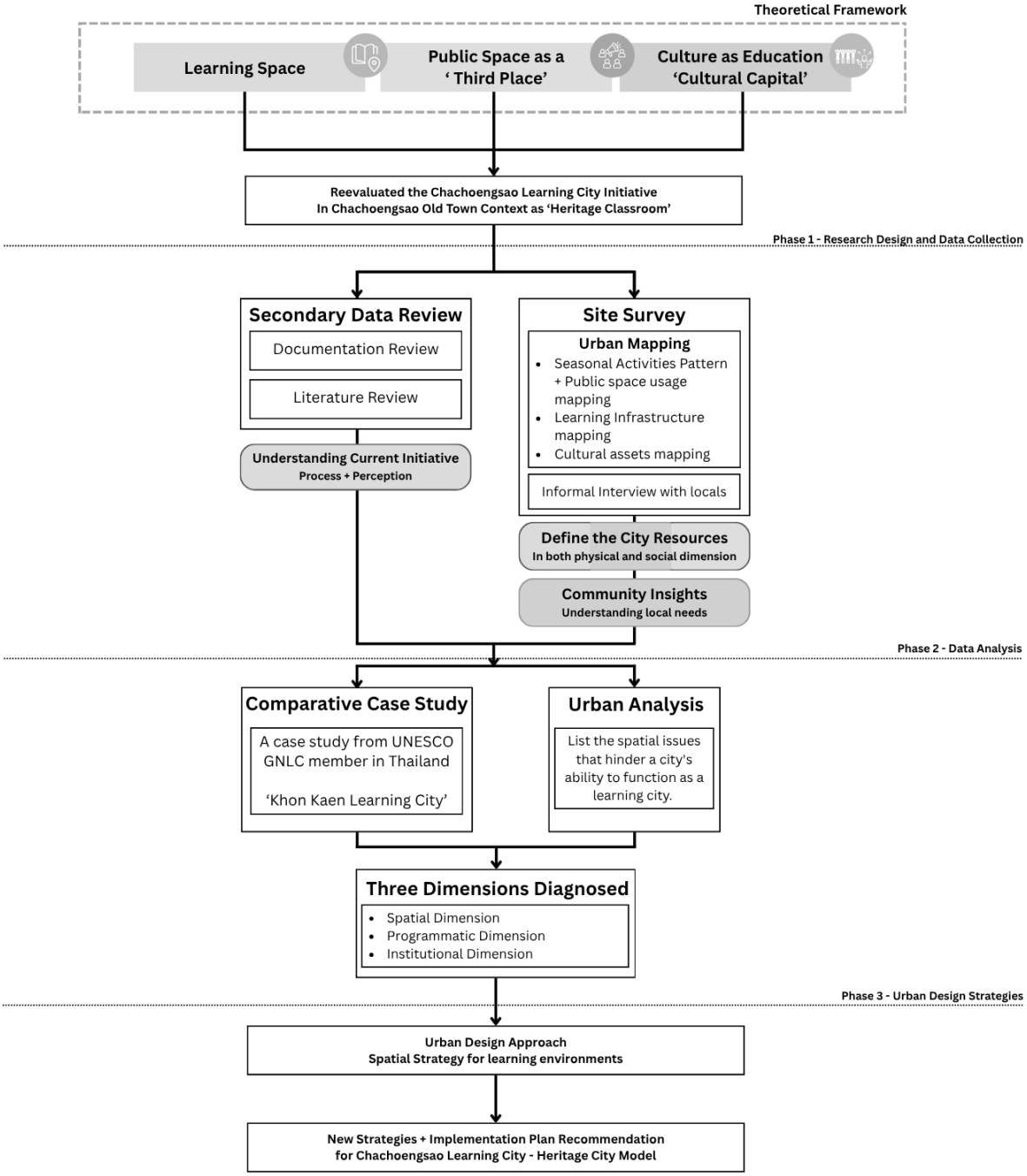

Figure 5. Research Framework.

This research adopts a qualitative approach structured around three interconnected theoretical lenses: Learning Space, Public Space as a 'Third Place', and Culture as Education through Cultural Capital. Framed from the problem statement of developing the Learning City in Chachoengsao old town. These frameworks are applied to reevaluate the Chachoengsao Learning City initiative within the context of its Old Town, treated as a 'Heritage Classroom', a living environment where cultural heritage serves as the foundation for place-based intergenerational learning. The research is structured across three analytical stages: dataset preparation, data collection, and data analysis. Data collection is divided into two parallel streams. The first is secondary data review, comprising documentation review and literature review, which aims to understand the current learning city initiative through its process and institutional perception. The second is a site survey, which includes urban mapping of seasonal activities patterns, public space usage, learning infrastructure, and cultural assets, alongside 10 informal interviews with local residents to define the city's resources in both physical and social dimensions and to generate community insights about local needs. In the data analysis phase, findings from both streams are examined through a comparative case study of Khon Kaen as a UNESCO GNLC member city in Thailand, and through urban analysis to identify spatial issues hindering the city's function as a learning city.

The synthesis of these analyses produces a diagnosis across three dimensions — spatial, programmatic, and institutional — which then informs the urban design approach and final implementation strategies

