



THAILAND Culture 21 Plus

CULTURE 21 PLUS THAILAND AS A GLOBAL PILOT FOR THE NEW EDITION



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INTRODUCTION

Thailand, with its globally recognized cultural heritage and commitment to sustainable development, hosted a groundbreaking seminar on August 30, 2024 stepping forward as a pioneering pilot country for Culture 21 Plus. This initiative marks a historic milestone for Thailand as it seeks to align its rich cultural assets with global sustainability frameworks. To start this process, the Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture, sustainable tourism platform Roamingelephants.com and Silpakorn University organized the seminar with the support of UCLG. The event brought together local and international stakeholders to lay the foundation for Thailand's leadership in promoting culture as a driver of sustainable development.

As a UCLG's partner, Thailand's participation underlines the country's readiness to test and refine Culture 21 Plus through systematic and inclusive approach to testing, refining, and implementing Culture 21 Plus. The pilot aims to demonstrate how cultural policies can be holistically integrated into city development strategies, ensuring inclusive growth and long-term resilience.

This report highlights Thailand's journey as a pilot country for Culture 21 Plus, showcasing its role in advancing the global agenda for culture and sustainability. It outlines the significance of the pilot initiative, Thailand's pioneering efforts, the structured process for implementation, and the anticipated transformative impacts on cities, communities, and cultural governance. Through this endeavor, Thailand not only strengthens its position as a cultural leader but also contributes to shaping a more sustainable and culturally enriched future for the world.

The UCLG Culture Committee

The Committee on culture of the world organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is a global platform of cities, organisations and networks to learn, cooperate and launch policies and programmes on the role of culture in sustainable development.

The Committee works with various founding documents: Agenda 21 for Culture (2004); the political declaration Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development (2010), Culture 21 Actions (2015), and The Rome Charter (2020). Moreover, the Committee on Culture runs several programmes to support the elaboration and implementation of cultural policies: Leading Cities, Pilot Cities, Culture 21 Lab, and the Seven Keys.

Culture 21 Plus

In order to stay updated and remain at the forefront of local cultural policies, the Committee on Culture presents a draft of a new tool to be approved in 2025: Culture 21 PLUS, an updated version of the guide for culture in sustainable cities, Culture 21 Actions. The tool provides a framework comprising a series of areas and actions that explore the connections between culture, cultural rights and other fields of local action, in order to position culture as a driver of citizenship and sustainable development of a territory. This enhanced edition expands upon the foundational principles of Culture 21, adapting them to address modern complexities while fostering innovative cultural policies. It constitutes a practical toolkit for cities to i) assess their cultural landscape, ii) design strategies tailored to their local realities, and iii) implement impactful cultural policies that contribute to the SDGs and global sustainability goals.

The process of developing Culture 21 Plus began in 2023, so far with the participation of the cities of Jinju, Mexico City, Lisbon, Elefsina and Esch-sur-Alzette.

The Culture 21 Plus covers 30 focus areas and 200 specific actions:

government	RIGHTS	COMMUNITIES	people
	1. Cultural rights	8. Culture, inclusion and social cohesion, poverty and inequalities	
	2. Culture and creation	9. Culture, health and well-being	
	3. Cultural and creative ecosystem	10. Culture and education	
	4. Cultural expressions of citizens, culture of proximity and the commons	11. Culture, gender equality and sexual diversity	
	5. Public services in culture	12. Culture, peace, security and coexistence	
	6. Cultural infrastructures and spaces		
7. Knowledge and information			
people	PROSPERITY	TERRITORIES	planet
	13. Cultural economy and local development	18. Culture, urbanism and territorial planning	
	14. Cultural and creative industries, employment and livelihoods	19. Culture and public spaces	
	15. Decent working and socio-economic conditions for artists and cultural workers	20. Cultural heritage	
	16. Culture and sustainable tourism		
17. Culture, digitisation and technology			

planet

NATURE

1. Culture, landscapes and natural heritage and spaces
2. Culture, agriculture, food and gastronomy
3. Culture and ecological and social transition
4. Culture and climate change

GOVERNANCE

5. Cultural strategies and policies
6. System of cultural public management
7. Culture and citizen participation
8. Mechanisms for governance and cooperation
9. International cooperation
10. Communication

government

THE PILOT PROCESS MAPPING THAILAND'S CULTURE 21 PLUS IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of Culture 21 Plus in Thailand followed a structured and inclusive process, moving from initial pilot testing in six diverse communities to national-level expansion. The aim was to contextualize the framework, test its applicability, and implement it through real case scenarios to evaluate the entire project lifecycle.

