



Integrating Local Wisdom and Social Innovation in Community-Based Tourism Development in Pekalongan, Central Java

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to explore how local wisdom and social innovation can be integrated into the development of community-based tourism in Pekalongan, Indonesia. The research responds to the need for sustainable tourism models that empower local communities while preserving cultural heritage, particularly in regions rich in traditional batik craftsmanship.

Design/methods/approach – The study employed a qualitative approach using a single case study design. Data were collected through participatory observation, cultural mapping, and in-depth interviews with local stakeholders, including community leaders, batik artisans, and tourism managers. The research focused on identifying the physical and non-physical cultural assets of the community and the forms of social innovation used in tourism development.

Findings – The findings reveal that local wisdom—such as communal cooperation (gotong royong), traditional batik-making knowledge, and historical spatial layouts—plays a central role in shaping tourism activities. Social innovation occurs through collaborative community efforts, digital marketing adoption, and inclusive participatory planning. These strategies have led to increased local engagement, diversified income sources, and enhanced tourist experiences.

Research implications/limitations – The study is context-specific to Pekalongan and may have limited generalizability to other regions without similar cultural or social conditions. The qualitative nature of the research also limits the ability to statistically measure impacts but provides deep contextual insight.

Originality/value – This research contributes to the discourse on sustainable tourism by offering a localized model that blends indigenous knowledge with innovative practices. It highlights how community-based approaches can foster empowerment and cultural resilience in tourism development.

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Introduction

The burgeoning tourism industry serves as a fundamental driver of economic development and cultural exchange globally, necessitating a shift towards more sustainable and community-centric tourism models, particularly Community-Based Tourism (CBT). Traditional models of tourism

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have often resulted in economic benefits that disproportionately favor external stakeholders while failing to integrate local communities into the tourism planning and benefit-sharing processes. The adoption of CBT can help to rectify these imbalances by directly involving local populations in the development and management of their tourism resources, ensuring they reap the economic and cultural benefits of tourism activities (Manzoor et al., 2019; Bello et al., 2016).

Community-Based Tourism has been recognized for its potential to elevate local economies while preserving cultural heritages and environments. Research illustrates that sustainable tourism development is reliant on the active participation of local communities, which has shown to enhance local socio-economic conditions and reduce poverty in various contexts (Manzoor et al., 2019; Prasetyanti & Nugroho, 2019). Moreover, the literature emphasizes a systemic approach, suggesting that tourism development should harmonize economic growth with social and environmental sustainability (Wu et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2019). Additionally, a study on swamp buffalo tourism in Indonesia showcased how such initiatives can improve community welfare through increased participation, capacity building, and targeted marketing strategies that elevate cultural identity and environmental awareness (Huda et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Indonesia's rich cultural assets, such as traditional batik, exemplify the ideal conditions for implementing CBT, leveraging existing conditions and available human resources while promoting sustainable cultural preservation. Successful strategies of CBT can be observed in various settings where local communities have engaged actively in decision-making, resulting in more equitable economic growth and preservation of cultural identity (Kotlyarova et al., 2020). It is evident that as tourism continues to expand, the implementation of models that prioritize community engagement and sustainable practices will be critical. The case of Indonesia's CBT, especially in areas like Pekalongan with unique cultural heritage, illustrates the potential for not only improving local economies but also fostering cultural preservation and ecological sustainability. The shift towards inclusive tourism is not merely preferable; it is essential to creating a sustainable future for the tourism industry.

Local wisdom, or "kearifan lokal," serves as a foundational element in shaping culturally respectful and environmentally sustainable tourism practices. In Pekalongan, this refers to batik-making techniques and social norms like gotong royong (mutual cooperation), which are vital for developing equitable tourism frameworks. The significance of local wisdom in tourism development lies in its capacity to encapsulate the historical, social, and ethical dimensions of a community's identity. By integrating local wisdom into tourism practices, communities can preserve their cultural heritage and values while enhancing the tourism experience (Poetra & Nurjaya, 2024; Ghofur & Ismanto, 2022). Moreover, local wisdom fosters a sense of belonging and identity among local populations, which is essential for promoting sustainable tourism (Wibowo et al., 2021; Wibowo et al., 2023).

