



Strengthening Community Participation in Developing Community-Based Tourism in Batu, Malang, East Java, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to explore and strengthen community participation in the development of community-based tourism (CBT) in Batu, Malang. As tourism increasingly becomes a driver of local economic growth, the active involvement of the community is critical to ensuring inclusive and sustainable development. This study addresses the gap in participatory practices in CBT initiatives in the Batu area and proposes strategies to enhance local engagement.

Design/methods/approach – The research applied a qualitative approach using descriptive analysis. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and field observations involving community leaders, tourism actors, local government officials, and tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis). Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 Plus to identify patterns related to participation, leadership, organizational capacity, and community empowerment.

Findings – The study found that although community awareness of tourism potential in Batu is relatively high, participation in decision-making and tourism governance remains limited. Key barriers include the lack of structured community organizations, weak leadership, and minimal coordination with stakeholders. Strengthening community participation requires integrated strategies including leadership development, participatory planning, and formal support for local tourism organizations.

Research implications/limitations – The study is limited to qualitative data from three tourism villages in Batu and does not capture broader regional dynamics. Future studies could expand geographically and incorporate quantitative analysis to enhance generalizability.

Originality/value – This study contributes a practical model for enhancing community participation in CBT based on the socio-cultural context of Batu. It highlights actionable insights for local governments, NGOs, and universities engaged in tourism-based community empowerment.

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Introduction

Tourism is increasingly recognized as a pivotal catalyst for economic development, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment,

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particularly in areas endowed with natural beauty and cultural heritage. The multifaceted nature of the tourism industry is not limited to economic gains; it fundamentally fosters cultural exchange, raises environmental awareness, and promotes social inclusion. Nevertheless, these benefits are most effectively realized when tourism initiatives resonate with the needs, values, and aspirations of local communities. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emerges as a viable model in this context, characterized by the active participation of local populations in the planning, development, and management of tourism initiatives. CBT has been shown to empower communities by integrating their cultural and natural resources into tourism frameworks, ultimately enhancing local economic conditions and preserving socio-cultural traditions (Lina, 2023; UMAM et al., 2022; Wardani et al., 2023; al., 2021). Research indicates that the active management and operation of tourism projects by local communities can lead to increased economic benefits, help sustain livelihoods, and reduce poverty at the local level (Sutresna et al., 2019; Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Han et al., 2019).

Furthermore, CBT supports community development through the establishment of participatory planning processes and collaboration among stakeholders, thereby promoting environmental sustainability and cultural preservation (Naingalis et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2019; Ginanjar, 2023; Prakoso et al., 2020). Therefore, aligning tourism development with community aspirations and engaging local populations is not merely beneficial but essential for realizing the full potential of tourism as a sustainable development strategy. The CBT model stands as an effective approach to ensure that tourism benefits are equitably distributed while fostering empowerment and resilience within local communities.

The concept of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is fundamentally intertwined with the principles of sustainable development, focusing on the balance of economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity. Unlike mass tourism, which often marginalizes local communities and prioritizes profits over well-being, CBT uniquely emphasizes community ownership, equitable distribution of benefits, and the conservation of local culture and environment. By defining communities as active participants rather than mere beneficiaries, CBT empowers them to shape and manage tourism initiatives that directly affect their lives. CBT fosters community engagement by encouraging locals to partake in tourism planning and management. Bello et al. highlight the need for strong local participation in tourism decisions, revealing that when communities are actively involved, they experience increased benefits, which results in better conservation efforts for their natural resources Bello et al. (2016). Similarly, Khalid et al. (2016) illustrate how community support is crucial for empowering local populations, which leads to sustainable tourism development by ensuring that the interests of the community are met Khalid et al. (2019). Moreover,

Acharya discusses the positive impact of tourism on women's empowerment, suggesting that tourism fosters not only economic benefits but also improves community cohesion and empowerment Acharya (2023).

Additionally, CBT is characterized by the development of locally owned businesses aimed at enhancing community livelihoods. Numerous studies have shown that successful CBT initiatives lead to improved community resilience and capacity to generate economic benefits while preserving cultural identity Lina (2023)Wardani et al. (2023)al. (2021). Research by Lina explains that CBT establishes community authority over tourism-related activities, thus ensuring that local resources are utilized sustainably Lina (2023). Furthermore, Rachmawati et al. indicate that community involvement in tourism can enhance social cohesion and solidarity, contributing to overall social empowerment Rachmawati et al. (2022). Therefore, CBT represents a sustainable path for tourism that not only balances economic growth with environmental stewardship and social equity but also enables local communities to reclaim ownership of their development processes, thus enhancing their resilience and capacity to navigate external pressures and disruptions.