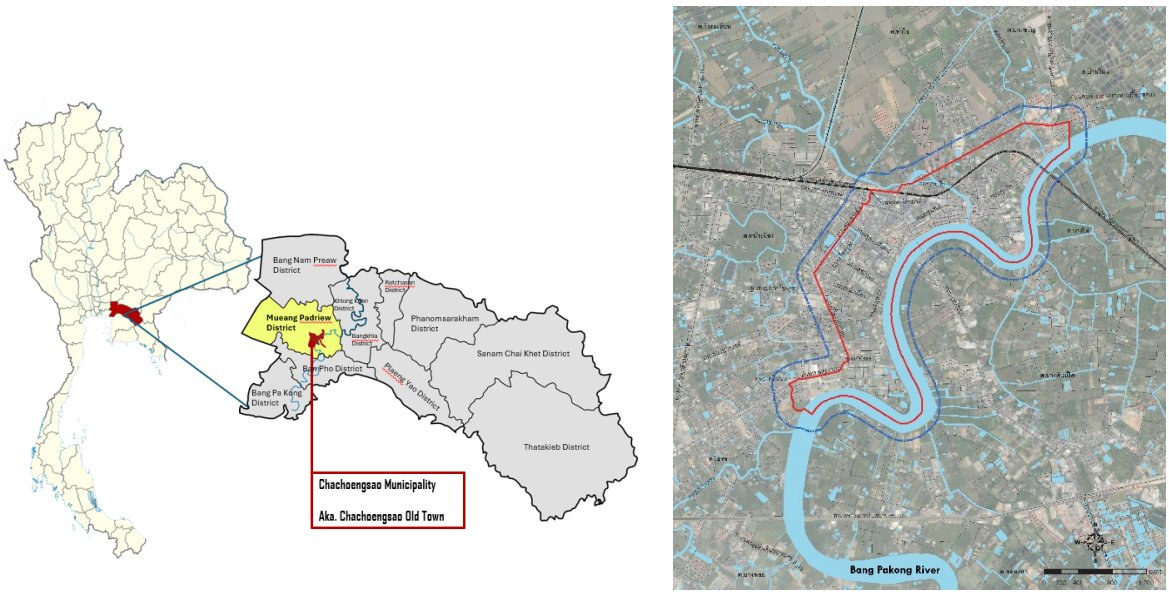

Figure 6. Site study area – Chachoengsao Old Town.
(Source: Left by Author, Right by ONEP, 2020)

The research site is located in Chachoengsao Old Town, commonly known as "Pad-Riew," within Na Mueang Sub-district, Mueang Chachoengsao District, the administrative and urban centre of Chachoengsao Province. The study area covers approximately 3.96 km², with an additional 2.73 km² buffer zone surrounding the historic core (Phamornsuwan et al., 2021). The site was selected due to its strategic role in Chachoengsao's Learning City initiative under the Heritage City theme promoted by PMUA, as well as its strong local governance capacity and commitment to learning city development (EEF, 2025).

Chachoengsao Old Town contains a rich concentration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including historic temples, traditional shophouses, riverside communities, local knowledge, and cultural festivals. As the historic heart of the municipality recognized within UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), the area provides an appropriate context for investigating how cultural heritage can function as a place-based learning resource. The site, therefore, offers valuable

opportunities to examine the relationship between heritage conservation, lifelong learning, community engagement, and sustainable urban development.

3.1. Secondary Data Review

This study employs secondary data to build a foundational understanding of the policy context, urban development direction, and ongoing learning city initiatives in Chachoengsao. The EEC Strategic Plan provides an overarching regional development framework that influences economic and spatial priorities within the province, helping to situate the study within broader national and regional agendas. The Chachoengsao Municipality Local Development Plan 2023–2027 offers insight into the city's planned infrastructure, social development goals, and municipal strategies, which are essential for aligning the proposed learning spaces with local needs and policy directions. The City Leaders Magazine Vol.5 —Chachoengsao Learning City Progress Report supplies detailed information on the city's current learning city mechanisms, achievements, and challenges. Critical for identifying gaps and opportunities for improvement.

In addition, digital platforms such as the Padriew Sainatee Withi Wattanatham Facebook page serve as real-time documentation of cultural events and community activities funded under the Learning City research project, providing evidence of how learning is practiced in everyday public life. Furthermore, within the Thai sociocultural context, Facebook remains the predominant digital platform through which the general public engages with local news and community activities. As such, the municipality's official Facebook page functions as the primary communication channel for disseminating information regarding public events and city festivals, making it a particularly relevant and representative source of data for tracking the scope and frequency of learning city activities within the district. Lastly, the City Leader website and magazine by PMUA offer national-level perspectives, case studies, and conceptual frameworks for Learning Cities in Thailand, enabling comparison and positioning Chachoengsao within the broader network of learning city development. Together, these sources enrich the analysis by combining policy-level, municipal-level, and community-level insights.

3.2 Site Survey and Urban Mappings

To make a better understanding of how the urban morphology of Chachoengsao can influence the way of lifelong learning, urban mapping is used as a primary analytical tool — operating across all three layers of the Learning City Ecosystem, which was adapted from Zhuang, R. et al., 2017 – five types of learning environment within the cities. The cultural and learning assets map identifies the density and distribution of physical assets within the area, defining district characteristics that correspond to Layer 1; Formal Education and Layer 2; Learning Support Infrastructure of the ecosystem — from schools to libraries and museums. The activities mapping, on the other hand, functions as a tool to analyse patterns and interactions of human activities across time, capturing the seasonal rhythm of events and festivals that directly activate Layer 3: Learning Potential of Places, turning temples, public spaces, markets, and streets into living learning environments.

When both maps are integrated, they reveal how cultural-learning assets and seasonal activities intersect, highlighting which spaces actively support place-based learning, where gaps in the ecosystem exist, and how people interact with cultural resources across time and season. This combined view identifies strategic locations for enhancing place-based, intergenerational, and continuous learning within the urban fabric.

3.2.1 Interview Design

The interview structure comes from three major problems that have been addressed in Chachoengsao Learning City development. To clarify these problems, the question is categorised into three topics. The interview design was structured to examine the key spatial, experiential, and cultural challenges identified in Chachoengsao's Learning City development. As shown in Table 1, the questions were organised into three thematic categories and aligned with relevant theoretical lenses to connect participants' perceptions with the study's conceptual framework.

Table 1: Interview Questions framed by three major problems of CCS Learning City.

Major problems (Topics)	Sample Interview Questions	Reflection with the theoretical lenses	Theoretical Source
The perception of Learning City	1.For you, what does a "Learning City" mean in your everyday life? 2.Have you ever had a meaningful learning experience in any public space in Chachoengsao? Please describe. 3.If possible, what kinds of learning activities would you like to see more in Chachoengsao?	Learning Space Lifelong Learning Learning Perception	UNESCO UIL (2015); UNESCO UIL (2017); Longworth (2003); Zhuang et al. (2017)
Learning Experiences in the City	1.Where and how do you think learning should happen in Chachoengsao? 2.Which places in Mueang Chachoengsao could serve as intergenerational learning spaces? 3.In what ways would you like to participate in building a Learning City?	Public Space City's experience	Gehl (2011); Oldenburg (1989); Gruenewald (2003); Zhuang et al. (2017)
Chachoengsao Cultural Identity and Future Vision	1. In your view, what represents the local identity of Chachoengsao? 2. How can local culture and identity be used to promote shared learning in the city? 3. Do you have any further suggestions for making the city a learning space for everyone?	Cultural Identity Cultural Heritage Cultural Capital	Bourdieu (1986); Horayangkura (2005); Landry (2012); Munasinghe (2022);

3.2.2 Participants or Subjects

Participants were selected from age group populations categorised by the WHO Age Group Classification, in correlation with the UNESCO Learning City framework that emphasises gender equality. The participants should be local residents living within the old town area in order to clarify three major problems of the learning city initiative. However, a limitation in selecting these participants is that currently, only data has been collected from two groups: young adults (17-30 years old) and middle-aged adults (31-59 years old). Future research requires interviews with all age groups.