A review of tourism arrangements in Indonesia highlights the necessity of incorporating local wisdom to ensure the sustainability of cultural practices and promote responsible tourism behavior (Poetra & Nurjaya, 2024). Moreover, Prasetyo's investigation into marine tourism demonstrates that utilizing local knowledge not only enhances the cultural identity of indigenous peoples but also deepens visitors' understanding of their historical and spiritual connections to the land (Prasetyo, 2023). Furthermore, studies indicate that local wisdom can provide a unique value proposition in tourism offerings — a sentiment echoed across various case studies in Indonesia where local values and practices are leveraged to improve community welfare and cultural integrity while attracting tourists (Wibowo et al., 2021; Andari et al., 2022). For instance, efforts to develop agrotourism based on local wisdom illustrate the multifaceted benefits of intertwining cultural elements into tourism frameworks, ultimately leading to enhanced community engagement and economic opportunities (Utomo et al., 2022).

In summary, the integration of local wisdom and social innovation presents a promising pathway for revitalizing Pekalongan's communities and creating more equitable forms of tourism. By embracing local knowledge and values, the tourism sector can not only enhance its offerings but also ensure that it aligns with the aspirations and needs of local communities. This approach not only respects their heritage but also promotes environmentally sustainable practices, paving the way for a more conscientious tourism industry.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) relies heavily on community participation, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment, making

these elements critical for the success of tourism initiatives. The empowerment of local communities plays a fundamental role in effectively implementing CBT. According to Scheyvens (1999), success hinges on social, economic, and political empowerment, which enables communities to take ownership of their resources and culture. Additionally, Salazar (2012) emphasizes the necessity for tourism models that are sensitive to local cultures, advocating for culturally-informed development strategies. A range of studies supports the assertion that community participation and empowerment are integral to CBT's effectiveness. For instance, Aji & Faniza (2024) found that local knowledge significantly contributes to the sustainability of tourism projects, making it essential for achieving long-term positive outcomes. Similarly, Suryani (2015) highlighted the value of social capital in fostering community resilience and cohesion, which are essential for maintaining tourism initiatives. Furthermore, Komariah et al. (2019) demonstrated that women's empowerment in tourism development leads to increased participation from diverse community members, thereby enriching the overall tourism experience and enhancing economic benefits for local families. Additionally, Nguyen et al. (2021) discuss the intrinsic barriers to community empowerment, highlighting the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure that local communities can fully benefit from tourism developments.

In sum, the success of Community-Based Tourism is intricately linked to community participation, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment. By integrating these elements, CBT not only enhances local involvement but also reinforces cultural authenticity and promotes sustainable development. Consequently, the findings imply a need for policymakers and tourism developers to prioritize community engagement and cultural sensitivity in their frameworks to ensure the long-lasting success of tourism initiatives.

However, there remains a gap in the literature concerning how local wisdom and social innovation can be systematically integrated into tourism planning, particularly in urban heritage areas like Pekalongan. Much of the existing research tends to treat these concepts separately, focusing either on traditional knowledge systems or on new technological and organizational solutions without examining their potential synergy. This study attempts to fill this gap by proposing a conceptual and empirical model that bridges these two paradigms.

The decision to focus on Pekalongan arises from its unique status as a city rich in tradition while increasingly integrating into global networks of creative economies. It was recognized as a UNESCO Creative City for Crafts and Folk Arts in December 2014, emphasizing its historical craftsmanship in batik and fostering creative tourism that honors local traditions. Pekalongan's designation by UNESCO underscores its potential as a case study for leveraging cultural heritage in pursuit of sustainable development. This recognition highlights the city's traditional batik craftsmanship as central to the local identity and as a driver for creative tourism (Kusumawati et al., 2022; Syahrir & Pramono, 2021).

