

*The Role of Rural Aesthetics and Cultural Practices in Promoting Active Ageing in Northern Thai Community*

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**Abstract**

This study examines the impact of rural aesthetics and cultural practices on fostering active ageing in a case study village of Baan Pong Nuea, a rural community in Northern Thailand. Focusing on a high proportion of elderly residents, the research explores how the physical environment, cultural traditions, and social structures contribute to health and well-being among older adults. Active ageing in rural contexts is underrepresented in the literature, particularly concerning how aesthetic and cultural elements create supportive environments that foster physical health, mental resilience, and social inclusion. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study gathered quantitative data through structured surveys with 144 elderly residents, complemented by qualitative insights from in-depth interviews and site surveys. Quantitative findings revealed that well-maintained communal spaces and natural landscapes significantly correlated with self-reported health measures, and participation in cultural practices was positively associated with mental and emotional well-being. Qualitative findings underscored the sense of place attachment among elderly residents, with community spaces and cultural practices fostering a sense of purpose and social connection. This research offers essential insights for policymakers, urban planners, and community leaders, advocating for culturally and aesthetically sensitive approaches in rural planning to promote active ageing. By highlighting the importance of the physical and cultural environment in supporting the well-being of elderly residents, this study contributes to a broader understanding of active ageing in rural contexts.

Keywords: Ageing Health, Active Ageing, Rural Aesthetics, Cultural Traditions, Environmental Design, Rural Communities

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## **1. Introduction**

As global populations age, rural communities face unique challenges in fostering well-being and quality of life for elderly residents. Unlike urban centres, which often have structured healthcare facilities and social programs tailored for the elderly, rural areas are frequently limited in resources and infrastructure. However, these areas possess distinctive features, such as communal spaces, natural landscapes, and cultural practices, that may provide supportive environments for older adults. Active ageing, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation, and security to enhance the quality of life as people age (WHO, 2002). While extensive research has examined active ageing within urban settings, the role of rural environments in supporting this process remains less understood, especially in non-Western contexts where cultural practices are deeply embedded in community life.

In Northern Thailand, where rural communities hold high proportions of elderly residents, the need for sustainable, community-focused strategies to promote active ageing is exceptionally pressing. The case study village of Baan Pong Nuea in Chiang Mai Province exemplifies a traditional rural Thai community with a notable elderly population and a lifestyle centred on agricultural activities, communal spaces, and cultural rituals. The physical environment includes communal areas like temples and a village centre, while local traditions, such as annual festivals and religious ceremonies, serve as regular events that integrate elderly residents into community life. These cultural and environmental features create a unique setting for exploring ageing and well-being dynamics.

### **1.1 Research Background and Relevance**

Prior studies on active ageing have emphasised physical health, mental well-being, and social engagement as critical elements that enable elderly individuals to live fulfilling lives (Bowling & Dieppe, 2005). Research has also shown that access to communal spaces and natural landscapes can improve well-being by providing opportunities for physical activity and social connection (Sugiyama et al., 2008). However, most existing studies focus on urban or suburban contexts, which offer more organised healthcare services and social infrastructure. There is a significant gap in understanding how rural aesthetics, such as open landscapes, natural features, and cultural sites, contribute to active ageing in rural communities. These communities often have elderly populations that experience greater social cohesion but face fewer healthcare resources.

For elderly residents in the case study village, the aesthetic quality of communal spaces and the ability to participate in cultural practices may offer alternative pathways to well-being that are not typically accounted for in urban-centric research on ageing. Given the limited access to healthcare and social services in many rural Thai communities, understanding these alternative supports is crucial. This study, therefore, aims to explore how the physical and cultural environments in the case study village contribute to active ageing, shedding light on the potential of rural areas to support elderly well-being through unique, culturally rooted approaches.

### **1.2 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1) To assess the impact of communal spaces and natural landscapes on physical and mental health among elderly residents in the case study village.
- 2) To explore the role of cultural practices in promoting social cohesion, identity, and emotional well-being.
- 3) To provide practical recommendations for age-friendly rural planning and community development, informed by the case study village findings.