3.3 Thematic Analysis

The interview data were thematically analysed and coded around the three key challenges identified in the research. The data also points out, through the spatial mapping, to identify the usage of public space during the cultural festivals.

3.4 Comparative Case Study Review

Khon Kaen was selected as a comparative case through purposive criterion sampling based on seven justifiable criteria that enable meaningful analytical comparison with Chachoengsao Old Town:

1. UNESCO GNLC membership (Thailand) — Both cities are members of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities operating within the Thai national policy context under PMUA coordination, ensuring comparability of institutional framework and policy mandate.

2. Secondary city classification — Both Khon Kaen and Chachoengsao are classified as secondary cities in Thailand, sharing comparable urban scale, population density, and governance capacity distinct from metropolitan Bangkok, making the comparison contextually appropriate for transferable lessons.

3. Cultural capital richness — Both cities possess layered tangible and intangible cultural capital as primary assets — Khon Kaen through its silk heritage, Isan cultural identity, and multicultural communities; Chachoengsao through its Chinese Thai, Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic

heritage — enabling direct comparison of how cultural capital is mobilised within the Learning City framework. (Silapacharanan & Mongkolpradit, 2012)

4. Municipal-level governance — Both cities operate their Learning City initiatives at the municipal (Tessaban) level rather than provincial level, ensuring comparable governance scope, resource scale, and decision-making authority.

5. Contrasting governance model — While sharing similar preconditions, the two cities have adopted distinctly different institutional models: Khon Kaen's citizen-led, private-sector-anchored Think Tank model versus Chachoengsao's municipality-and-university-led collaborative model. This contrast provides analytical leverage to identify governance factors that enable or constrain Learning City outcomes.

6. Heritage-to-economy trajectory — Both cities explicitly position cultural heritage as a driver of creative economy transition, as evidenced by Khon Kaen's creative tourism and MICE city branding and Chachoengsao's designation under PMUA's Heritage City theme — allowing comparison of how heritage capital is converted into socio-economic value.

7. Data availability and documentation — Khon Kaen's Learning City model is extensively documented in Wongthanawasu et al. (2019) and PMUA publications, enabling systematic secondary data comparison without requiring additional fieldwork — a methodological necessity given this study's qualitative, single-site design

This case study will show a successful strategy for driving the learning city by using cultural capital as a learning resource. Khon Kaen itself is also rich in cultural diversity and city branding. In further study, it requires studying the learning city from other countries as well.

4. Results

4.1 Policy Review – Chachoengsao Learning City Mechanism: Institutional Dimension

According to the EEC Strategic Plan, Chachoengsao is positioned as a livable residential city. The alignment between the EEC Strategic Plan, the Chachoengsao Municipality Local Development Plan, and the Chachoengsao Learning City Research Project demonstrates a unified direction focused on human capital development, creative economy, and area-based urban improvement. The EEC's emphasis on workforce skills, innovation, and regional competitiveness corresponds with the municipality's goals to enhance education, public services, and quality of life. Within this policy landscape, the Learning City initiative serves as a practical mechanism for turning strategic goals into community-level action through lifelong learning programs, cultural activities, and the use of public spaces as learning environments. All three policy directions highlight the importance of cultural capital, heritage assets, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, which mainly outcomes focusing on the economic power contribution. Learning City is helping to prepare human resources for further development towards a Creative City and Smart City.

However, in terms of using cultural capital to drive the mechanism of a learning city, the municipality currently still uses the festival model. Although there are plans to develop learning spaces, there is still a lack of clarity regarding the use of cultural spaces and a lack of public participation in the development of place-based learning spaces. The institutional fragmentation observed in Chachoengsao reflects a broader governance pattern critiqued by Munasinghe (2022), wherein top-down heritage decision-making excludes community voices and erodes the cultural diversity that gives heritage its socio-economic value. Table 2 synthesises how cultural capital can operate as a mechanism for advancing Chachoengsao's Learning City development within the broader institutional and urban policy framework. It links key concepts, local conditions, and expected outcomes to clarify how heritage resources, public-space activation, and learning programs can support the city's transition toward creative and culturally rooted urban development.

Table 2: Mechanisms for driving learning cities by using cultural capital.

Key Concept	Description/Mechanism	CCS Old Town Context	Expected Outcomes
Cultural Capital	Both tangible (physical) and intangible (socio-economic) cultural assets with historical and multicultural character	Existing but not well categorized	Serves as a resource base for subsequent stages
Culture as Education	Informal education: training courses for SMEs Learning Management → Learning Manager Learning Center → reduce inequality gap	Potential to integrate cultural capital into learning activities	• Lifelong Learning Culture — Build community skills and reduce inequality • Elevated Cultural Capital — Creative Economy, Strengthen Community
Culture activates Public Space.	Using traditional cultural festivals (e.g. Songkran, Loy Kratong) to activate public space as a learning environment Using City Festival to activate public space as a learning environment and contribute to economic power	Contributes economic power and transforms public space into a third place for locals	Public space has become a community learning hub
Learning City in the Urban Development Trajectory	Learning City contributes the lessons learned and expands the transition toward the creative city model, with smart city as a parallel incoming urban development pathway	Incoming urban development	A smart city with deep cultural roots

4.2 Site Survey and Urban Mappings: Spatial Dimensions

4.2.1 Spatial Integration of Public Spaces, Cultural Assets, and Learning Facilities

This map illustrates 3 data sets: public space, cultural assets and the locations of learning facilities in Chachoengsao old town. The cultural assets will focus on a physical cultural place such as a temple, museum, archaeological site, and local market. The learning facilities will include a general education school, a vocational school, a university, and a learning centre.