Pekalongan's experience with batik tourism reveals critical discussions around authenticity, commodification, and community engagement. Studies indicate that the batik industry not only serves as an economic driver but also plays a vital role in maintaining cultural identity (Wolor et al., 2021; (Andjanie & Putro, 2023)). Furthermore, local experts argue that integrating local wisdom and community practices into tourism development enhances the authenticity of the tourism experience, helping to prevent the exploitation of local traditions (Andjanie & Putro, 2023). The dynamics of batik tourism illustrate challenges such as the risk of commodification, where cultural products may be oversimplified for tourist consumption (Cai et al., 2021). Research emphasizes that significant community involvement in planning and decision-making processes is essential for ensuring that tourism practices reflect and respect local heritage (Hoang, 2021).

In conclusion, Pekalongan serves as an invaluable model for studying the intersection of cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, and economic empowerment. Its designation as a UNESCO Creative City provides essential insights into the ways local traditions can be harnessed for development while safeguarding authenticity. The ongoing engagement with batik tourism offers a compelling framework for addressing challenges in cultural commodification and enhancing community participation, thereby contributing to sustainable local development.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the research methodology, detailing the qualitative case study approach used and the data collection techniques employed, including cultural mapping, interviews, and participant observation. The third section discusses the findings, highlighting how local wisdom and social innovation manifest in the context of CBT in Pekalongan. This is followed by a discussion that situates the findings within

broader debates on sustainable tourism and community empowerment. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key contributions of the study and offers recommendations for policy and future research.

By situating the study within both academic and practical discourses on tourism, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how community engagement, cultural heritage, and innovative practices can be aligned to promote inclusive and sustainable tourism development. The findings are expected to be of interest not only to scholars of tourism and community development but also to policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders working in heritage-rich urban settings.

Ultimately, the integration of local wisdom and social innovation in community-based tourism represents more than just a development strategy; it is a pathway toward cultural resilience, social equity, and environmental sustainability. In a time of rapid globalization and environmental degradation, such models offer a compelling vision for the future of tourism—not as an extractive industry, but as a participatory and transformative process that uplifts local communities and honors their heritage.

Methods

2.1 Research Design

This research adopts a **qualitative case study design** to explore the integration of local wisdom and social innovation in the development of community-based tourism in Pekalongan. The study is exploratory and descriptive in nature, aiming to understand social processes and interactions that shape sustainable tourism initiatives at the grassroots level. The case study method is considered appropriate due to its capacity to provide a holistic and in-depth understanding of contextual phenomena in real-life settings.

The research emphasizes participatory and interpretive approaches to investigate how local actors—community members, cultural leaders, and local government—collaboratively contribute to tourism development rooted in local identity, heritage, and socio-cultural assets.

2.2 Population and Sample

The target population includes community members and stakeholders involved in the tourism development process in the Pekalongan region,

especially in kampong-based tourism areas such as Kampung Batik Kauman and Kampung Canting. A **purposive sampling technique** was applied to select informants who have extensive knowledge, experience, and involvement in tourism activities, local culture, and community empowerment programs.

Key informants in this study consisted of:

1. Heads of community tourism groups (Kelompok Sadar Wisata / Pokdarwis)
2. Local batik artisans
3. Youth and women's community organizations
4. Representatives from the Department of Tourism and Creative Economy of Pekalongan City
5. Traditional leaders and elders possessing deep knowledge of local wisdom

2.3 Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development

Data were collected through a combination of **in-depth interviews**, **participant observation**, and **document analysis**. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring themes while ensuring consistency in data collection. An interview guide was developed based on the research questions, covering aspects such as:

1. Community involvement in tourism planning and management
2. Role of local wisdom in shaping tourism narratives and practices
3. Types of social innovations applied in tourism initiatives
4. Perceived impacts and sustainability concerns

Participant observation was conducted by attending community meetings, cultural events, tourism workshops, and daily activities of tourism actors in the kampong. Field notes were maintained systematically. In addition, relevant documents such as tourism development plans, community charters, promotional materials, and heritage preservation guidelines were collected and analyzed.