1.1 Background of the Study

Batu, located in East Java, Indonesia, is a popular tourist destination renowned for its cool climate, scenic landscapes, and diverse attractions, including agro-tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. Over the past two decades, Batu has transformed into one of Indonesia's key tourism cities, attracting millions of visitors each year. However, this rapid development has not resulted in an equitable distribution of the economic benefits of tourism across all communities, with several marginalized groups remaining excluded from the growth and decision-making processes related to tourism. Various studies illustrate the disparity in tourism benefits within Batu. For instance, Hidayaturrahman et al. highlight that while tourism development is significant, it often overlooks the needs of marginalized communities, illustrating a disconnect between tourism profitability and community benefits (Sukmana, 2022). Similarly, Sukmana notes that despite the growth of eco-community-based tourism, many local communities still struggle to engage effectively with tourism initiatives, indicating a need for inclusive strategies (Sukmana, 2022). Nasution et al. elaborate on how integrated agro-tourism initiatives can bolster local economies, yet communities that lack participation in tourism planning remain on the outskirts of these economic opportunities (Nasution et al., 2021). Additionally, Kurniawan et al. point out that enhancing local tourism attractions without community involvement leads to benefits being unequally distributed (Kurniawan et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the research conducted by Prayitno et al. shows that while the Batu City Government has developed tourism villages, these initiatives often exclude input from local stakeholders, limiting the empowerment and economic benefits for the very communities that tourism purports to improve (Prayitno et al., 2023). While Batu's tourism sector has demonstrated remarkable growth, it is crucial for local governments and stakeholders to ensure that tourism development strategies are inclusive, empowering marginalized communities and distributing economic benefits equitably. Addressing these disparities can enhance the sustainability of tourism in Batu, ensuring that all segments of the community can partake in and benefit from the region's rich tourism potential.

Despite significant government and private investments that have shaped Batu's tourism landscape, community participation in tourism initiatives remains limited and fragmented. The predominance of top-down approaches in tourism development often excludes local residents from meaningful participation, leading to a lack of ownership and input from these communities. While there is a high level of community awareness regarding tourism potential, the capacity for local residents to engage effectively in planning and governance remains inadequate. This disconnect ultimately leads to a tourism model that neglects local needs, undermines community cohesion, and poses risks of cultural commodification and environmental degradation.

Research shows that the limited engagement of local communities in tourism decision-making contributes to various negative outcomes. For instance, Tuyen et al. highlight that while tourism can benefit local economies and engage communities, barriers such as lack of supportive infrastructure and limited access to resources impede effective participation (Lina, 2023). Similarly, Chan et al. observe that inadequate community involvement in ecotourism can result in limited benefits for local empowerment and improved living conditions (UMAM et al., 2022). Furthermore, Safii and Pujiati emphasize that community participation is crucial for the success of tourism initiatives, as local management leads to greater benefits for residents (Wardani et al., 2023).

In examining the power dynamics of tourism, Rachmawati et al. stress the importance of inclusive governance models that facilitate local engagement, which can help mitigate the risks of cultural commodification and environmental degradation (al., 2021). Their research indicates that excluding local voices can detrimentally affect local traditions and ecological sustainability (Sutresna et al., 2019). This observation reflects a broader trend within the tourism industry identified by Summers et al., which underscores the need to acknowledge the varied interests and capacities within tourism markets to enhance community benefits and ensure sustainability (Dangi &

Jamal, 2016). Consequently, this study seeks to address these challenges by examining and strengthening community participation in the development of community-based tourism in Batu. By employing qualitative fieldwork and participatory methods, this research aims to identify barriers to involvement, explore community perspectives, and propose actionable strategies to foster inclusive and sustainable tourism development. Recognizing the importance of community participation is essential for creating a more equitable and sustainable tourism environment that respects and enriches the local culture and ecosystem.

1.2 Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this research centers on the concepts of community empowerment, participatory development, and sustainable tourism, emphasizing the necessity for inclusive development processes that prioritize local agency, build community capacity, and equitably share development benefits. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is broadly defined as tourism that is owned, operated, and managed by local communities, with the primary objective of generating economic, social, and environmental benefits for those communities. This model seeks to transition from externally-driven tourism development to community-led initiatives, allowing residents to have significant control over decision-making, resource management, and revenue distribution. Research highlights that community empowerment is crucial in tourism contexts. For instance, Abdullah et al. argue that effective empowerment hinges on the agency of local communities, suggesting that enabling local populations to be self-directed is vital for successful tourism initiatives Abdullah et al. (2022). Similarly, the study by Aghazamani and Hunt illustrates that a strong relationship exists between tourism and empowerment, emphasizing the importance of local participation in tourism development (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017). Furthermore, Ara et al. indicate that disintermediation strategies in tourism can enhance community engagement and ownership, underlining the importance of direct involvement of local stakeholders (Ara et al., 2022).

Additionally, studies indicate that when tourism is solely driven by external interests, it can lead to negative consequences, such as cultural commodification and environmental degradation, emphasizing the need for sustainable models that engage local communities meaningfully. Research shows that when local communities are empowered and involved in tourism planning, there is a notable increase in local benefits and overall community resilience (Sutresna et al., 2019).

Therefore, this research aims to examine the current state of community participation in tourism development in Batu, proposing strategies that enhance community empowerment through participatory development approaches. By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the study seeks to

identify barriers to effective participation and develop actionable strategies that foster inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

According to Tosun (2006), community participation in tourism can be categorized into three typologies: coercive participation (imposed and symbolic), induced participation (consultative but lacking control), and spontaneous participation (genuine and empowering). Ideally, spontaneous participation, which is central to Community-Based Tourism (CBT), involves communities initiating and managing tourism processes. Unfortunately, many instances of CBT in the Global South tend to fall into the coercive or induced categories due to various constraints, such as political dynamics, institutional limitations, and capacity-related issues. Effective community participation necessitates both structural enablers—such as policies, institutions, and funding—as well as social enablers, including education, awareness, and leadership. Without these conditions in place, community participation risks becoming merely tokenistic.