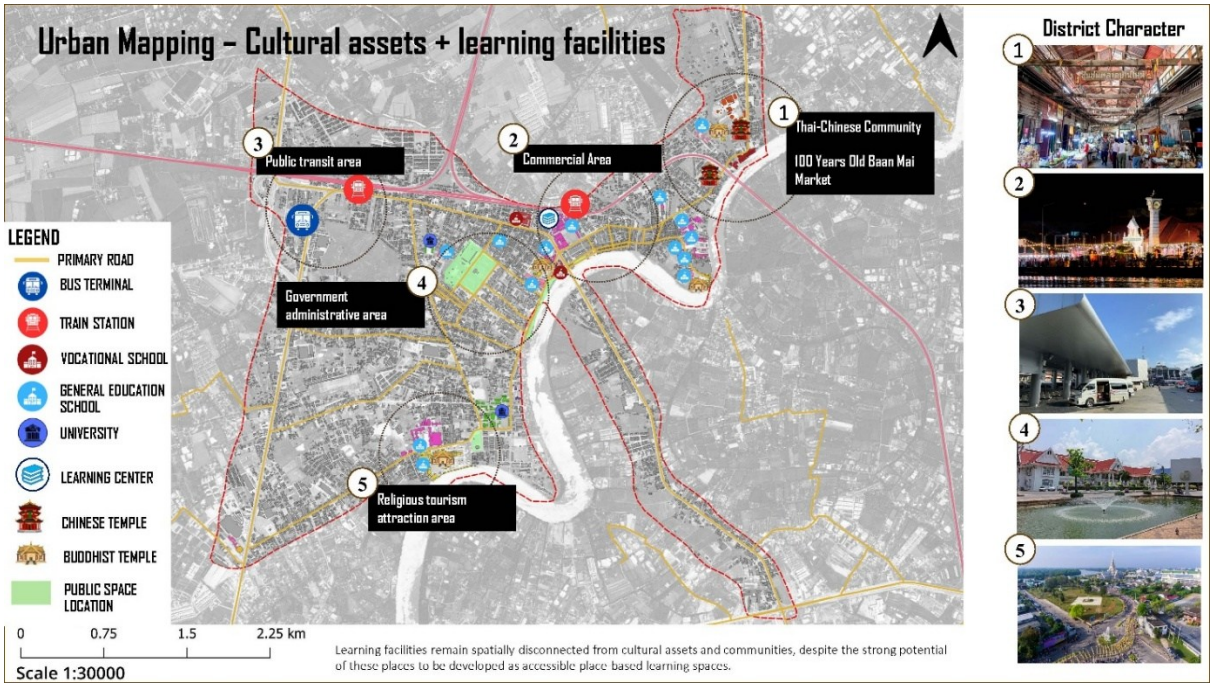

Figure 7. Spatial Integration of Public Spaces, Cultural Assets, and Learning Facilities Mapping.

As a result, the learning facilities will be concentrated in the middle of the old town. Located in the Thai Chinese Community district, the commercial district and the government administrative district. While the cultural assets are scattered around the site area. Learning facilities remain spatially disconnected from cultural assets and communities, despite the strong potential of these places to be developed as accessible, place-based learning spaces.

4.2.2 Seasonal Activities Calendar Mappings: Programmatic Dimension

Figure 8 presents the seasonal activity calendar mapping of Chachoengsao Old Town, illustrating the temporal distribution of cultural, religious, and community-based events throughout the year. The mapping reveals that public spaces, particularly parks and riverfront areas, function as the primary venues for city-wide festivals and public gatherings due to their accessibility, capacity, and ability to accommodate diverse activities. Most events are closely associated with religious traditions, cultural celebrations, and local product promotion, reflecting the city's strong cultural identity and heritage-based economy. From a Learning City perspective, these recurring events demonstrate the municipality's reliance on a festival-based activation model, where public spaces temporarily become environments for social interaction, cultural exchange, and informal learning. While such activities successfully attract residents and visitors and contribute to local economic vitality, the findings indicate that many cultural heritage spaces embedded within historic communities remain underutilised as year-round learning environments. Consequently, learning opportunities are concentrated around periodic events rather than being continuously integrated into everyday urban life. This pattern highlights the need to expand the role of cultural heritage spaces beyond seasonal programming and transform them into permanent place-based learning resources that can support intergenerational knowledge exchange, community engagement, and lifelong learning throughout the year.

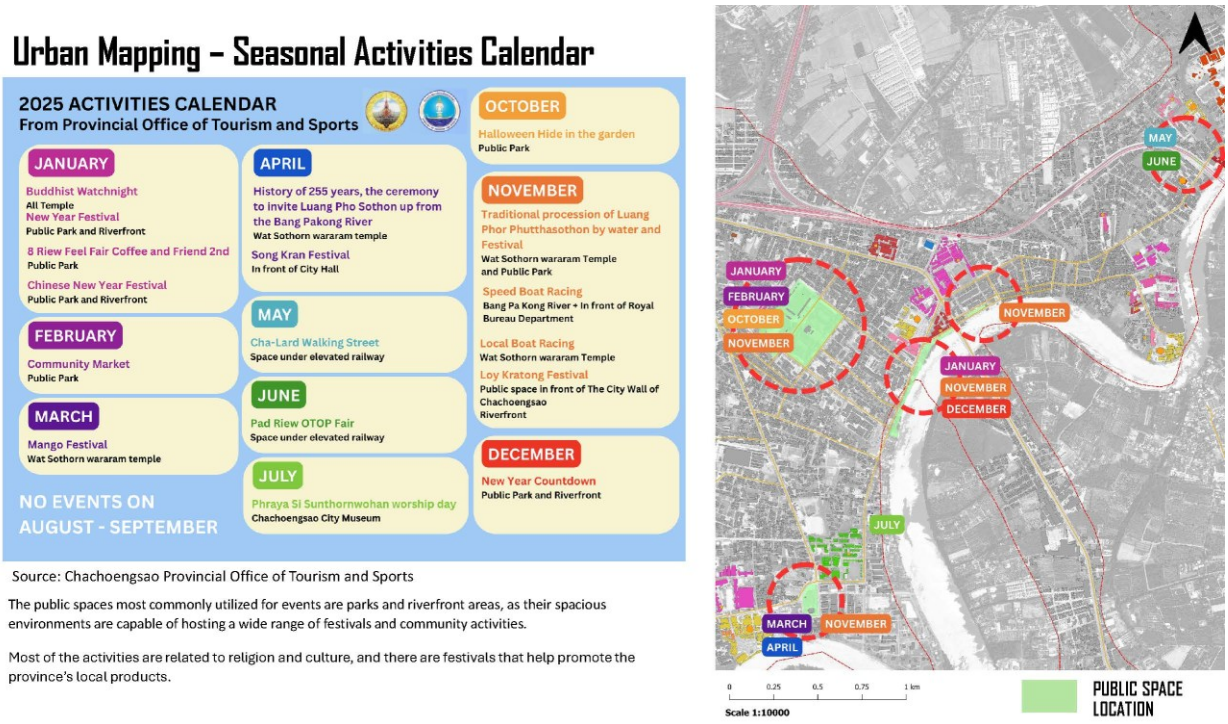

Figure 8. Seasonal Activities Calendar Mappings.