Through these objectives, this study seeks to address the gap in the literature on rural active ageing and offer insights that can inform policies to support elderly well-being in rural settings. Focusing on the physical environment and cultural practices, this research provides a holistic perspective relevant to Thailand and rural communities facing similar demographic shifts worldwide.

## **2. Literature Review**

The concept of active ageing has gained significant attention in recent decades, especially as global populations experience rapid ageing. Active ageing highlights the importance of longevity and quality of life as people age, emphasising the need for an environment that fosters physical, mental, and social well-being (WHO, 2002). Although much research has focused on active ageing in urban settings, there is a growing recognition of the need to explore how rural environments influence elderly well-being. This literature review examines the foundational theories and empirical studies on active ageing, rural aesthetics, cultural practices, and their roles in supporting elderly well-being, focusing on rural contexts like Northern Thailand.

### **2.1 Active Ageing: Definitions and Frameworks**

Active ageing, as defined by the WHO, is a framework that seeks to maximise the opportunities for health, participation, and security as people age, enabling them to enhance their quality of life (WHO, 2002). The framework is often discussed in urban settings, where access to healthcare, social services, and structured recreational facilities is readily available. However, the application of active ageing principles to rural areas remains less studied. The WHO's framework is adaptable and can be enriched by considering factors such as cultural practices, environmental aesthetics, and community engagement in rural settings (Plouffe & Kalache, 2010).

Rowe and Kahn's (1997) model of successful ageing aligns with the WHO's framework, focusing on the importance of physical, cognitive, and social engagement. Their model emphasises that ageing should not be solely about disease prevention but also about sustaining meaningful participation in life. While Rowe and Kahn's model has significantly influenced active ageing research, it is predominantly based on Western, urban-centric perspectives, often overlooking rural areas' distinct social and cultural dynamics (Bowling & Dieppe, 2005). This gap highlights the need to adapt and contextualise active ageing frameworks to include the cultural and environmental characteristics of rural communities, as they play a vital role in shaping the experiences of elderly residents.

### **2.2 The Role of Rural Aesthetics in Elderly Well-being**

The concept of "therapeutic landscapes," introduced by Gesler (1992), highlights how rural aesthetics influence health and well-being. These environments provide restorative

experiences that improve physical, mental, and emotional health. Gesler's work emphasises that natural landscapes, religious sites, and community spaces can facilitate healing and well-being. In rural areas with limited healthcare facilities, natural and community spaces often serve as primary sources of mental and physical rejuvenation for elderly residents (Wiles et al., 2009). Research indicates that exposure to green spaces, like forests and mountains, can reduce stress and enhance mood and cognitive function in older adults (Hartig et al., 2014). Therefore, the aesthetic quality of rural environments offers therapeutic benefits that help address healthcare access challenges.

Sugiyama and Ward Thompson (2007) further explored the link between outdoor environments and elderly health, finding that well-maintained, accessible green spaces encourage physical activity and social interaction among older adults. Their findings support the notion that rural aesthetics are not merely decorative but contribute to essential health outcomes. In the case study village context, rice paddies, orchards, and forested areas provide physical activity and relaxation opportunities, underscoring the potential for natural landscapes to act as supportive, therapeutic spaces for active ageing.

### **2.3 Cultural Practices and Social Engagement in Rural Settings**

Cultural practices play a significant role in the lives of elderly individuals, especially in rural areas where cultural heritage and traditions are deeply embedded in community life. Kitayama and Markus (1999) emphasised the importance of cultural identity and continuity in shaping mental and emotional well-being. In rural Thailand, cultural practices such as festivals, religious ceremonies, and traditional crafts foster a sense of identity and belonging, essential to active ageing. These activities provide elderly residents with opportunities for social engagement, which has been shown to reduce isolation and improve mental health (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

Koenig (2001) highlighted that participation in religious and cultural activities contributes positively to mental health, particularly by offering social support and fostering community bonds. In the case study village, the elderly actively participate in events such as temple gatherings and annual festivals, providing them with a sense of purpose and connection. Such practices reinforce social cohesion, enhancing mental and emotional well-being by creating a supportive network around the elderly, thus facilitating active ageing in a culturally specific manner.