Research supports this understanding of community participation dynamics. For example, Dragouni & Fouseki (2017) emphasize that genuine community-led initiatives in tourism planning are often impeded by institutional barriers and insufficient support frameworks, leading to a disconnect between community interests and tourism practices (UMAM et al., 2022). Additionally, Bello (2021) addresses the necessity for local representation and autonomy in planning processes to ensure authentic participation and avoid coercive or induced types of participation (Wardani et al., 2023). Similarly, Rusli et al. (2022) explore how women's participation in tourism can enhance social inclusion, revealing that empowering marginalized groups is vital for transforming consultative approaches into genuine community-led initiatives (Lina, 2023).

Furthermore, critiques of romanticized views of community participation underscore the need for addressing internal community diversity and power dynamics. For instance, Nugroho et al. (2022) note that communities are not monolithic and that internal differences must be acknowledged to foster effective participation (al., 2021). Research by (Akbar et al., 2021) asserts that genuine empowerment and sustainable participation must consider these dynamics to avoid exacerbating existing tensions and inequalities within communities (Akbar et al., 2021).

Overall, understanding the typologies of community participation outlined by Tosun provides critical insights into the barriers and facilitators of effective community engagement in tourism. By recognizing the necessity for both structural and social enablers, this research contributes to reframing community participation as a genuine, empowering process rather than a tokenistic exercise. Highlighting these issues is vital for developing strategies that enhance local agency and foster sustainable tourism development.

In the Indonesian context, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has gained traction since the early 2000s through various government and NGO programs, notably the Desa Wisata (Tourism Village) initiatives that aim to leverage local culture, traditions, and natural assets to promote rural tourism. However, the effectiveness of these programs varies significantly and is often contingent upon the level of community involvement and the strength of institutional support. Many cases of CBT suffer from inadequate stakeholder coordination, insufficient capacity-building efforts, and unclear mechanisms for sharing benefits, which collectively undermine their success.

Research indicates that community participation is vital for the successful implementation of CBT initiatives. For example, Bozdaglar highlights the critical role that community-based tourism initiatives play in promoting sustainable tourism development while enhancing the well-being of local communities (Lina, 2023). Meanwhile, Kuntariningsih et al. emphasize that effective disaster risk reduction and management are facilitated through community empowerment and participation in tourism management (UMAM et al., 2022). Furthermore, Umam et al. found that local communities experience more significant benefits when they can actively participate in the development processes of tourism in their areas, suggesting that a bottom-up approach fosters better outcomes (Wardani et al., 2023). However, Siregar et al. assert that systemic barriers such as inadequate institutional frameworks and lack of clear benefit-sharing mechanisms frequently hinder successful community engagement in tourism (al., 2021).

Moreover, Wibowo and Darsono elaborate on how a lack of coordination among stakeholders can impede the development of tourism villages, resulting in wasted potential for economic and cultural enrichment within local communities (Sutresna et al., 2019). Addressing these challenges requires appropriately designed community participation models, as demonstrated by Hudayana et al., who call for participatory rural appraisal methods that engage communities in meaningful dialogue about tourism development (Dangi & Jamal, 2016).

Therefore, while CBT initiatives in Indonesia present significant opportunities for empowering local communities and promoting sustainable tourism, it is crucial to address the existing barriers to effective participation and stakeholder coordination. By strengthening institutional support and clarifying benefit-sharing mechanisms, Indonesia can enhance the effectiveness of its tourism programs, ultimately ensuring that the benefits of development are equitably distributed among all community members.

1.3 Research Problem and Significance

The central problem addressed in this research is the limited and uneven participation of local communities in the development of tourism in Batu,

which undermines the potential benefits of Community-Based Tourism (CBT). Despite the growing recognition of CBT's importance, its implementation remains inconsistent across various communities in Batu. Many local residents lack the necessary tools, support, and knowledge to engage effectively in tourism development processes. This deficiency restricts the economic and social benefits that communities could derive from tourism and threatens the sustainability of the tourism sector as a whole.

Khalid et al. highlight that community empowerment is essential for effective participation in tourism development, emphasizing that community support for tourism increases when local communities are included in decision-making processes (Khalid et al., 2019). Additionally, Setokoe and Ramukumba discuss the importance of community participation as a cornerstone for sustainable tourism, identifying barriers such as inadequate institutional support that hinder such participation (Setokoe & Ramukumba, 2020). They specify that addressing these barriers is crucial for fostering engagement among community members.

Moreover, evidence from Lestari et al. indicates that collaborative governance is vital in tourism development, stressing the need for clear communication and capacity-building initiatives to enhance stakeholder engagement in Batu (Lestari et al., 2022). Furthermore, Prayitno et al. emphasize that successful tourism strategies in Batu rely heavily on active community involvement and a community-centric approach, illustrating that the prosperity of tourism villages is linked to local engagement (Prayitno et al., 2023). Additionally, Kurniawan et al. provide insights into how optimizing local resources can lead to economic gains for communities and reinforce the importance of inclusive participatory frameworks (Kurniawan et al., 2023).