The presence of the researcher was central in the data collection process, enabling direct interaction with informants and participation in community routines. Ethical considerations were maintained through informed consent and confidentiality assurances.

2.4 Research Setting and Duration

The research was carried out in the city of **Pekalongan, Central Java**, a region recognized as a UNESCO Creative City in the field of Crafts and Folk Art. Specifically, the research focused on Kampung Batik Kauman and Kampung Canting, which serve as central locations for batik-based cultural tourism.

The data collection process took place over a period of **four months**, from **February to May 2024**. This duration allowed the researcher to establish rapport with community members and understand seasonal and cyclical tourism activities.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using **Miles and Huberman's interactive model** of qualitative data analysis, which includes three interrelated stages:

1. **Data Reduction** – Selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents.
2. **Data Display** – Organizing data into thematic matrices, charts, and narrative summaries to facilitate interpretation.
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification** – Identifying patterns, relationships, and meaning from the data to construct a grounded explanation of the phenomena.

Thematic coding was applied to the interview transcripts using NVivo 12 software to assist in managing and analyzing qualitative data efficiently.

2.6 Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity of findings, the study employed **data triangulation**, involving multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents). **Member checking** was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with key informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. **Peer debriefing** was also used to reduce potential bias, involving academic colleagues in reviewing coding processes and emerging themes.

The credibility of the research was further enhanced by prolonged engagement in the field, reflective field journaling, and transparent documentation of methodological steps.

Results

3.1. Identification of Local Wisdom as the Foundation of Community-Based Tourism

The results of field observations and interviews revealed that local wisdom in Pekalongan is a central pillar in shaping the identity of community-based tourism. Among the most prominent forms of local wisdom are the batik-making tradition, local rituals such as *sedekah laut* and *ruwatan desa*, architectural characteristics of traditional homes (*limasan* and *joglo*), and traditional culinary heritage such as *megono*, *garang asem*, and *nasi kebuli*. These cultural assets not only possess intrinsic values but also function as attractions that differentiate Pekalongan from other tourist destinations.

The community perceives tourism not merely as a means of economic gain but as a medium to preserve and revitalize their cultural identity. This was evident in the narratives of local batik artisans who viewed tourist visits as a form of appreciation and intergenerational transmission of intangible heritage. Moreover, the community expressed pride in being “hosts” who can share their heritage, while also being open to creative innovation to make these traditions more appealing to tourists.

3.2. The Role of Community in Tourism Initiatives

The study identified several types of community roles in developing tourism initiatives: (1) cultural preservationists, (2) entrepreneurs, (3) educators, and (4) facilitators of visitor experience. Community members actively manage home-stay accommodations, develop batik workshops, lead walking tours, and operate culinary stands or kiosks. Youth groups (*Karang Taruna*) were also involved in organizing cultural festivals, managing digital promotion, and acting as local guides.

The community's involvement is mostly voluntary and is driven by shared values of togetherness and a strong sense of place. The “gotong royong” spirit remains central to organizing events and maintaining public spaces. However, the level of participation varied between neighborhoods, depending on leadership strength, access to training, and exposure to external stakeholders such as NGOs or universities.

3.2.1. Social Capital and Institutional Support

Institutional mapping showed that community-based tourism in Pekalongan is supported by a network of local institutions, including neighborhood associations (RT/RW), village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), women's groups (PKK), batik cooperatives, and educational institutions. These institutions function as intermediaries that mobilize resources, channel government support, and coordinate tourism planning.