Figure 8 illustrates the use of public spaces through seasonal activities, which the municipality and It shows that the public spaces used most frequently for events are parks and riverfront areas, as those areas are suitable for accommodating various festivals. Most of the seasonal activities are related to

religion and culture, and there are festivals that help promote the province's local products. However, cultural spaces within the old communities are not often utilised as learning spaces.

4.2.3 Integrated Mapping – Cultural + Learning + Public Space

The integrated map shows that the density of cultural and learning assets, along with the character of each district, influences the selection of sites for festivals. Currently, most events are held in parks and riverfront areas because they are easier to manage. However, cultural places such as markets or temples, which have strong potential to be developed into place-based learning spaces, are not being further utilised. As a result, most festivals lack a distinct local cultural identity, and cultural heritage is neither clearly expressed nor effectively passed down through generations.

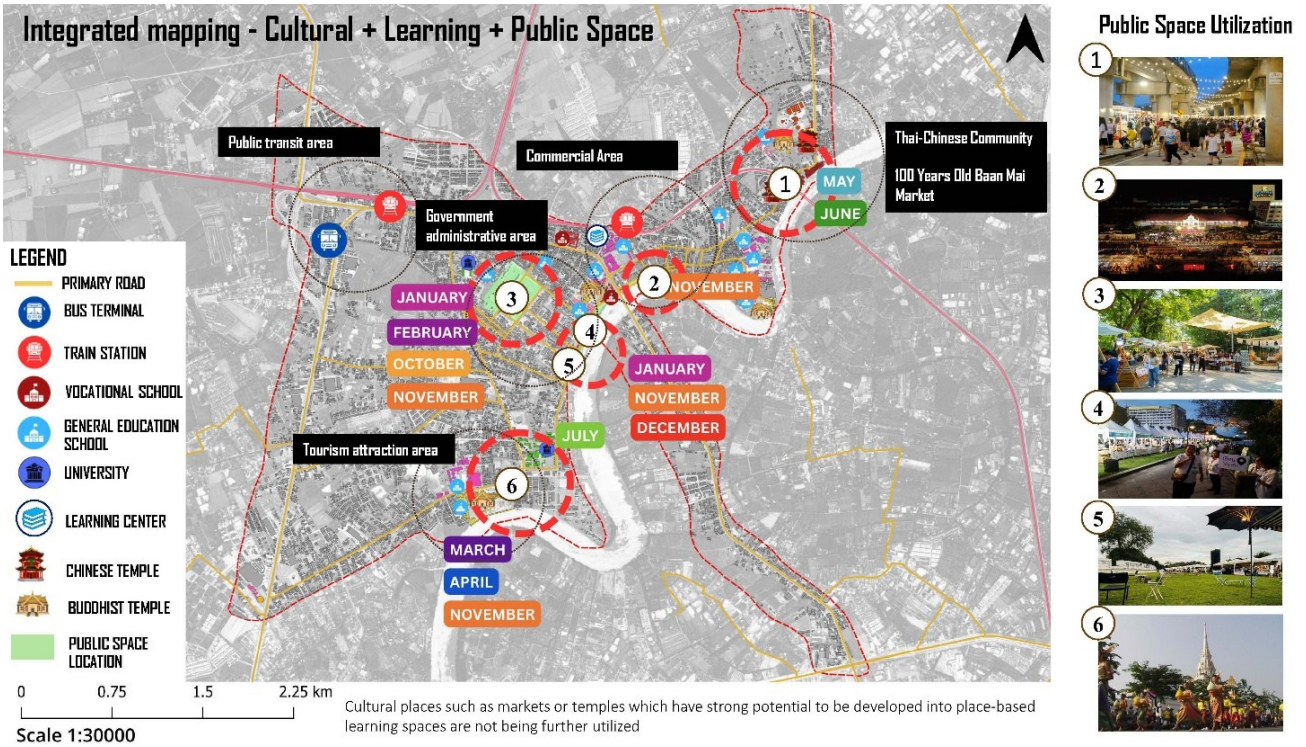

Figure 9. Integrated Mapping – Cultural + Learning + Public Space.

Furthermore, another contributing factor is the lack of public awareness and understanding of the Learning City concept among local residents — a condition that can be observed through these maps as limited access to inclusive learning spaces for all population groups. This limitation stems from two primary reasons.



Figure 10. Spatial Disconnection in the old town area that locals point out.

The first concerns accessibility, which is a fundamental prerequisite for reaching the city's learning facilities. Currently, the urban design of secondary cities in Thailand, including Chachoengsao, remains heavily car-dependent. Street design has not been conceived with pedestrians in mind — narrow sidewalks generate a sense of insecurity and discomfort for those attempting to reach learning facilities on foot, ultimately creating an environment that is not conducive to learning. The second reason is the insufficient provision of inclusive learning spaces that can adequately serve all age groups within the population.

4.3 Thematic Analysis – Three major problems of CCS Learning City Initiative

The findings suggest that Chachoengsao's primary challenge is not the absence of cultural resources but the lack of mechanisms to systematically transform cultural heritage into accessible learning opportunities. Public spaces, festivals, and community activities currently function as an informal learning infrastructure; however, stronger integration between cultural assets, learning spaces, governance systems, and community participation is needed. By activating heritage public spaces as place-based and intergenerational learning environments, cultural capital can generate socio-economic value while advancing the implementation of the Learning City concept in Chachoengsao.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis of Learning City Ecosystem in Chachoengsao Old Town.