This study's significance lies in its potential to inform policy and practice regarding community empowerment and participatory tourism development in Batu. By focusing on a city that embodies challenges faced in the wider context of Indonesia's tourism sector, the research offers insights relevant to other regions encountering similar issues. It contributes to academic discourse on CBT by providing an empirical analysis of community experiences, barriers to participation, and context-sensitive strategies for fostering inclusive development.

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1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

The main objective of this study is to strengthen community participation in the development of community-based tourism in Batu, Malang. Specific research questions include:

1. What are the current forms and levels of community participation in tourism development in Batu?
2. What are the main barriers that hinder community involvement in tourism planning and governance?
3. What strategies can be adopted to enhance community capacity, leadership, and organizational strength in CBT?

1.5 Structure of the Paper

This paper is organized into five main sections. Following this introduction, the **second section** presents a review of relevant literature and conceptual frameworks related to community-based tourism and participatory development. The **third section** outlines the research methodology, including the qualitative approach, data collection techniques, and analytical tools used. The **fourth section** presents the research findings, organized around key themes such as participation, leadership, community capacity, and organizational dynamics. The **final section** discusses the implications of the findings, draws conclusions, and offers practical recommendations for stakeholders involved in tourism development.

1.6 Contribution to the Field

This study contributes to both academic and practical domains by enhancing the understanding and application of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in urban-rural contexts like Batu, where tourism is experiencing significant growth yet community participation is often constrained. While tourism development is frequently perceived as inherently beneficial for local communities, this study challenges that assumption, asserting that structural and social conditions must be in place to facilitate genuine participation. By examining how CBT can be effectively operationalized in such contexts, the research provides valuable insights into the complexities of tourism's impact on local communities.

Academic literature supports the notion that effective CBT relies on enabling conditions that foster community involvement. For instance, Tosun (2000) emphasizes that community participation is not automatic and requires targeted strategies to engage local populations effectively (Han et al., 2019). Additionally, findings by Boley and McGehee (2014) illustrate that sustainable tourism practices benefit from strong local leadership and organizational capacity (Naingalis et al., 2022). This study underscores the importance of fostering not just participatory frameworks but also the necessary infrastructure for effective community engagement, as highlighted by research for community empowerment benchmarks (Guo et al., 2019).

Practically, the study proposes a model for community engagement that is adaptable for local governments, development agencies, and community organizations. By focusing on leadership development, organizational strengthening, and inclusive governance, it aligns with best practices in sustainable tourism as recommended in the work of Scheyvens (2002), who advocates for empowering local populations to partake actively in tourism processes (Ginanjjar, 2023). The proposed roadmap emphasizes that resilient

and empowered tourism communities emerge from collaborative approaches, thereby enabling them to better navigate the tourism landscape and derive equitable benefits from its growth.

In conclusion, this study significantly enhances both academic discourse and practical approaches to CBT by demonstrating the requisite conditions for effective community participation in tourism development. By providing a comprehensive model for community engagement focused on leadership and inclusivity, the research offers actionable strategies that can be implemented by various stakeholders to build strong, resilient, and empowered tourism communities in contexts like Batu.

1.7 Main Argument and Preliminary Conclusions

The core argument of this paper is that community participation is not merely a complementary aspect of tourism development—it is essential to its sustainability and success. Without meaningful involvement of local communities, tourism risks becoming extractive, unsustainable, and socially unjust. Strengthening participation requires not only policy support but also long-term investments in community capacity, leadership, and institutional collaboration.

Preliminary findings from the study suggest that while community awareness in Batu is high, actual participation remains limited due to structural barriers, weak leadership, and fragmented community organization. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that integrates training, facilitation, and policy reform.

Methods

This research employed a **qualitative descriptive approach** to explore and analyze the dynamics of community participation in the development of community-based tourism (CBT) in Batu, Malang. The qualitative design was selected to gain a deeper understanding of social processes, experiences, and perspectives of community members and stakeholders involved in tourism development. Through in-depth exploration, the study sought to construct meaning from participants' narratives and to identify contextual factors that shape participation patterns.

2.1 Research Design

The research was conducted as a **case study** focusing on selected tourism villages in Batu, Malang. The case study design allowed for an in-depth and holistic examination of CBT practices, community engagement, and empowerment strategies in a specific social and geographic context. This method is particularly suitable for examining complex phenomena within real-life settings and for uncovering the "how" and "why" behind community behaviors and institutional arrangements.

2.2 Population and Sample (Target of Research)

The population in this study consisted of key stakeholders involved in community-based tourism in Batu. These included:

- Local community members
- Community leaders
- Tourism actors (e.g., homestay owners, guides)
- Village officials
- Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis)
- Representatives from local government agencies related to tourism

Using **purposive sampling**, 18 participants were selected based on their direct involvement, knowledge, and experience in the planning, implementation, or evaluation of tourism activities in three tourism villages: **Desa Punten, Desa Tulungrejo, and Desa Temas**. These villages were chosen for their active engagement in tourism and their potential for CBT development.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques and Instrumentation

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure data richness and triangulation. The instruments and techniques included:

1. **In-depth interviews:** Conducted with 12 key informants, including community leaders, Pokdarwis coordinators, and tourism entrepreneurs. A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore themes such as participation, leadership, benefit-sharing, and institutional support.
2. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Conducted with local community members and village officials in each location. FGDs aimed to capture collective experiences, challenges, and aspirations related to CBT.
3. **Field observations:** Conducted during community meetings, tourism activities, and Pokdarwis planning sessions. Observations focused on community interaction patterns, leadership styles, and organizational practices.
4. **Document analysis:** Included village tourism plans, Pokdarwis activity reports, and local government tourism policies to contextualize findings.