### **2.4 Social Inclusion and Place Attachment in Rural Ageing**

Place attachment, or the emotional bond people form with their surroundings, is another critical factor in rural ageing. Wiles et al. (2009) found that older adults in rural areas often experience a profound sense of attachment to their environment, contributing to their quality of life and mental health. This attachment is influenced by both the environment's physical characteristics and the community's social relationships. The aesthetic beauty and cultural familiarity of rural settings like the case study village foster a strong place attachment among elderly residents, reinforcing their sense of identity and continuity.

Social inclusion is also a crucial determinant of well-being for older adults. Menec et al. (2011) found that communities that foster inclusion through accessible spaces and opportunities for participation in social activities promote a higher quality of life among elderly residents. For instance, in rural areas where formal healthcare and social services may

be lacking, inclusive communal spaces become vital for maintaining mental and physical health. Baan Pong Nuea Village exemplifies this by providing accessible communal spaces and cultural events where the elderly feel valued and included.

## **2.5 Research Gap and Implications**

While existing literature provides insights into active ageing, much is limited to urban contexts, where formalised healthcare and social services are available. Studies that focus on rural areas often emphasise the limitations of these communities, overlooking the positive role that rural aesthetics and cultural practices can play in supporting active ageing. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how the unique features of the case study village, including its natural landscapes and cultural practices, contribute to active ageing. Focusing on a rural setting with limited formal healthcare but rich cultural traditions, this research provides insights into how environmental and social factors work together to support elderly well-being.

## **3. Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine how rural aesthetics and cultural practices promote active ageing within Baan Pong Nuea Village, Northern Thailand. Combining quantitative and qualitative data enables a comprehensive understanding of how physical, social, and cultural factors support elderly well-being in rural contexts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

### **3.1 Quantitative Component**

The quantitative component involved administering a structured survey to elderly residents aged 60 and above in Baan Pong Nuea Village. A sample of 144 participants was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This sample size represents the elderly population of the village, ensuring statistically robust findings.

The survey included closed-ended questions addressing various well-being indicators such as physical health, mental health, social well-being, and life satisfaction. Additionally, participants rated their perceptions of communal spaces, natural landscapes, and engagement in cultural activities. Measurement scales were adapted from established gerontological research to ensure reliability and validity (Bowling, 2005; Pallant, 2016). Trained local researchers conducted face-to-face interviews, facilitating accurate responses despite participants' potential literacy or vision limitations.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise demographics and well-being indicators, while regression analysis examined relationships between environmental factors and well-being outcomes. This analysis identified significant predictors of well-being, offering insights into how the village's rural environment influences active ageing.

### **3.2 Qualitative Component**

The qualitative component aimed to capture the elderly residents' experiences and perspectives on their environment and cultural engagement. In-depth, semi-structured

interviews were conducted with the same 144 participants to ensure data consistency and depth. Interview questions explored interactions with communal spaces, natural landscapes, cultural practices, and feelings of inclusion. This approach allowed participants to share insights into the social and emotional dimensions of ageing in a rural context.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the interview data, identifying recurring themes related to place attachment, community inclusion, and the perceived benefits of cultural practices. This structured analysis provided a nuanced interpretation of the qualitative data, revealing patterns and contextual insights that complemented the quantitative findings.

### **3.3 Site Surveys for Town Planning Illustration**

Site surveys were conducted to document and map the physical layout of Baan Pong Nuea Village, focusing on key communal spaces, natural landscapes, and residential areas. The surveys gathered spatial information for a town planning illustration, capturing essential village elements such as the temple, community centre, residential zones, and agricultural landscapes. Photographs and field notes provided a visual foundation for the illustration, ensuring it accurately reflects the village's spatial organisation and significant features. This illustration aids in understanding the village's layout, highlighting environmental and structural characteristics that shape community life.