Theme	Key Codes	Supporting Evidence	Theoretical Interpretation	Related Objective
1. Learning City as an Abstract Policy Rather Than a Lived Experience	Limited awareness of Learning City; Learning City perception; Learning through participation; Lack of shared vision; Understanding through activities rather than policy	Residents tend to engage with Learning City initiatives through festivals and community activities rather than through direct understanding of the Learning City concept itself. Public awareness of Learning City remains relatively limited despite municipal efforts.	Learning City principles become meaningful when embedded in everyday experiences and lifelong learning opportunities rather than remaining as policy rhetoric (UNESCO UIL, 2015; Longworth, 2003; Zhuang et al., 2017).	Objective 2
2. Festivals as Informal Learning Infrastructure	City festivals; Walking street markets; Community participation; Learning by doing; Intergenerational interaction; Informal learning; Entrepreneurship learning	Festivals, cultural events, and walking street markets provide opportunities for residents to learn event management, entrepreneurship, cultural interpretation, and community collaboration while simultaneously generating socio-economic benefits.	Public spaces function as Third Places where informal and intergenerational learning naturally occurs through social interaction and participation (Gehl, 2011; Oldenburg, 1989; Gruenewald, 2003).	Objective 2
3. Cultural Heritage as an Underutilized Learning Resource	Tangible heritage; Intangible heritage; Temple as learning space; Community knowledge; Heritage interpretation; Cultural identity; Untapped cultural assets	Chachoengsao possesses rich cultural resources, including temples, riverside communities, traditional markets, local wisdom, and multicultural heritage. However, these assets have not been systematically categorised or activated as learning resources.	Heritage can be transformed into cultural capital when utilized for education, knowledge transmission, and community development rather than solely for conservation or tourism purposes (Bourdieu, 1986; Horayangkura, 2005; Munasinghe, 2022).	Objective 1
4. Public Space as a Platform for Place-Based and Intergenerational Learning	Public space activation; Learning space accessibility; Place attachment; Everyday learning; Social interaction; Community gathering	Heritage public spaces provide opportunities for learning through direct experience, storytelling, observation, and participation in local cultural practices.	Place-based learning connects individuals to local environments and strengthens identity through experiential and community-based learning (Gruenewald, 2003; Gehl, 2011; Oldenburg, 1989).	Objectives 1 & 2
5. Fragmented Learning Ecosystem and Weak Institutional Integration	Spatial disconnection; Isolated learning facilities; Limited stakeholder collaboration; Weak governance structure; Lack of coordination	Learning facilities, cultural assets, and community actors remain weakly connected. Existing activities are often project-based and dependent on specific organizations rather than operating as an integrated learning ecosystem.	Effective Learning Cities require collaborative governance and institutional capacity that connect public, educational, private, and community sectors (Healey, 1998; Thummaphan & Sripa, 2023; UNESCO UIL, 2015).	Objective 3
6. Cultural Capital as a Driver of Socio-Economic Development	Heritage economy; Local products; Creative economy; Cultural tourism; Community empowerment; Local identity	Cultural activities and heritage assets generate economic opportunities while strengthening local identity and community participation. However, their socio-economic potential remains underleveraged.	Cultural capital can generate social, economic, and symbolic value when activated through learning, participation, and heritage-led development (Bourdieu, 1986; Evans, 2005; Tommarchi & Jonas, 2024; Landry, 2012).	Objective 3

4.4 Case Study Review – Khon Kaen Model

Wongthanawasu, S. et al. (2019) illustrate how Khon Kaen's Learning City and smart city development have been highly successful. Using the Khon Kaen Model, the city's strength lies in its integrated collaboration among stakeholders, which led to the establishment of the Khon Kaen City Development Corporation—also known as the Khon Kaen Think Tank. This collective effort has given everyone in the city a clear shared vision for urban development, fostering what is known as the Citizens' Sense of Khon Kaen Spirit. The establishment of Khon Kaen Think Tank helps to develop the city efficiently, reduce the government gap, and promote decentralisation. (Sudhipongpracha&Dahiya, 2019; Pechpakdee, 2020).

While Chachoengsao's learning city development strategy differs from the Khon Kaen Model, the mechanism for driving the learning city stems from integrated collaboration among stakeholders. The municipality serves as the core driver, while academic institutions like Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University act as a central hub connecting knowledge with all sectors, particularly local communities. The focus is on collaboratively driving city festivals, experimenting and learning from each activity to develop them further (PMUA & Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University, 2025).

To better understand the strengths and limitations of Chachoengsao's Learning City implementation, the city's initiatives were analysed using the six pillars of the UNESCO Learning City Framework and compared with those of Khon Kaen, a recognised Learning City benchmark in Thailand. Table 4 summarises the key activities and implementation approaches adopted by both cities, highlighting differences in governance, learning environments, community engagement, and the integration of cultural capital into lifelong learning practices.

Table 4: Khon Kaen Learning City Initiatives categorized in UNESCO Learning City Framework.

UNESCO Learning City Framework (6 Pillars)	**Khon Kaen Learning City Activities and Implementation**	**Chachoengsao Learning City Activities and Implementation**
Inclusive Learning in the Education System	Strong collaboration between Khon Kaen Think Tank (KKTT), Khon Kaen Transit System (KKTS), Academic, Public Sector, Private Sector and People — Khon Kaen Model Offers programs and activities for vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and informal workers.	Opening an inclusive learning center such as Knowledge Center of Chachoengsao (KCC) which is designed to serve all generations from young children and school-age students to working adults and the elderly . Municipal schools co-organize learning activities both inside and outside the classroom
Revitalized Learning in Families and Communities	Utilizes public spaces such as Bueng Kaen Nakhon, local markets, and cultural communities as learning venues. Organizes community-based activities like walking streets and silk festivals that encourage intergenerational learning.	Utilize public spaces and underutilized areas such as under the elevated railway bridge as a walking street in order to engage the community through everyday life (commerce + learning activities) Provide intergenerational learning program and activities at KCC Learning activities in public spaces such as Somdet Phra Srinakarin Park and along the Bang Pakong River — Still reliant on occasional events; not yet established as a permanent, consistent learning space
Effective Learning for and in the Workplace	Promotes lifelong learning for professional development, such as digital skills and creative tourism training programs.	Upskill / Reskill programs for workers in the EEC area, supporting industrial expansion

	Encourages collaboration between universities and local businesses for supporting SME	Encourages collaboration between universities and local businesses for supporting SME
Extending the Use of Modern Learning Technologies	Implement digital platforms such as the KKU Learning Platform. Utilizes digital smart data to support urban planning — Smart City	Provide digital tools for learning purposes at KCC Multimedia zone Social Media utilization — Senior citizens and business owners are being taught how to use social media for their work or to promote their products.
Enhanced Quality and Excellence in Learning	Continuously assesses and improves learning quality through collaboration between the university and municipality. Adopts the "Smart Education" concept to enhance learning quality at all levels.	Continuously assesses and improves city festival through collaboration among the stakeholders.
A Vibrant Culture of Learning Throughout Life	Organizes continuous community events that nurture learning habits, such as *Cultural Festivals*. Khon Kaen citizens possess a strong sense of *Learning Citizenship*.	Multicultural heritage (Thai, Chinese, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic) the urban environment becomes City classroom. The city festivals are integrated with a learning culture through daily practice.

To identify transferable lessons for strengthening Chachoengsao's Learning City development, a comparative analysis was conducted using Khon Kaen as a benchmark UNESCO Learning City. Table 5 presents the analytical matrix comparing governance structures, spatial integration, programmatic approaches, cultural capital utilisation, socio-economic outcomes, and digital learning mechanisms, highlighting key performance gaps and strategic opportunities for Chachoengsao.