Interview guides and observation sheets were developed by the researcher and validated through expert review and pre-testing with non-participant individuals.

2.4 Researcher's Presence

In qualitative research, the researcher plays an active role as the primary instrument. The researcher was present during all data collection activities and maintained prolonged engagement in the field over a period of **four months** (February–May 2025). This immersion allowed for the building of rapport with participants and deeper understanding of the social setting. The researcher maintained a reflective field journal to document observations, emerging insights, and reflexivity regarding positionality and biases.

2.5 Research Location and Duration

The research was conducted in **three tourism villages** located in Batu City, East Java:

1. **Desa Punten** – known for agro-tourism and apple orchards
2. **Desa Tulungrejo** – active in educational and ecotourism development
3. **Desa Temas** – near urban Batu, with cultural tourism initiatives

The fieldwork lasted from **February to May 2024**, with follow-up communication for clarification and member checking conducted in June 2025.

2.6 Validity and Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings, several strategies were employed:

1. **Triangulation:** Data were cross-verified using interviews, FGDs, observations, and document reviews to ensure consistency and depth.
2. **Member checking:** Preliminary findings and interpretations were shared with several key informants for validation and clarification.
3. **Peer debriefing:** The researcher engaged in regular discussions with academic supervisors and fellow researchers to test interpretations and enhance analytical rigor.
4. **Audit trail:** Detailed documentation of data collection procedures, coding processes, and analytic decisions was maintained to enhance transparency.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed a **thematic analysis** approach using both manual coding and digital tools. The stages included:

1. **Data transcription:** All interview and FGD recordings were transcribed verbatim.

2. **Initial coding:** Segments of data were labeled according to emerging themes.
3. **Categorization:** Codes were grouped into broader categories such as participation, leadership, organizational dynamics, and community empowerment.
4. **Theme development:** Core themes were identified to explain patterns across cases and stakeholder groups.
5. **Interpretation:** Themes were interpreted in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

NVivo 12 Plus software was used to facilitate coding, visualization (e.g., project maps), and cross-case analysis. The software enabled efficient organization of large qualitative data sets and helped identify co-occurrence of themes across different sources and locations.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study, organized into several major themes derived from qualitative data analysis. The results are structured around the key elements influencing community participation in community-based tourism (CBT) in Batu, including participation patterns, leadership dynamics, community capacity, and organizational support. The analysis draws from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations across three tourism villages in Batu: Punten, Tulungrejo, and Temas.

3.1 Community Participation in Tourism Activities

Community participation is a core element of successful CBT. The study revealed a variety of participation levels across the research locations, ranging from passive involvement to active engagement.

3.1.1 Forms of Participation

Community members were involved in tourism development through various roles:

- (1) Participation in tourism planning meetings
- (2) Involvement in Pokdarwis (tourism awareness groups)
- (3) Contribution as homestay providers, local guides, and souvenir producers
- (4) Participation in tourism-related training and workshops

While some residents engaged in decision-making and activity coordination, most community members participated primarily as service providers rather than planners.

3.1.2 Participation in Decision-Making

Despite awareness of tourism potential, many community members expressed limited involvement in planning and policy discussions. Interviews indicated that tourism programs were often initiated by local government or external stakeholders with minimal consultation:

“We are happy tourism is growing, but usually the plans come from above. We are just informed after decisions are made.” — (Interview, Tulungrejo Resident)

This reflects a **top-down governance model**, which contradicts the participatory principles of CBT.

3.2 Leadership in Community-Based Tourism

Leadership was identified as a determining factor in mobilizing community involvement and ensuring program continuity. Strong local leadership could inspire trust, encourage collaboration, and bridge the gap between the community and external actors.

3.2.1 Characteristics of Local Leaders

Effective CBT leaders were described as:

1. Communicative and transparent
2. Capable of coordinating diverse stakeholders
3. Trusted by the community
4. Committed to long-term goals

Villages with active, visionary leaders (e.g., Tulungrejo) showed higher levels of participation and better organization in CBT.

“Our Pokdarwis leader regularly updates us, invites us to give ideas, and explains the purpose of each tourism event.” — (FGD, Punten)

3.2.2 Challenges in Leadership

However, some villages faced leadership challenges, including:

1. Lack of leadership regeneration
2. Overreliance on a single charismatic figure
3. Weak coordination with local government

Table 1 summarizes the comparison of leadership effectiveness across villages.