### **3.4 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

The mixed-methods approach enabled an integrated analysis, cross-referencing regression results with interview themes. This integration provided a holistic view of how physical and cultural environments impact elderly well-being, emphasising the interplay between rural aesthetics, cultural practices, and ageing. This approach also underscores the importance of culturally and environmentally responsive rural planning to support active ageing, particularly in regions with limited formal services.

## **4. Findings**

The findings from this study reveal that both the physical environment and cultural practices within Baan Pong Nuea Village contribute significantly to promoting active ageing among elderly residents. Through a mixed-methods approach that combined survey data with in-depth interviews and site observations, the study identified key elements within communal spaces, natural landscapes, and cultural practices that foster physical and mental well-being, social cohesion, and feelings of inclusion. This section outlines the quantitative findings from the survey data and qualitative insights from interviews. It concludes with a synthesis emphasising the interwoven nature of environmental and cultural factors in supporting active ageing.

### **4.1 Quantitative Findings**

The quantitative data analysis examined relationships between physical health, mental well-being, social engagement, and perceptions of communal and natural spaces among elderly residents. Descriptive statistics revealed that, on average, elderly residents rated their physical and mental health moderately high, with high levels of life satisfaction and feelings of value and inclusion within the community.

## **1) Communal Spaces and Physical Health**

Regression analysis demonstrated a positive association between the perceived quality of communal spaces and physical health outcomes. Higher ratings of communal spaces were significantly linked with better self-reported physical health scores ( $\beta = 0.196$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that the accessibility, maintenance, and appeal of these spaces may encourage physical activity among elderly residents. In the absence of formal fitness facilities, communal areas like the village temple and community centre serve as key sites for physical movement, offering ample space for activities such as walking, stretching, and traditional exercises. This aligns with studies showing that age-friendly public spaces enhance well-being by providing opportunities for physical engagement (Sugiyama & Ward Thompson, 2007).

## **2) Natural Landscapes and Mental Health**

The analysis also showed that the quality of natural landscapes was positively correlated with mental health outcomes ( $\beta = 0.514$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Elderly residents who rated their natural surroundings, such as rice fields, orchards, and forested areas, highly reported better mental well-being. These natural landscapes offer aesthetic beauty and a tranquil environment that contribute to stress relief and mood enhancement, findings supported by research demonstrating that exposure to natural environments can improve mental health (Hartig et al., 2014). The therapeutic value of these green spaces, where residents can walk, sit, and enjoy nature, appears central to mental health maintenance in this rural setting.

## **3) Participation in Cultural Practices and Social Cohesion**

Another significant finding is the strong positive correlation between participation in cultural practices and social well-being ( $\beta = 0.733$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Activities such as temple ceremonies, annual festivals, and traditional dance provide a sense of purpose and foster a shared identity among residents. Participation in these practices encourages social cohesion, reduces feelings of isolation, and strengthens bonds within the community. This finding echoes Koenig's (2001) research on how cultural practices enhance social support networks, which are essential for elderly well-being.

## **4) Feelings of Value and Inclusion**

Regression analysis revealed that feelings of value and inclusion within the community were positively associated with life satisfaction and lower levels of depressive symptoms. Residents who felt valued and included showed significantly higher self-reported life satisfaction ( $\beta = 1.024$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), underscoring the importance of social inclusion in elderly well-being. The data suggest that the village's community-driven planning efforts, where elderly input is considered in decision-making processes, contribute to these positive outcomes. This is consistent with Menec et al. (2011), who noted that inclusive environments promote mental well-being by fostering a sense of belonging.