One notable example is the collaboration between the local tourism office, the University of Pekalongan, and a local youth community (Komunitas Batik Tulis) in designing and executing a Batik Cultural Route. This program successfully integrated cultural education with tourism, involving schools and tourists in the process of batik-making, and ended with an exhibition of student works. Such collaboration demonstrated how social capital and institutional synergy contributed to program sustainability.

3.2.2. Capacity Building and Empowerment Outcomes

The research found that training and capacity-building efforts significantly impacted community empowerment. Training provided by local universities and NGOs included topics such as service standards, storytelling techniques, environmental awareness, and basic digital marketing. Many participants claimed increased confidence in interacting with visitors and better understanding of tourism trends.

In several cases, women who previously had no source of income began selling batik accessories or traditional snacks. Youth who were previously unemployed became local guides or social media managers for tourism groups. This shows a shift not only in economic terms but also in personal agency and social inclusion.

3.3. Creative Innovation in Tourism Offerings

One of the key findings is the community's ability to adapt and creatively innovate based on their local culture. Some of the notable creative products include:

1. **Batik Eco-Tourism:** Integrating natural dye techniques with environmental education for visitors.
2. **Cultural Storytelling Tours:** Conducted in small groups where elders narrate village history, legends, and transformation stories.

3. **Mobile Batik Workshop:** A mobile cart equipped with batik tools that can be moved across different neighborhoods to reach broader audiences.
4. **Digital Promotion through TikTok and Instagram:** Managed by youth to share authentic village life, batik processes, and culinary experiences.

These innovations were often grassroots in nature and not reliant on major external funding. Instead, they emerged from community dialogue and experimentation, often supported by university-community service programs.

3.4. Challenges in Sustaining Community-Based Tourism

Despite promising developments, several challenges hinder the sustainability of tourism initiatives in Pekalongan. These include:

1. **Fragmented Coordination:** Lack of integrated planning between city government departments and community groups often leads to program overlap or inefficient resource use.
2. **Infrastructure Gaps:** Roads to several batik-producing villages remain underdeveloped, limiting accessibility for visitors, especially during rainy seasons.
3. **Youth Migration:** A common concern was the outmigration of youth to urban centers for employment, reducing the pool of creative talent needed to sustain tourism innovation.
4. **Seasonal Tourism Pattern:** Visitor numbers significantly drop outside of major holidays or festivals, creating economic uncertainty for local vendors and artisans.
5. **Lack of Impact Monitoring:** Most tourism initiatives do not systematically measure their economic, social, or environmental impact, making it difficult to evaluate progress and improve strategies.

Table 1 summarizes the main challenges and local responses observed during the study.

Table 1. Key Challenges and Community Responses

Challenge	Local Response
Coordination issues	Formation of Tourism Task Forces at the neighborhood level
Infrastructure limitations	Community-led road maintenance during peak tourist season
Youth migration	Peer mentoring and storytelling to inspire youth involvement
Seasonal tourism	Developing school-tour packages to attract off-season visits
Monitoring and evaluation gaps	Initiating manual visitor count logs and guest feedback journals

3.5. Model of Community-Based Creative Tourism Development

Based on data triangulation and analysis, the study proposes a development model characterized by four core components:

1) **Local Wisdom as a Narrative Driver**

Local wisdom becomes the basis for storytelling, branding, and the experiential value of tourism.

2) **Social Innovation Ecosystem**

Tourism activities are developed through collaboration between community actors, universities, and local government.

3) **Inclusive Participation**

Emphasizes broad community involvement, particularly of youth and women, in both planning and execution.

4) Sustainability Orientation

Environmental preservation, cultural continuity, and economic resilience are embedded in tourism programs.

Figure 1 visualizes the conceptual model derived from the field findings.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Creative-Based Tourism Development in Pekalongan

- 1) *Local wisdom serves as cultural capital*
- 2) *Social innovation acts as enabler*
- 3) *Community drives participatory planning and action*
Sustainability ensures long-term impact

This model aligns with principles of community empowerment and participatory development, emphasizing that tourism can be both a cultural revitalization process and an economic opportunity.