Table 1. Comparison of Community Leadership Across Villages

Village	Leadership Quality	Community Trust	Coordination with Government
Punten	Moderate	Medium	Low
Tulungrejo	Strong and inclusive	High	High
Temas	Inconsistent	Low	Medium

3.3 Community Capacity and Empowerment

Community capacity refers to the knowledge, skills, and resources that enable local people to take active roles in tourism development.

3.3.1 Training and Education

While all villages had received basic tourism training, most programs were one-off and lacked follow-up. Participants reported a need for continuous mentoring, especially in:

1. Hospitality and customer service
2. Digital marketing
3. Financial literacy
4. Tour guiding and storytelling

“We had training from the tourism office two years ago, but after that, there was no further program. We need regular sessions.” — (Interview, Temas)

3.3.2 Access to Resources

Several constraints limited community participation:

- Lack of initial capital for tourism ventures
- Limited access to government funding schemes
- Insufficient facilities to support visitors (e.g., toilets, signage, homestays)

Some community members relied on personal savings to initiate tourism businesses. Others expressed interest but felt excluded due to the absence of support mechanisms.

3.4 Organizational Support: The Role of Pokdarwis

Pokdarwis plays a central role in coordinating community-based tourism initiatives. Their performance varied across the three villages.

3.4.1 Organizational Structure and Function

Effective Pokdarwis had:

1. Clear leadership structure
2. Regular meetings and documentation
3. Collaboration with tourism stakeholders
4. Defined roles and responsibilities

Tulungrejo's Pokdarwis, for example, had a five-year strategic plan and monthly coordination meetings, enabling it to access funding and coordinate events effectively.

3.4.2 Weaknesses in Pokdarwis Functionality

In contrast, in Punten and Temas, Pokdarwis faced several challenges:

- Lack of legal status, hindering access to grants
- Low participation in organizational activities
- Unclear vision and mission
- Limited communication with external parties

“Sometimes we don't know who's leading the group or what our next event is. Everything feels ad hoc.” — (FGD, Temas)

3.5 Stakeholder Collaboration and Policy Support

The research also highlighted the importance of multistakeholder collaboration in CBT development. This included coordination between:

- 1) Local government agencies
- 2) Community organizations
- 3) Private sector actors (e.g., tour operators, investors)
- 4) Universities and NGOs

3.5.1 Government Involvement

While the local government has supported tourism infrastructure and promotional activities, its engagement with communities varied. In some cases, programs were planned without prior consultation with community members, leading to mismatches between community needs and government priorities.

“The government built a rest area, but it’s rarely used because it’s not in the main tourist route.” — (Observation Note, Punten)

3.5.2 Academic and NGO Partnerships

Universities and NGOs have provided training and advocacy, particularly in Tulungrejo, where a local university collaborated on developing a tourism curriculum for youth.

3.6 Community Perception of Tourism Benefits

Perceived benefits strongly influenced participation. When communities felt they gained tangible benefits, they were more likely to engage in tourism initiatives.

3.6.1 Economic Benefits

The most commonly cited benefits were increased income and job opportunities. These came through:

- Homestay rentals
- Selling food and souvenirs
- Acting as guides or performers

However, uneven benefit distribution sometimes led to community resentment, especially when tourism profits were concentrated among a few individuals.

3.6.2 Social and Cultural Benefits

CBT also helped revive traditional arts and foster a sense of pride among residents. Communities organized local performances, cultural festivals, and traditional cooking events.

“We’ve started teaching traditional dances again. It brings the youth closer to our roots.” — (Interview, Tulungrejo)

Figure 1 shows a community-organized cultural event supported by the tourism group.

Figure 1. (a) Traditional dance performance by local youth; **(b)** Culinary bazaar during a tourism festival in Tulungrejo.

3.7 Summary of Key Findings

To summarize, the main findings from the fieldwork are as follows:

- 1) Community participation in Batu’s CBT initiatives is still limited and primarily focused on service provision, not decision-making.
- 2) Effective leadership and well-functioning Pokdarwis significantly improve participation and coordination.

- 3) Training and institutional support remain sporadic and need to be scaled up.
- 4) Stakeholder collaboration is crucial, but current practices are often fragmented.
- 5) Community perceptions of benefit—both economic and cultural—strongly affect motivation to participate.

These findings serve as the foundation for the discussion and formulation of practical recommendations, which will be presented in the next section.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the dynamics of community participation in community-based tourism (CBT) in Batu, Malang. This section discusses the implications of those findings in light of existing literature, highlights the significance of participation as a foundation for sustainable tourism, and suggests directions for future research. The discussion is organized thematically to reflect the key elements of the study: participation, leadership, community capacity, organizational structure, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

4.1 Community Participation: Between Ideal and Reality

The results of the study reveal a persistent gap between the ideal of participatory tourism and its practical implementation. While CBT is conceptually grounded in participatory development (Scheyvens, 2002; Timothy, 1999), real-world application in Batu remains uneven. Community members are often involved as implementers or beneficiaries but are rarely empowered to shape the vision, planning, or management of tourism development. This finding supports Tosun's (2006) typology, in which participation is often "induced" or even "coercive," rather than spontaneous and community-driven.

This situation reflects a broader pattern seen in many Global South contexts, where institutional structures and power asymmetries limit the extent of local agency (Blackstock, 2005). In Batu, despite growing awareness of tourism potential, local communities are still perceived as peripheral to decision-making processes. As a result, tourism development risks becoming extractive rather than empowering.