## **4.2 Qualitative Findings**

The qualitative data from interviews provide deeper insights into how elderly residents perceive their interactions with the physical and social environment. The themes emerging from the interviews highlight the importance of communal spaces, natural landscapes, and

cultural practices in fostering active ageing. The findings reveal a complex interplay between place attachment, social networks, and cultural engagement that supports the physical, emotional, and social needs of the elderly.

### **1) Perceptions of Communal Spaces**

Elderly residents frequently described the village's communal spaces as essential to their daily lives. The temple grounds, community centre, and village square were particularly valued for their accessibility and social function. Many residents reported using these spaces daily for various purposes, from physical exercise to informal gatherings. For example, one participant noted, "The community centre is a place where I feel safe and connected. I can meet friends, exercise, and relax in this environment." Such spaces offer elderly residents a safe and familiar setting to stay physically active and socially engaged.

The importance of communal spaces also emerged in discussions about inclusivity. The village's design and maintenance ensure that spaces are accessible to residents of all abilities. Shaded areas, seating, and accessible paths make it easy for elderly individuals to navigate these spaces, promoting physical health and social inclusion. These observations align with Sugiyama and Ward Thompson's (2007) research, emphasising that well-maintained communal spaces are crucial for elderly physical and social well-being.

### **2) The Impact of Natural Landscapes on Mental Well-being**

Natural landscapes were consistently cited as a source of peace, relaxation, and mental rejuvenation. Interviewees described the rice fields, forests, and orchards surrounding the village as "therapeutic" and "comforting," with several participants mentioning that simply seeing these landscapes reduced their stress levels. One resident shared, "Being near the rice fields gives me a feeling of calm. It reminds me of my childhood, of simpler times. It's like therapy for me." This sense of connection to the land enhances psychological resilience, particularly for those who have spent most of their lives in rural settings.

Therapeutic landscapes (Gesler, 1992) are relevant here, as the rural environment provides restorative experiences that promote mental health. The interviews suggest that these natural surroundings allow elderly residents to engage in reflective practices, further contributing to mental well-being. These findings support previous research on the psychological benefits of natural settings (Hartig et al., 2014) and highlight the unique role that rural landscapes play in elderly mental health.

### **3) Role of Cultural Practices in Social Engagement and Identity**

Cultural practices emerged as a central theme in the qualitative data, with residents expressing pride and satisfaction in participating in rituals, ceremonies, and traditional events. These practices are anchors of identity and continuity, essential for older adults who may face challenges adapting to change. For example, one participant described the village's annual festival as "A time when the whole village comes alive. It's like we're all one family." Such gatherings provide opportunities for social connection, emotional support, and shared cultural expression.