STEP 1: CONTEXTUALIZING CULTURE 21 PLUS & ESTABLISH THE STEERING TEAM

1.1 CULTURE 21 PLUS CONTEXTUALIZED INTO THAI

As part of Thailand's leadership in contextualizing and implementing Culture 21 Plus, the country achieved a significant milestone by producing the first-ever contextualized translation of the framework into Thai. This effort went beyond linguistic translation, incorporating Thailand's unique cultural and social realities to make the framework not only accessible but also practical for local application. The contextualization process reinforced the concept of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, alongside economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Additionally, it introduced a structured approach for assessing cultural policies through the lens of the 6-block framework.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THAI CONTEXTUALIZATION

Accessibility: Translating and adapting Culture 21 Plus into Thai made the framework comprehensible to a wider audience, including local governments, community leaders, and cultural practitioners. Many of the framework's complex terminologies and technical jargon were simplified and explained through culturally relevant examples, ensuring inclusivity across varying levels of expertise.

Localization with Context: The contextualization process went beyond literal translation by embedding culturally significant terms, practices, and concepts into the framework. Thailand's unique challenges, such as balancing heritage preservation with urbanization, were incorporated, making the framework directly applicable to local realities. By emphasizing culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, the framework highlighted the critical role of cultural rights, creative industries, and heritage in achieving long-term sustainability.

Policy Assessment Framework (6 Blocks): The contextualized version introduced a structured policy assessment framework based on the six blocks of Culture 21 Plus:

1. Cultural Rights: Examining the inclusivity and equity of cultural participation.
2. Community Participation: Assessing the engagement of diverse community groups, including marginalized populations.
3. Cultural Economy: Evaluating the integration of culture into local and national economic strategies.
4. Cultural Spaces: Reviewing the availability, accessibility, and use of cultural spaces.
5. Environmental Sustainability: Linking cultural practices with ecological preservation.
6. Governance: Evaluating multi-stakeholder collaboration and policy coherence.

This approach provided a clear roadmap and cultural policy progress for local governments to assess their past, present and future cultural policies and align them with sustainability goals.

Capacity Building: The contextualized version became an essential tool for workshops, training sessions, and pilot projects, enabling stakeholders to engage meaningfully with the framework. Visual aids, such as diagrams and infographics, were added to illustrate the interconnectedness of the six blocks, making complex ideas easier to grasp. The process ensured that local governments and cultural organizations could not only understand the framework but also implement it effectively.

IMPACT OF THE CONTEXTUALIZATION

By contextualizing Culture 21 Plus, Thailand not only reinforced its role as a global leader in cultural governance but also provided a replicable model for other nations. The process bridged the gap between global frameworks and local realities, offering a practical and culturally nuanced approach to embedding culture into sustainable development strategies. This milestone underscores Thailand's commitment to making culture a central pillar of national and international development, setting a strong precedent for future cultural initiatives.



1.2 ESTABLISH ADVISORY BOARD AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

ESTABLISHING THE ADVISORY BOARD FOR THAILAND CULTURE 21 BEST PRACTICE: A KEY MILESTONE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On August 29, 2024, the Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with Silpakorn University's Office of Academic Services and the Roaming Elephants platform, launched the Thailand Culture 21 Best Practice Project. The advisory board's ultimate goal is to develop a model cultural learning resource and submit it for the prestigious International Award UCLG - Culture 21, demonstrating to the world that Thailand's culturally guided sustainable development practices are both effective and impactful.

LAUNCH OF THE ADVISORY BOARD: A STRATEGIC STEP FORWARD

The board comprises representatives from over 10 key agencies with expertise in cultural governance, urban planning, and sustainability. These organizations work closely with local communities, making them critical players in driving sustainable urban development aligned with the Culture 21 Plus framework. Key Objectives of the Advisory Board:

1. Guiding Cultural Development

- The board is tasked with shaping the strategic direction of the project, ensuring alignment with the principles of Culture 21 Plus.
- It aims to contextualize the framework to Thai realities, highlighting local culture as a key driver for sustainability.