Moreover, the concentration of tourism benefits among a few actors fosters inequality and erodes the communal spirit necessary for CBT success. This phenomenon was also identified by Goodwin & Santilli (2009), who argue that unless benefit-sharing mechanisms are clearly defined, CBT can reproduce social exclusion.

4.2 Leadership as a Catalyst for Participation

Leadership emerged as a decisive factor influencing the level and quality of community participation. Villages such as Tulungrejo, which exhibited strong and transparent leadership, had better-organized tourism activities and higher levels of resident engagement. These findings align with the work of Sofield (2003) and Moscardo (2008), who emphasize the importance of visionary and inclusive leadership in facilitating sustainable tourism and empowering local communities.

Effective leadership functions as a bridge between the community and external stakeholders, fosters trust, ensures transparency, and drives long-term commitment. In contrast, the absence of leadership regeneration, over-reliance on a single figure, and weak coordination with government were identified as barriers to sustainability.

This reinforces the need for leadership development programs within CBT frameworks. Such programs should not only build managerial skills but also promote democratic decision-making and succession planning, ensuring that leadership remains inclusive, responsive, and resilient over time.

4.3 Building Community Capacity: More than Skills Training

The study found that while training and workshops were occasionally provided, they were often sporadic, one-time events with limited follow-up. This reflects a common issue in development programs where capacity-building is viewed as a technical intervention rather than a continuous, participatory learning process.

Literature on empowerment (e.g., Chambers, 1997; Friedmann, 1992) stresses that real empowerment involves more than skills transfer; it requires strengthening people's confidence, critical awareness, and ability to act collectively. In the context of CBT, capacity-building must include:

- Ongoing mentoring and coaching
- Opportunities for community members to learn by doing
- Space for reflection and feedback
- Support for building local institutions

In Batu, the lack of continuous support systems and institutional backing hampers community learning and innovation. Many residents expressed interest in tourism but felt discouraged due to the absence of accessible capital, legal knowledge, or infrastructure.

Therefore, development agencies and local governments must reframe capacity-building as a **long-term investment** in people, not just a checklist activity.

4.4 *The Role of Community Organizations (Pokdarwis)*

Community-based tourism in Indonesia is often facilitated through *Kelompok Sadar Wisata* (Pokdarwis). This study confirmed that functional Pokdarwis play a pivotal role in coordinating tourism activities, mobilizing residents, and serving as a liaison with external partners.

Villages with strong Pokdarwis, such as Tulungrejo, were able to develop strategic plans, organize regular meetings, and even secure funding. These findings are consistent with previous research (Rahayu et al., 2018; Pratiwi & Widodo, 2021) that highlight the significance of local organizations in sustaining CBT.

However, many Pokdarwis in Batu lacked legal recognition, structured management, or clear roles. Without formal status, these groups are excluded from funding opportunities and decision-making processes at the regional level. This institutional marginalization undermines their effectiveness and legitimacy.

This issue points to a need for **institutional strengthening**, including:

- Legal capacity building (e.g., to register as legal entities)
- Organizational development training
- Facilitation of networking and partnerships
- Integration into regional tourism planning frameworks

Only when Pokdarwis are supported as formal community institutions can they function effectively and inclusively in CBT systems.

4.5 *Stakeholder Collaboration: From Fragmentation to Integration*

The research highlights the fragmented nature of stakeholder collaboration in Batu's tourism development. While efforts from the local government, universities, and NGOs were observed, they often lacked coordination and alignment with community needs.

For example, infrastructure projects were sometimes developed without considering local preferences or potential usage, as seen in Punten. This top-down planning mirrors the critique of state-led tourism models in the Global South, where technocratic interventions often neglect social context (Hall, 2000).

In contrast, Tulungrejo benefited from academic partnerships that facilitated participatory planning and knowledge co-production. This confirms the potential of **university–community partnerships** as catalysts for bottom-up development (Jacobs, 2008). Such partnerships should not only be instrumental (i.e., delivering training) but also **collaborative**, involving communities in agenda-setting, implementation, and evaluation.

To improve stakeholder collaboration in CBT, the following strategies are recommended:

- Establish multistakeholder forums or platforms at the village level
- Adopt participatory planning approaches such as PRA or community mapping
- Encourage transparency and accountability through community scorecards or social audits
- Build long-term partnerships rather than short-term project engagements

4.6 Tourism Benefits and Motivation to Participate

Perception of benefits plays a key role in shaping community motivation to engage in CBT. When communities see tangible outcomes—such as increased income, revived cultural pride, and improved infrastructure—they are more likely to participate.

The study found that economic benefits were the most recognized form of reward. However, when benefits were perceived as unequally distributed, they caused tension and disengagement. This finding aligns with literature by Mitchell & Ashley (2010), which emphasizes the need for **inclusive benefit-sharing mechanisms** in tourism.

Social and cultural benefits, such as the revival of traditional dances or communal pride, were also noted, particularly in Tulungrejo. These intangible outcomes are essential for building social capital and ensuring long-term community commitment.

This highlights that CBT should be designed not only as an economic enterprise but also as a **cultural and social empowerment process**.