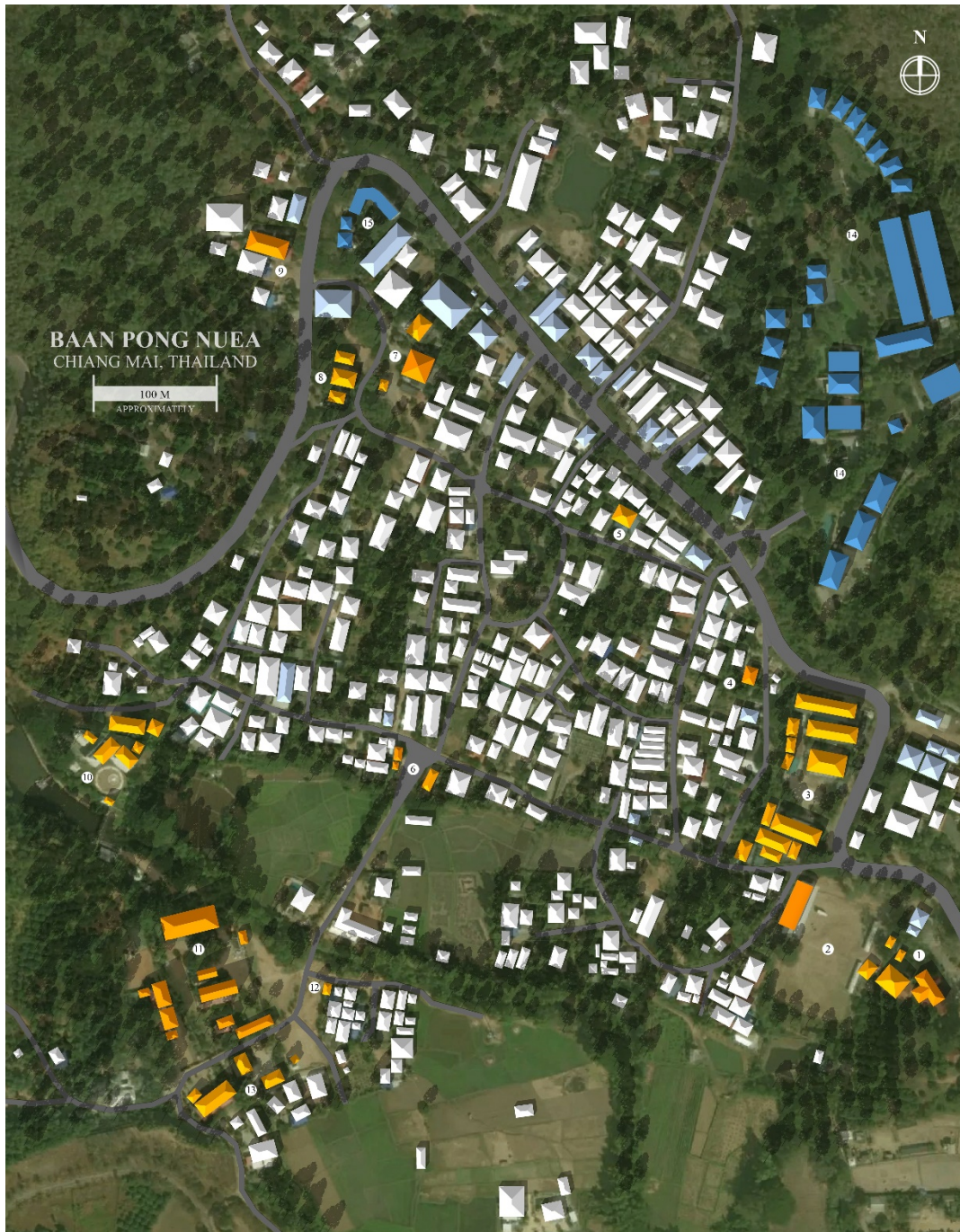
Many elderly residents also highlighted the psychological benefits of these cultural practices, noting that they provided them with a sense of purpose and social connectedness.



Participating in traditional events and rituals reinforces community bonds and fosters a sense of belonging. These insights align with studies by Kitayama and Markus (1999), which demonstrate that cultural practices support mental health by fostering social cohesion and identity, which is essential for elderly well-being.

### **4.3 Town Planning Illustration**

The town planning illustration findings highlight the spatial arrangement and environmental characteristics in the Baan Pong Nuea Village community planning that supports active ageing. Key communal spaces, including the village temple, community centre, and primary residential areas, are shown to be strategically located within accessible distances for elderly residents. These areas facilitate daily social interactions and physical activities, promoting physical and mental well-being. Natural landscapes, such as rice fields, orchards, and forested areas surrounding the village, enhance aesthetic value and provide tranquil environments for relaxation, contributing to reduced stress and improved mental health among the elderly. The illustration (see Figure 1) also emphasises the connectivity between communal spaces and natural landscapes, underscoring the importance of integrated, accessible design in rural town planning to foster a supportive and cohesive community for ageing populations.