2. Fostering Collaboration

- By bringing together agencies from diverse sectors, the board fosters interdisciplinary collaboration to address challenges and opportunities in cultural development.
- The meeting provided a platform for knowledge exchange, enabling participants to share the best practices and operational strategies.

3. Advancing Local and International Impact

- The board focuses on scaling sustainable cultural initiatives across local communities while creating networks that promote Thailand's cultural leadership on the global stage.
- This dual focus ensures that Thailand's cultural governance serves both national and international objectives.



Agencies Involved: The Advisory Board includes representatives from various organizations, including:

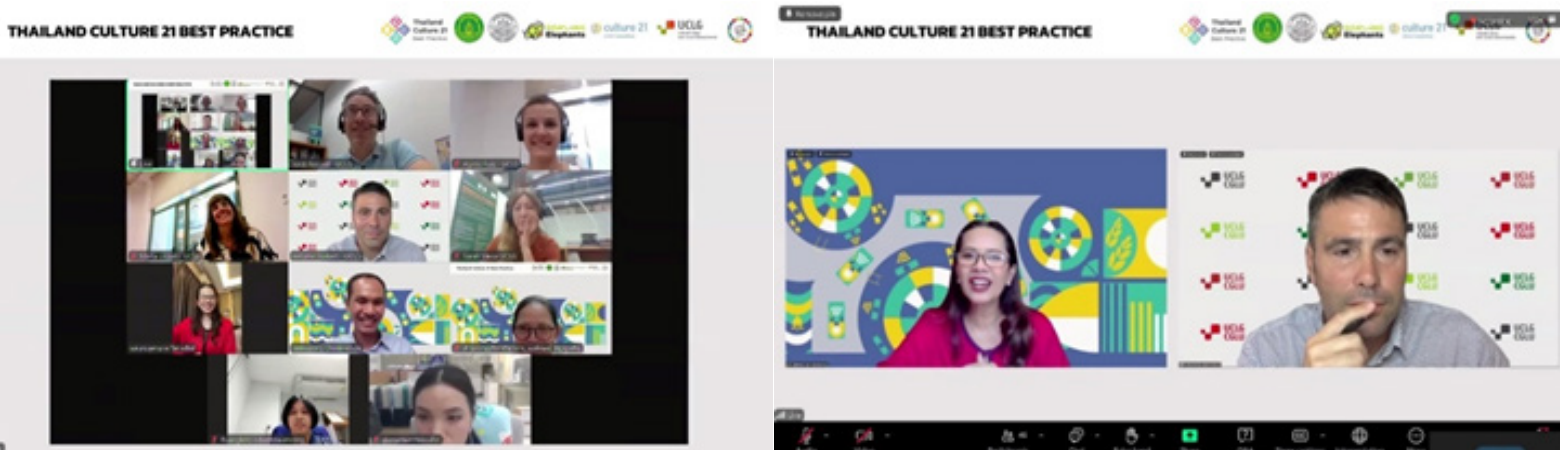
- The Department of Cultural Promotion (Ministry of Culture),
- Silpakorn University's Office of Academic Services,
- The Roaming Elephants platform,
- The Department of Tourism,
- The Office of Creative Economic Promotion, and
- Local government bodies and NGOs are dedicated to cultural and sustainable urban development.

This collaborative initiative underlines Thailand's dedication to showcasing how culture can serve as a transformative pillar for sustainable growth, setting a benchmark for other nations to follow.

WORKSHOPS AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND SELECTION OF 6 PILOT COMMUNITIES:

On August 30, 2024, Thailand organized the first seminar "Thailand Culture 21 Best Practice," marking its inaugural step as a UCLG member in promoting Culture 21 on the world stage. The event, held at Silpakorn University Bangkok, was organized in collaboration with the Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture, and Roamingelephants.com. These sessions introduced the 6-block structure of Culture 21 Plus, which encompasses 30 focus areas and 200 specific actions, and guided participants in adapting the framework to Thai cultural contexts.