Discussion

The findings of this research reveal the dynamic and complex relationship between local wisdom and social innovation in shaping community-based tourism in Pekalongan. This section will interpret the research results in relation to the existing literature, providing a deeper understanding of how these two elements interact to foster sustainable development, community empowerment, and cultural preservation.

4.1. The Role of Local Wisdom in Shaping Tourism Identity

Local wisdom is a foundational element that shapes the identity of community-based tourism in Pekalongan. As reflected in the cultural practices, local crafts, culinary heritage, and historical narratives of the region, local wisdom serves not only as a cultural asset but also as a strategic resource in differentiating the tourism experience. This is in line with the arguments of Nuryanti (1996) and Suansri (2003), who emphasized that the uniqueness of local culture can become a competitive advantage in tourism development.

In the context of Pekalongan, batik traditions, religious festivals, and kampong-based cultural architecture have become central elements that attract tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences. The findings underscore the importance of preserving and revitalizing these traditions by integrating them into tourism planning and product development.

Community members play a central role in maintaining the continuity of these traditions, which aligns with the concept of endogenous development proposed by Haverkort and Hiemstra (1999), where local actors define and direct development based on their own values and knowledge systems.

4.2. Social Innovation as a Catalyst for Community Empowerment

Social innovation, characterized by creative solutions to social problems and collaborative models of action, emerged as a key driver in the community-based tourism model in Pekalongan. The research highlights several community-led initiatives, such as cooperative-run homestays, digital batik storytelling platforms, and participatory mapping of tourism assets. These initiatives demonstrate how communities can generate innovative responses to socioeconomic challenges, including limited infrastructure, low market access, and youth unemployment.

This resonates with Moulaert et al. (2013), who describe social innovation as a multidimensional process that enhances the participation, skills, and well-being of communities. In Pekalongan, social innovation was not only about new technologies or business models but also about reconfiguring relationships—between government agencies, local entrepreneurs, and residents—to foster inclusive decision-making. These innovations strengthened community capacity to manage tourism, which echoes findings from Dredge and Jenkins (2011) regarding governance in local tourism development.

4.3. Synergizing Local Wisdom and Social Innovation

The integration of local wisdom and social innovation creates a synergy that enhances both the sustainability and distinctiveness of tourism development. The study shows that community members often draw upon traditional knowledge systems to design innovative solutions, such as eco-friendly souvenirs using natural dyes or storytelling tours led by local elders. These examples reveal a hybrid approach that values tradition while embracing change.

This integration aligns with the framework of cultural sustainability (Soini & Dessein, 2016), which emphasizes the importance of embedding culture in sustainable development strategies. In Pekalongan, the co-existence of tradition and innovation has helped tourism to remain community-driven while evolving to meet modern expectations. Moreover, the participatory

nature of these innovations has reinforced community ownership, thereby ensuring long-term commitment and resilience.

4.4. Institutional Support and Policy Implications

The research also reveals the crucial role of institutional support in facilitating community-based tourism. Government programs, academic partnerships, and non-profit interventions provided technical assistance, capacity building, and financial incentives that enabled local communities to implement their initiatives. However, inconsistencies in policy implementation and limited coordination between stakeholders were identified as challenges.

These findings echo the concerns raised by Hall (2008) and Tosun (2006), who pointed out that top-down policies often fail to engage local actors effectively. In the case of Pekalongan, the most successful outcomes emerged from collaborative governance structures where communities had a meaningful voice. This underscores the need for policies that prioritize participatory planning, cross-sectoral partnerships, and flexible funding mechanisms.