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| <p><b>PUBLIC / GOVERNMENT BUILDING</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. OFFICE OF BAAN PONG MUNICIPALITY</li> <li>2. FOOTBALL FIELD</li> <li>3. BAAN PONG SCHOOL</li> <li>4. VILLAGE HEADMAN'S OFFICE</li> <li>5. FARMERS GROUP OFFICE</li> <li>6. VILLAGE COMMUNITY CENTRE, LIBRARY</li> <li>7. BAAN PONG HEALTH PROMOTING HOSPITAL</li> <li>8. DISTRICT OFFICE</li> <li>9. POST OFFICE</li> </ol> | <p><b>PUBLIC / GOVERNMENT BUILDING</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. SRIMUANGPONG INTERNATIONAL MEDITATION CENTRE</li> <li>11. ARUNYAVASA TEMPLE</li> <li>12. SRIMUANGPONG EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTRE</li> <li>13. BAAN PONG EXTRACURRICULAR EDUCATION PROMOTION CENTRE</li> </ol> <p><b>BUSINESS BUILDING</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. VERANDA RESORT CHIANG MAI</li> <li>15. HERNLHIN NATURAL RESORT</li> </ol> |
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Figure 1: Spatial Arrangement and Environmental Characteristics in the Community Planning of the Baan Pong Nuea Case Study Village (Source: Author, 2024)

#### **4.4 Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings illustrates that the physical and cultural environment in the case study village plays a vital role in promoting active ageing. While quantitative data provide evidence of significant associations between environmental factors and well-being outcomes, qualitative data reveal the subjective experiences and emotional connections that underpin these relationships.

The synthesis of both data types underscores that active ageing in the case study village is supported by an accessible and inclusive environment rich in cultural traditions and natural beauty. Communal spaces and cultural practices enhance social cohesion and reduce isolation, while natural landscapes offer therapeutic benefits that contribute to mental well-being. This holistic approach to active ageing, where physical, social, and cultural dimensions intersect, highlights the importance of culturally and environmentally sensitive rural planning.

### **5. Discussion**

This study reveals the essential role of rural aesthetics and cultural practices in promoting active ageing among elderly residents in Baan Pong Nuea Village. The findings provide insights into how elements like communal spaces, natural landscapes, and cultural practices contribute to well-being in rural settings, offering implications for rural development and community planning to support ageing populations.

#### **5.1 Communal Spaces With Physical and Social Well-being**

The quantitative data revealed that higher ratings of communal space quality are associated with better self-reported physical health among elderly residents. Communal areas, such as the temple grounds and community centre, serve as multifunctional spaces encouraging physical activity and providing social support. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that well-designed, accessible communal spaces are critical to the well-being of older adults (Sugiyama & Ward Thompson, 2007). The findings suggest that age-friendly communal spaces facilitate physical health, social interaction, and a sense of belonging, which are critical components of active ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1997).

In rural areas with limited healthcare, communal spaces serve as informal support networks for elderly residents, enabling them to engage in light exercises like walking and stretching. This promotes physical activity, which may lower the risk of chronic diseases, aligning with McPhee et al. (2016) on age-related health. Additionally, the maintenance of these spaces fosters social cohesion, helping reduce isolation and loneliness, key risk factors for mental health issues in older adults (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

#### **5.2 Natural Landscapes and Mental Health Benefits**

Natural landscapes emerged as a key factor positively influencing mental well-being, with elderly residents reporting that exposure to green spaces and scenic views provides them with relaxation and stress relief. This finding supports the “therapeutic landscapes” concept introduced by Gesler (1992), which posits that specific environments foster mental and emotional health. Rice fields, orchards, and surrounding forests in the case study village

provide residents with daily interaction with nature, improving mood, reducing anxiety, and enhancing cognitive function (Hartig et al., 2014).

Natural landscapes in rural areas offer significant psychological benefits, especially where formal mental health services are limited. The tranquillity of these settings helps elderly residents feel calmer, acting as a buffer against stress and enhancing resilience. This supports Kaplan's (1995) theory that nature aids psychological recovery by fostering reflection and reducing mental fatigue. Overall, rural landscapes not only provide beauty but also serve as vital informal mental health resources.