Table 5: Analytical Metrix reveals comparison between Khon Kaen and Chachoengsao.

Dimension	Indicator	Khon Kaen	Chachoengsao	Performance Gap	Implication for Chachoengsao
Governance	Institutional model	Citizen-led Think Tank (KKTT): private sector, academic, public, community integrated	Municipality + Rajabhat University as dual drivers; limited community representation	Khon Kaen: high decentralisation and stakeholder diversity; Chachoengsao: top-down, limited participatory governance	Establish multi-stakeholder Heritage Learning City Council with formalised community and private sector roles (Healey, 1998)
Governance	Civic identity & ownership	Strong "Khon Kaen Spirit" citizen-driven sense of ownership over city development	Limited shared vision; residents have low awareness of Learning City concept	Khon Kaen: high civic capital; Chachoengsao: low institutionalised capital (Bourdieu, 1986)	Build civic identity through community-led heritage interpretation and participatory programming
Spatial	Learning infrastructure integration	Public spaces (Bueng Kaen Nakhon, markets, cultural communities) systematically integrated as learning venues	Learning facilities concentrated in administrative core; cultural assets spatially disconnected	Khon Kaen: spatially integrated ecosystem; Chachoengsao: fragmented spatial distribution	Develop Heritage Learning Corridor linking cultural assets with learning infrastructure
Spatial	Accessibility & mobility	Smart city infrastructure supports multimodal access; KKTS transit system	Car-dependent urban design; narrow sidewalks limit	Khon Kaen: accessible learning ecosystem; Chachoengsao:	Pedestrian-priority streetscape improvements along

			pedestrian access to learning spaces	mobility barrier to place-based learning	Bang Pakong riverside axis
Programmatic	Learning activation model	Continuous community events, walking streets, silk festivals; year-round programming	Festival-dominant model; cultural spaces dormant outside event periods	Khon Kaen: continuous learning culture; Chachoengsao: episodic activation	Develop year-round Cultural Learning Calendar converting festivals into permanent third places (Oldenburg, 1989)
Programmatic	Intergenerational programming	Structured programmes for vulnerable groups: elderly, children, informal workers	KCC serves all generations; festivals include intergenerational activities but not systematically	Khon Kaen: institutionalised intergenerational programme; Chachoengsao: ad hoc	Designate Intergenerational Learning Nodes at KCC, riverside market, and Somdet Phra Srinakarin Park
Cultural Capital	Objectified capital utilisation	Heritage assets (silk, Isan culture) systematically integrated into creative economy and branding	Rich multicultural heritage (temples, shophouses, communities) but not classified as learning assets	Khon Kaen: objectified capital → economic value; Chachoengsao: objectified capital dormant	Formally classify and map cultural assets as Learning City resources under UNESCO 3-layer framework (UNESCO UIL, 2015)
Cultural Capital	Institutionalised capital	UNESCO GNLC since 2019; strong national and international recognition; MICE and creative city branding	UNESCO GNLC since 2020; Heritage City theme under PMUA; limited public awareness of designation	Khon Kaen: high institutional legitimacy; Chachoengsao: low public awareness of institutional capital	Communication strategy and city branding to translate institutional designation into community identity
Economic	Socio-economic outcomes	Creative economy, MICE industry, digital tourism; measurable economic contribution from cultural heritage	Economic contribution through city festivals; EEC alignment; creative economy as aspirational goal	Khon Kaen: heritage → measurable economic output; Chachoengsao: heritage → economic potential unrealised	Develop monitoring indicators for economic activity generated through Learning City heritage activation (Evans, 2005)
Digital	Learning technology integration	KKU digital learning platform; smart city data for urban planning	KCC multimedia zone; social media training for seniors and SMEs	Khon Kaen: systemic digital infrastructure; Chachoengsao: fragmented digital tools	Develop integrated digital learning platform connected to heritage public spaces

A comparison between Chachoengsao and Khon Kaen using the UNESCO Learning City Framework shows significant differences in governance, strategy, and cultural orientation. In Khon Kaen, governance is anchored by the Khon Kaen Think Tank (KKTT), which emphasizes local development by local people. These individuals from the private sector established a company to develop the city's infrastructure for decentralization and integrated collaboration among stakeholders. This involves integrating smart city infrastructure and digital learning platforms. A strong sense of citizenship and pride in their hometown is driving the city's cultural heritage to become a cultural capital, fostering a creative economy.

Chachoengsao, by contrast, adopts a more community-centered and heritage-driven approach, where the municipality and Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University serve as collaborative drivers, and cultural capital — rooted in the city's multicultural heritage — becomes the primary vehicle for lifelong learning. Chachoengsao has revitalized everyday life through the continuous development of city festivals. However, developments in cultural space utilization as a learning space and digital learning infrastructure will essentially help to foster comprehensive lifelong learning. environment.

4. Discussion

The findings reveal that Chachoengsao possesses a rich yet poorly classified cultural heritage and lacks spatial strategies that translate cultural capital into accessible learning opportunities or connect public and cultural spaces with existing learning infrastructure. Additionally, local communities still demonstrate limited awareness and understanding of the Learning City concept. The risk of reducing heritage public spaces to event-based activation mirrors what Munasinghe (2022) identifies as tourism-

oriented heritage interpretation—an approach that prioritises short-term market value over the continuous and inclusive engagement of local communities, ultimately producing spaces that are visited but not genuinely inhabited.

However, the current mechanisms driving Chachoengsao's Learning City initiative, particularly city festivals and cultural events, also generate meaningful socio-economic value through active community participation. For example, annual festivals and walking street markets provide opportunities for local residents, entrepreneurs, and community groups to set up stalls, showcase local products, and engage directly with visitors. Through these activities, participants not only contribute to the local economy but also acquire practical knowledge and skills related to event organisation, cultural interpretation, entrepreneurship, and community collaboration. Rather than asking residents directly what a "Learning City" means to them, these events may offer a more tangible lens through which to understand how learning is experienced in everyday life. In this sense, festivals function not only as cultural celebrations but also as informal learning environments where knowledge, skills, and social relationships are continuously exchanged among community members. Beginning to help local communities understand the direction of developing a learning city, leading to the search for the actual Learning City concept in Chachoengsao. The findings are consistent with Nunthasiriphon (2025)**,** who highlighted the importance of learning-oriented activities and local product promotion in enhancing the value of cultural attractions in Chachoengsao. Similarly, this study found that festivals and heritage-based public activities function not only as cultural events but also as informal learning environments that contribute to local economic participation and community capacity building. Further research will require a participatory process approach and one more case study from SEA countries to support the development of spatial and design strategies.