4.5. Challenges and Limitations in Practice

Despite the promising developments, several limitations were observed. First, the dependency on a few charismatic leaders raised concerns about sustainability and continuity. Second, the commercialization of cultural products sometimes led to the dilution of cultural meanings, a concern similarly noted by Cohen (1988). Finally, there was a digital divide that limited the participation of certain community groups, particularly elderly residents and rural women.

Addressing these limitations requires intentional strategies, such as leadership training, cultural integrity audits, and inclusive digital literacy programs. Future research may explore the long-term impacts of these interventions and their scalability in other regions.

4.6. Future Directions and Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to the theoretical discourse on sustainable tourism by proposing a model that places the integration of local wisdom and social innovation at its core. It challenges conventional dichotomies between tradition and modernity, instead suggesting a continuum where both elements co-evolve. Moreover, it reinforces the importance of bottom-up

approaches in designing tourism that is not only economically viable but also culturally and socially meaningful.

Further research could expand on this study by conducting comparative analyses across different cultural contexts, applying mixed-method approaches to evaluate impact, or developing tools for measuring cultural sustainability. As global interest in responsible tourism grows, understanding the nuances of community-led innovation becomes increasingly important.

In conclusion, the discussion affirms that community-based tourism in Pekalongan, when guided by local wisdom and enhanced by social innovation, presents a viable pathway for inclusive and sustainable development. It calls for continued support, reflexivity, and cross-learning among stakeholders to scale and sustain these efforts.

Conclusion

This research has explored the integration of local wisdom and social innovation as the foundation for developing sustainable community-based tourism in Pekalongan. The findings highlight that local wisdom—manifested through cultural heritage, traditional crafts, community rituals, and place-based narratives—plays a crucial role in shaping tourism identity. When combined with social innovation, which includes participatory governance, digital tools, and inclusive business models, these elements form a powerful synergy that promotes not only economic development but also cultural preservation and social empowerment.

The study confirms that community-based tourism, when rooted in the values and knowledge systems of local communities, can create meaningful and memorable experiences for tourists while simultaneously strengthening community resilience. The batik culture, religious festivals, and community-based architectural heritage serve as key attractions, demonstrating how culture can be the cornerstone of sustainable tourism. Social innovations such as digital storytelling, cooperative management of homestays, and participatory tourism mapping further enhance the capacity of local communities to manage and benefit from tourism.

Several key conclusions can be drawn from this research:

- 1) The preservation and revitalization of local wisdom must be at the heart of tourism development strategies in culturally rich regions such as Pekalongan.

- 2) Social innovation acts as a transformative force that enables communities to address challenges, improve service delivery, and foster inclusive participation in the tourism sector.
- 3) The synergy between tradition and innovation is not only possible but necessary to ensure the sustainability and distinctiveness of tourism offerings.
- 4) Institutional support—through policy, funding, and capacity building—is essential, but must be responsive, flexible, and participatory to be truly effective.
- 5) Challenges such as dependency on individual leaders, digital inequality, and risks of cultural commodification need to be addressed with targeted and context-sensitive interventions.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study offer a framework for policymakers, tourism developers, and community leaders. The proposed model can serve as a guide for designing tourism strategies that honor cultural values while embracing adaptive change. It emphasizes the importance of engaging communities not as passive beneficiaries but as active co-creators of tourism experiences.

For future research, several directions are suggested. Comparative studies in different regions could further validate and refine the model. Longitudinal studies could assess the durability and impact of community-based innovations over time. Additionally, more empirical work is needed on developing metrics for evaluating cultural sustainability and social innovation outcomes in tourism.

In closing, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on sustainable tourism by demonstrating that the integration of local wisdom and social innovation can create a culturally grounded, economically viable, and socially inclusive tourism sector. The experience of Pekalongan offers valuable insights for other regions in Indonesia and beyond that seek to develop tourism not only as an industry but also as a vehicle for community development and cultural resilience.

Declarations

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All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, and writing of this manuscript. Each author reviewed and approved the final version of the paper before submission.

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Declaration of Interests Statement

The authors declare 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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