- The seminar brought together consultants and advisory team from various departments, including the Department of Tourism, Department of Local Administration, Department of Community Development, Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), Office of Creative Economic Promotion (Public Organization), and the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism (Public Organization). Representatives from the Municipal League of Thailand, the Subdistrict Administrative Organization Association of Thailand, the Thai Town Planning Association, the Urban Design and Development Center (UddC), and cultural community networks nationwide also participated.
- This collaborative effort reflects Thailand’s dedication to integrating cultural considerations into its development strategies and its commitment to contributing to the global discourse on culture and sustainability.



STEP 2: TESTING THE CONTEXTUALIZED CULTURE 21 PLUS “THE THAI EDITION”

COMMUNITIES TESTING CULTURE 21 PLUS: PROPOSED INITIATIVES

During the pilot phase of Culture 21 Plus in Thailand, six diverse communities were first selected to test and contextualize the framework. These communities represented various cultural, ecological, and urban contexts across the country, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the toolkit’s applicability. Each community utilized the 6-block structure of Culture 21 Plus to assess its cultural landscape and propose creative, sustainable initiatives tailored to its unique needs and challenges. Below are the initiatives developed as a result of this process:

1. PHUKET: REVITALIZING ITS HISTORIC FRESH MARKET AS A SUSTAINABLE FOOD HUB

Phuket focused on transforming its historic fresh market into a hub for sustainable food practices. This initiative aims to:

- Preserve local culinary traditions and highlight the island's rich food culture.
- Support local farmers and producers through sustainable sourcing.
- Promote the market as a cultural destination for both residents and tourists, linking food heritage to the island's broader cultural identity.

2. CHIANG MAI: DEVELOPING ARTIST RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

Leveraging its status as a UNESCO Creative City, Chiang Mai proposed an artist residency program designed to:

- Foster global cultural exchange by inviting international and local artists to collaborate on creative projects.
- Highlight traditional Lanna art forms while incorporating contemporary techniques.
- Strengthening its identity as a hub for innovation and creativity in arts and crafts.

3. NAN: PROMOTING MULTIGENERATIONAL COLLABORATION THROUGH CULTURAL SPACES

Nan's initiative focused on bridging generations by creating cultural spaces that:

- Encourage interaction between younger and older residents to preserve and pass down traditional knowledge.
- Blend contemporary activities with heritage-based practices, ensuring cultural continuity.
- Reinforce the town's identity as a community rooted in shared traditions.

4. BANGKOK-LADKRABANG: SHOWCASING RIVERINE HERITAGE THROUGH "THE ART OF RIVER LIFE"

Bangkok-Ladkrabang emphasized its connection to waterways with "The Art of River Life," which seeks to:

- Celebrate the area's riverine heritage through art installations and cultural events.
- Engage local communities in preserving the environmental and cultural significance of Bangkok's canals and rivers.
- Create a platform for education and tourism centered on sustainable water management and cultural preservation.

5. NAKHON RATCHASIMA (KORAT): HIGHLIGHTING HIDDEN GEMS

Korat's initiative focused on rediscovering and revitalizing hidden cultural treasures, including:

- Traditional crafts such as stone carving, which has historical significance in the region.
- Developing heritage trails and cultural workshops to attract tourists while empowering local artisans.
- Ensuring that traditional practices are integrated into the local economy and community development.

6. UBON RATCHATHANI: INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES TIED TO THE MEKONG RIVER

Ubon Ratchathani designed its initiative around the Mekong River's ecological and cultural importance. Key components include:

- Promoting sustainable practices that align with the river's natural rhythms, such as eco-tourism and community-based agriculture.
- Highlighting the Mekong's role in local festivals, traditions, and daily life.
- Educating residents and visitors on the interconnectedness of culture, nature, and sustainability.

IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVES

The creative proposals generated by these communities reflect the effectiveness of the Culture 21 Plus framework in identifying and addressing local cultural challenges. These initiatives not only preserve and celebrate heritage but also integrate culture into broader sustainability goals, fostering innovation and community engagement. They serve as a blueprint for scaling the framework across other regions in Thailand and beyond, demonstrating the transformative potential of culture in driving sustainable urban development.