### **5.3 Cultural Practices and Social Cohesion**

Participation in cultural practices, such as temple ceremonies and annual festivals, was strongly linked with higher levels of social well-being. The qualitative findings revealed that these cultural practices create regular opportunities for social interaction, reinforcing social bonds and shared identity among residents. The social engagement fostered through these cultural practices is essential for active ageing, as it contributes to a sense of continuity and purpose, which is particularly valuable for older adults (Kitayama & Markus, 1999). This aligns with Koenig's (2001) study, which suggests that cultural and religious activities provide social support and foster a sense of community, both of which are vital for mental health.

In the case study village, cultural practices help elderly residents maintain their cultural heritage, enhancing their identity and sense of belonging. For rural seniors, engagement in culture fosters support networks that boost psychological well-being and resilience. This aligns with findings that cultural continuity and community involvement are vital for mental health and life satisfaction among older adults (Plouffe & Kalache, 2010). Such practices offer a predictable and fulfilling rhythm of life crucial for psychological stability and contentment in later years.

### **5.4 Feelings of Value and Inclusion**

The study found a positive association between feelings of value, inclusion, and overall life satisfaction. Elderly residents who felt valued and included in community life reported higher life satisfaction, consistent with Menec et al. (2011), who emphasised the importance of inclusive communities for quality of life in elderly populations. In the case study village, participatory planning and decision-making processes foster a sense of respect among elderly residents, enhancing their well-being.

Inclusive design elements in communal spaces, such as accessible pathways and seating areas, allow for active participation in community life. Such inclusivity reflects Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, where belonging and esteem are essential for overall well-being. Involving elderly residents in community planning meets their physical needs and fosters a sense of ownership and pride, reinforcing mental and emotional health.

### **5.5 Broader Implications for Rural Planning and Active Ageing Policies**

The findings of this study contribute to an emerging body of literature that advocates for age-friendly rural planning. Unlike urban areas, where ageing support often depends on formal services, rural communities rely heavily on environmental and cultural resources to foster

well-being among the elderly. Policymakers should recognise the unique strengths of rural areas, including natural landscapes, communal spaces, and cultural practices, and integrate these into strategies that promote active ageing.

By preserving rural aesthetics and facilitating cultural practices, planners and policymakers can enhance well-being without solely depending on formal healthcare infrastructure. This is particularly relevant in regions with limited resources, yet the cultural and environmental features can provide a foundation for active ageing. Creating inclusive, accessible communal spaces and supporting cultural engagement may help bridge the gap in health services, as these initiatives contribute to physical, social, and mental well-being (Plouffe & Kalache, 2010).

## **6. Conclusions**

This study highlights the integral role of rural aesthetics and cultural practices in promoting active ageing within the case study village of Baan Pong Nuea, revealing that these environmental and social elements significantly support elderly residents' physical, mental, and social well-being. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research identified that well-maintained communal spaces contribute to physical health by encouraging social interaction and physical activity. At the same time, natural landscapes provide mental health benefits through their calming and restorative qualities. Additionally, participation in cultural practices fosters social cohesion and a sense of identity, which are vital components of psychological well-being for the elderly.

The findings underscore the importance of creating age-friendly rural environments where physical and cultural characteristics are leveraged to support active ageing. In contexts where formal healthcare resources may be limited, rural aesthetics and cultural engagement offer accessible, community-driven avenues for enhancing the quality of life among older adults. This approach aligns with global ageing trends, emphasising inclusive, place-based strategies that respect the unique characteristics of rural communities.

This research contributes to the field of active ageing by demonstrating how non-urban environments can be optimised to meet the physical, emotional, and social needs of ageing populations. It highlights the need for policymakers and planners to prioritise rural environments, encouraging the integration of natural landscapes and cultural practices in rural development strategies. By preserving rural spaces' cultural heritage and aesthetic qualities, these communities can foster active, connected, and healthy ageing for their elderly residents. This offers a sustainable model for age-friendly development worldwide.

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