Thummaphan&Sripa, 2023 suggested that in order to make a successful learning city. They introduced the '4Com' Principle which interconnected the learning city development model. The core concept of this principle is communities that it necessary to drive the learning city development by using community-based learning which supports lifelong learning for all generations through experiential learning. It also aligned with Place-Based learning by Gruenewald, 2003 that uses the local environment as a fundamental context for learning. Community-based learning also enhances the sense of belonging and creates the third space for locals (Oldenburg, 1989).

5. Conclusion

This study examined how cultural capital embedded in Chachoengsao Old Town can be activated through public space to support Learning City development, place-based learning, and socio-economic regeneration in a Thai secondary city. Drawing on Bourdieu's cultural capital framework, Oldenburg's third place theory, UNESCO's lifelong learning principles, urban mapping, policy review, interviews, and comparative analysis with Khon Kaen, the study demonstrates that Chachoengsao's main challenge is not the absence of cultural resources, but the limited institutional, spatial, and programmatic mechanisms required to transform these resources into accessible learning assets and sustainable urban economic opportunities.

The findings reveal three interrelated constraints. First, cultural assets, public spaces, and learning facilities remain spatially fragmented. While Chachoengsao Old Town contains temples, traditional markets, riverside communities, historic shophouses, religious sites, and multicultural heritage resources, these assets are not systematically connected to existing learning infrastructure. Learning facilities are concentrated mainly in administrative and educational zones, while many cultural spaces remain disconnected from everyday learning practices. This spatial disconnection limits the capacity of heritage places to function as living classrooms and reduces their accessibility for different age groups and social communities.

Second, the city's Learning City mechanism remains highly dependent on festival-based activation. Cultural festivals, walking streets, religious events, and local product fairs successfully transform parks, riverfronts, and selected public spaces into temporary environments for informal learning, social interaction, and local economic exchange. These events generate short-term urban economic benefits

by supporting local vendors, SMEs, cultural tourism, local product promotion, and community entrepreneurship. However, their episodic nature limits year-round learning continuity and prevents cultural heritage from becoming a permanent socio-economic resource. The study therefore concludes that Chachoengsao must move beyond a seasonal festival model toward a continuous cultural learning calendar that activates heritage spaces throughout the year.

Third, institutional fragmentation remains a key barrier to the full mobilisation of cultural capital. Although the municipality and Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University serve as important drivers of the Learning City initiative, community participation, private-sector engagement, and resident ownership remain insufficiently formalised. Compared with Khon Kaen's citizen-led and multi-stakeholder governance model, Chachoengsao's approach is still more top-down and project-based. This weakens public awareness of the Learning City concept and limits the conversion of institutional recognition, including UNESCO GNLC membership, into shared civic identity and local development capacity.

From an urban economic perspective, the study highlights that Chachoengsao's cultural heritage has significant but underutilised potential to support inclusive local economic development. Cultural capital already contributes to the local economy through festivals, tourism activities, local products, community markets, and informal entrepreneurship. However, these contributions remain weakly measured, spatially concentrated, and insufficiently integrated into a broader creative economy strategy. The comparison with Khon Kaen indicates that cultural capital can generate stronger economic outcomes when it is connected to civic branding, creative industries, digital learning platforms, public-space programming, and collaborative governance. For Chachoengsao, this means that heritage-led Learning City development should not be understood only as an educational or conservation agenda, but also as an urban economic strategy capable of strengthening local livelihoods, SME development, cultural tourism, place branding, and community-based creative economies.

The study proposes that Chachoengsao's future development should be guided by three strategic directions. First, cultural assets should be formally classified, mapped, and recognised as Learning City resources. This would help clarify the city's cultural capital and provide a foundation for heritage interpretation, educational programming, and cultural-economic planning. Second, public spaces should be redesigned and connected through a Heritage Learning Corridor linking temples, markets, riverfront areas, parks, learning centres, and historic communities. Such a corridor could improve walkability, strengthen place-based learning, and increase the economic visibility of local cultural assets. Third, a multi-stakeholder Heritage Learning City Council should be established to institutionalise collaboration among the municipality, universities, communities, schools, local entrepreneurs, cultural groups, and private-sector actors. This would support more inclusive decision-making (Husain & Salem, 2024), and strengthen community ownership of the Learning City agenda.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the Learning City scholarship by demonstrating how cultural capital, public space, and lifelong learning can be integrated within the context of secondary-city development. It extends the Learning City debate beyond formal education and metropolitan innovation models by showing that heritage public spaces can operate as intergenerational learning environments and socio-economic platforms. Practically, the study provides urban planners, policymakers, and local governments with a transferable framework for activating cultural heritage through spatial integration, continuous programming, participatory governance, and urban economic monitoring.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a limited research period, which restricted longitudinal observation of seasonal activities and year-round public space use. The interview sample was also limited and did not fully represent all population groups, particularly elderly residents, youth, migrant workers, and marginalised communities. In addition, the analysis relied partly on secondary policy documents and publicly available municipal data, which may not fully capture implementation challenges at the community level. Future research should therefore incorporate participatory workshops, longitudinal public-space observation, and broader stakeholder interviews to test and refine the proposed framework. Comparative studies with other Southeast Asian Learning Cities would also be valuable for identifying how different governance

structures, cultural economies, and heritage contexts shape the relationship between cultural capital, lifelong learning, and urban regeneration.

In conclusion, Chachoengsao Old Town has strong potential to become a heritage-based Learning City where cultural capital is not only preserved but actively transformed into a driver of lifelong learning, community participation, and inclusive urban economic development. To realise this potential, the city must shift from fragmented, festival-based activation toward a more integrated model that connects cultural heritage, public space, learning infrastructure, governance, and local economic strategy. By doing so, Chachoengsao can strengthen its identity as a secondary city with deep cultural roots while advancing a more inclusive, resilient, and economically productive model of heritage-led urban development.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) no conflicts of interest.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Secondary data sources referenced in this study, including municipal reports, institutional publications, and publicly accessible online records, are available via the URLs cited in the reference list. Site survey data and urban mapping output collected by the author are available upon request. Further inquiries can be directed to the author.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

CRediT author statement

Conceptualisation: A.N.; Methodology: A.N; Writing – original draft: A.N; Writing – review & editing: A.N. Visualization: A.N. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript

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