CHALLENGES IN USING THE CULTURE 21 PLUS TOOL: INSIGHTS FROM THE THAI PILOT PROCESS

During the pilot implementation of Culture 21 Plus in Thailand, several challenges emerged that highlighted the need for strategic adjustments and supportive mechanisms to ensure the framework's effective application in local contexts. These challenges, observed across the six pilot communities, provided valuable lessons for refining the tool and its methodology.

1. COMPLEXITY OF THE 6-BLOCK FRAMEWORK

- **Challenge:** The interconnectedness of the six blocks (covering cultural governance, heritage, diversity, inclusion, sustainability, and creativity) was difficult to grasp for participants, particularly those without prior experience in urban planning or cultural policy.
- **Solution:** Simplified examples and case studies for each block were introduced to clarify their relevance and practical applications. By grounding the framework in real-world scenarios, stakeholders were able to better understand the integrated approach to cultural governance.

2. LACK OF FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE ON SDGS AND CULTURE

- **Challenge:** Many participants had limited familiarity with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the role of culture as a pillar within the sustainability framework. This knowledge gap made it challenging for stakeholders to align their cultural initiatives with broader global goals.
- **Solution:** Preliminary workshops were conducted to lay a foundational understanding of the SDGs and the interconnections between culture, economy, society, and environment. This preparatory work ensured participants could contextualize Culture 21 Plus within the global sustainability agenda.

3. NEED FOR VISUAL CONTEXT

- **Challenge:** The abstract nature of the framework and its components made it difficult for participants to see how they could be applied in practical, tangible ways.
- **Solution:** The Thai team introduced visual illustrations for each block of the framework, allowing participants to see how cultural policies could be mapped onto their communities. These visuals included diagrams, community maps, and interactive models to demonstrate how the blocks interact and overlap in urban and rural settings.

4. CONTEXTUAL RELEVANCE

- **Challenge:** Stakeholders found it challenging to relate the global framework to their local realities, particularly in rural or culturally distinct communities.
- **Solution:** Localization workshops were organized to adapt the framework to the Thai cultural landscape. This involved integrating traditional practices, local governance systems, and unique cultural assets into the framework's application.

5. BUILDING CROSS-SECTOR UNDERSTANDING

- **Challenge:** Encouraging stakeholders from different sectors (e.g., tourism, local governance, education, environment) to collaborate and understand the holistic nature of the tool required significant effort.
- **Solution:** Cross-sector dialogue sessions were facilitated to break down silos and foster collaboration. Participants were encouraged to share their expertise and explore how their work connects to the cultural agenda.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- **Simplification Is Key:** Providing relatable, real-life examples and visual aids significantly improved comprehension and engagement with the framework.
- **Foundation Matters:** Establishing a baseline understanding of SDGs and culture's role in sustainability helped participants align their initiatives with global goals.
- **Localization Drives Impact:** Adapting the framework to fit the specific needs, traditions, and dynamics of Thai communities was essential for its practical application.
- **Collaboration is Crucial:** Interdisciplinary teamwork amplified the framework's potential, enabling innovative and inclusive solutions to emerge.

ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION PLATFORM: BUILDING AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

The Thailand Culture 21 Facebook page serves as a dynamic platform dedicated to raising awareness and fostering understanding of the Culture 21 Plus framework within Thailand. By sharing case studies, updates, and engaging content, the page plays a pivotal role in the project's communication strategy, effectively connecting with a diverse audience.



Thailand Culture 21

286 likes • 353 followers



Liked

Message

Search

Key Features of the Page:

- **Educational Content:** The page offers informative posts that elucidate the principles of Culture 21 Plus, emphasizing the integration of culture into sustainable urban development.
- **Case Studies:** It highlights real-world applications of the framework across various Thai communities, showcasing successful initiatives and best practices.
- **Community Engagement:** Through interactive posts, discussions, and feedback opportunities, the page encourages active participation from followers, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.
- **Visual Storytelling:** Utilizing images, videos, and infographics, the page effectively communicates complex concepts in an accessible and engaging manner.