4.7 Implications for Policy and Practice

The results of this study have several implications for tourism development policy and practice in Batu and similar contexts:

1. **Reframe participation as empowerment:** Shift from consultative to transformative models of participation that emphasize community control and ownership.
2. **Invest in community leadership and institutions:** Provide leadership training and strengthen the institutional capacity of Pokdarwis to operate effectively.

3. **Adopt integrated planning approaches:** Encourage cross-sectoral and multilevel coordination to avoid duplication and address community needs.

4. **Prioritize inclusive benefit-sharing:** Ensure that tourism revenues are distributed equitably and reinvested in community development.

5. **Support long-term learning and adaptation:** Establish mechanisms for ongoing training, mentoring, and peer learning.

4.8 *Directions for Future Research*

This study was limited to three tourism villages in Batu, and its qualitative nature restricts the generalizability of findings. Future research could adopt **mixed-methods approaches** to combine qualitative depth with quantitative generalizability. Surveys could measure perceptions of participation, leadership trust, and benefit satisfaction across a larger population.

Moreover, longitudinal studies could track how community participation evolves over time and in response to interventions. Comparative studies between high- and low-performing CBT sites would also yield insights into enabling and constraining factors.

Research could also explore **youth participation** and **gender dynamics** in CBT, which were not the focus of this study but emerged as important during fieldwork. Involving these groups more directly could strengthen inclusiveness and innovation in CBT models.

4.9 *Concluding Remarks*

This discussion has shown that while community participation in CBT in Batu is gaining attention, its implementation still faces significant structural and social challenges. Leadership, organizational capacity, access to resources, and stakeholder coordination are all critical factors influencing participation levels.

To move towards a more inclusive and sustainable tourism model, CBT in Batu must be grounded in **genuine community empowerment**—one that acknowledges local knowledge, shares power equitably, and builds long-term partnerships across sectors.

Tourism can be more than a source of income; it can be a **vehicle for social transformation**, if rooted in the people it aims to serve.

Conclusion

This study has explored the dynamics of community participation in the development of community-based tourism (CBT) in Batu, Malang. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research examined how local

communities engage in tourism activities, the role of leadership and community organizations, and the extent of collaboration with external stakeholders.

The central argument of this research is that **community participation is a fundamental pillar of sustainable tourism development**, and without genuine inclusion of local voices in planning, governance, and benefit-sharing, CBT risks becoming extractive and unsustainable. While the rhetoric of participation is widespread, its practice in Batu remains limited, uneven, and often shaped by top-down planning models.

Key findings indicate that:

- Community members are aware of tourism potential but are often excluded from meaningful decision-making processes.
- Strong local leadership plays a vital role in mobilizing participation, maintaining communication, and building trust.
- Community capacity is constrained by limited access to continuous training, financial resources, and technical assistance.
- The effectiveness of community-based organizations such as Pokdarwis varies significantly, with legal status and organizational structure being critical factors.
- Collaboration between communities, government, academia, and NGOs is often fragmented and lacks mechanisms for inclusive planning and evaluation.
- Perceived economic, social, and cultural benefits directly influence residents' motivation to participate in CBT initiatives.

5.1 Practical Applications and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen community participation in CBT in Batu and similar contexts:

1. **Promote inclusive governance** by establishing participatory planning platforms at the village level, ensuring that community voices are heard in policy-making.
2. **Invest in local leadership development** to build skills in facilitation, conflict resolution, and strategic planning, while also promoting leadership regeneration.
3. **Institutionalize Pokdarwis** by supporting their legal registration, capacity building, and integration into formal tourism development frameworks.
4. **Design continuous learning programs** for communities, focusing on hospitality, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and cultural preservation.

5. **Foster multi-stakeholder collaboration** by creating coordination mechanisms among government agencies, universities, and community groups for long-term partnerships.
6. **Ensure equitable benefit-sharing** through transparent financial reporting, community development funds, and inclusive business models.

These strategies can be integrated into local government tourism policies, university-community service programs, and NGO development projects. They emphasize the importance of a **bottom-up approach** that values local knowledge, cultural identity, and social capital as key assets for sustainable tourism.

5.2 Implications for Future Research

While this study provides rich qualitative insights into CBT practices in Batu, further research is needed to deepen and broaden the analysis. Quantitative studies could examine the relationship between participation levels and tourism outcomes across a larger sample. Comparative research across regions would help identify best practices and contextual differences.

Moreover, future studies should explore the roles of **youth and women** in CBT, which remain underrepresented in current models but hold great potential for innovation and inclusion. Longitudinal studies could also assess how community participation evolves over time and how interventions impact empowerment trajectories.

5.3 Final Reflection

In conclusion, community-based tourism in Batu holds significant promise for local development, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. However, realizing this potential requires more than tourism promotion—it demands an **intentional commitment to community empowerment**. When communities are not just involved but truly lead the process, tourism becomes a pathway to dignity, resilience, and sustainable futures.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

The author was solely responsible for the conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and writing of this research article. All parts of the research process, from fieldwork to manuscript preparation, were carried out independently by the author.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to the qualitative nature of the research, data are in the form of interview transcripts, field notes, and documents that are not publicly archived to maintain participant confidentiality.

Declaration of interests statement

The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Additional information

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