ROLE IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

As part of the broader communication strategy, the Thailand Culture 21 Facebook page functions as a central hub for disseminating information, updates, and success stories related to the project. It facilitates transparency, keeps stakeholders informed, and provides a platform for continuous dialogue. By leveraging social media's reach, the page ensures that the project's messages resonate with a wide audience, including policymakers, cultural practitioners, and the general public. The Thailand Culture 21 Facebook page is an essential component of the project's efforts to promote cultural integration into sustainable development, serving as both an educational resource and a community-building tool.

STEP 3: NATIONAL-LEVEL EXPANSION

NOMINATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

Following the successful pilot phase, the project expanded to a national level. The advisory board, comprising experts, government representatives, and cultural leaders, was tasked with nominating potential cities for the next phase. The Advisory Board was convened, comprising representatives from government agencies, local organizations, cultural experts, academics, and creative economy leaders. This multi-stakeholder committee was tasked with overseeing the nomination and selection process, ensuring alignment with the goals of Culture 21 Plus. After a thorough review, Phuket and Samut Songkhram were selected as the final two cities for real-case implementation to complete the entire project loop “from conception to implementation and evaluation”.

The selection of Phuket and Samut Songkhram as the two cities for the comprehensive implementation of Culture 21 Plus followed a structured, inclusive, and transparent process. This process ensured that the selected cities reflected a strong potential to become models of sustainable cultural development, effectively representing Thailand’s cultural diversity and innovation on the global stage.

REAL-CASE IMPLEMENTATION IN FINAL CITIES: PHUKET AND SAMUT SONGKHRAM

Phuket and Samut Songkhram underwent a comprehensive testing process based on the Culture 21 Plus framework, from stakeholder engagement to problem analysis, and culminating in creative solutions tailored to each city’s unique cultural identity and challenges. These cities undertook the full loop of cultural projects, providing a holistic view of how the Culture 21 Plus framework can drive sustainable urban and cultural development. This application and real-case implementation was carried out in the following initiatives:

1. **The Creative Solution: “Spirit of Phuket”** to revitalize public spaces, showcase multiculturalism and promote inclusivity.
2. **Samut Songkhram: Cultural Orientation Room** to foster a strong sense of community among new residents and reconnecting younger generations with their roots.

You will find more information about these initiatives in the full report, available at: [URL](#)

WHAT'S NEXT?

STEP 4: REFLECTION AND SCALABILITY

- **Evaluation:** The outcomes from Phuket and Samut Songkhram were analyzed to assess the overall effectiveness of Culture 21 Plus. This evaluation highlighted successes in fostering cultural rights, sustainability, and community engagement while addressing unique urban and ecological challenges.
- **Setting a National Model:** The successful implementation in the two final cities served as a model for scaling Culture 21 Plus across Thailand, establishing a replicable framework for other nations. This mapped-out pilot process illustrates Thailand's systematic and inclusive approach to testing, refining, and implementing Culture 21 Plus, positioning the country as a leader in integrating culture into sustainable development strategies. Let me know if you need clarification or additional details on any step.

RESULTS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

The contextualization process in Thailand has yielded significant outcomes:

- **Creative Initiatives:** Each pilot community developed innovative cultural projects tailored to their unique contexts, showcasing the adaptability of Culture 21 Plus.
- **Strengthened Local Capacity:** Communities reported enhanced capacity to address cultural and developmental challenges through collaborative and strategic approaches.
- **Scalability and Impact:** The results from the pilot phase have set the stage for scaling Culture 21 Plus as a national model, demonstrating its potential to transform cultural governance at multiple levels (Thailand Culture 21 Plus).

Through these efforts, Thailand has not only contextualized Culture 21 Plus but also provided a replicable framework for other nations, reinforcing its role as a global leader in sustainable cultural development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Culture 21 Plus as a Global Model: Reflect on the lessons learned from Thailand's pilot and their potential for scaling Culture 21 Plus globally.

Next Steps: Recommend strategies for refining the tool based on Thailand's experiences, including greater emphasis on localized solutions, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and continuous capacity-building.

Thailand's Legacy: Conclude by positioning Thailand as a global leader in cultural policy innovation, ready to inspire other nations to adopt Culture 21 Plus as a framework for sustainable development.



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