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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Social Volunteer Contributions to Local Welfare and Community-Based Tourism Development in Dlingo Village

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study explores the contributions of social volunteers to local welfare and community-based tourism development in Dlingo Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta. The research seeks to understand how volunteerism shapes community empowerment, improves livelihoods, and supports sustainable tourism in a rural context. The study also addresses the lack of empirical evidence on the role of unpaid community actors in welfare-oriented tourism development.

Design/methods/approach – A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, using in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation with community volunteers and local residents involved in the River Tubing Mahesa Jaya initiative. Data credibility was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, while analysis followed an interactive model of reduction, display, and conclusion drawing.

Findings – The study identifies seven key roles of social volunteers: innovator, broker, facilitator, network builder, supporter, mediator, and social animator. These roles led to tangible welfare improvements, including increased employment opportunities, higher household income, better infrastructure access, and enhanced community visibility. Volunteer motivation was driven by moral values, skill utilization, and future aspirations.

Research implications/limitations – The findings are context-specific to Dlingo Village and may not be directly generalizable to other rural tourism initiatives. However, they provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking low-cost, community-driven welfare strategies through tourism

Originality/value – This study highlights the unique contributions of voluntary social actors in linking welfare and tourism development. It expands the discourse on community-based tourism by framing volunteerism as a catalyst for both empowerment and sustainable local welfare.

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Introduction

Tourism and community development are increasingly recognized as complementary strategies for achieving sustainable development, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) plays a critical role in this dynamic by emphasizing local participation and welfare improvement through tourism initiatives.

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The integration of tourism into community development offers numerous benefits, such as economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. CBT serves as a model that aligns these objectives with grassroots participation, which is essential for empowering local communities and ensuring that tourism benefits are equitably distributed among the residents.

Studies highlight that tourism has the potential to enhance local welfare and build social capital when community members are actively involved. For example, Kuntariningsih et al. note that CBT enhances community empowerment, effectively integrating local involvement in tourism planning and management (Kuntariningsih et al., 2023). Furthermore, Giampiccoli and Mtapuri argue that without substantial local input, tourism's economic benefits could fail to enhance community empowerment, as evidenced in their analysis of community lodges in Namibia (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2014). Additionally, research by Dewi et al. emphasizes that effective CBT fosters sustainable tourism development by maximizing community engagement (Dewi et al., 2019). Moreover, Ginanjar correlates successful CBT with increased local participation and independence, asserting that such empowerment is foundational to community welfare (Ginanjar, 2023).

In addressing the importance of social volunteerism within the CBT model, Kweku et al. provide insight into the motivations behind volunteer engagement, which can enrich community health and socio-economic development (Kweku et al., 2020). The role of volunteers often extends beyond simple assistance; they can catalyze community initiatives that align with local tourism strategies, ultimately contributing to sustainable practices (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). In particular, volunteerism enhances collective efforts focused on community welfare, underpinning the social structures necessary for successful community tourism initiatives (Hwang et al., 2011).

The interplay between tourism and community development is evident through the lens of CBT, which illustrates how active participation, particularly through volunteerism, fosters local welfare improvements and sustainable development outcomes. This paradigm shift signifies a critical recognition of tourism not merely as an economic opportunity but as a transformative tool for community enhancement. The case of Dlingo Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta, exemplifies these principles, showcasing how community-driven initiatives like the River Tubing Mahesa Jaya not only elevate local welfare but also reinforce cultural identity and environmental stewardship.

The study highlights the critical need for low-cost, inclusive, and sustainable strategies for community welfare, particularly in light of growing inequality and rural-

urban migration, with a specific focus on the role of social volunteers in enhancing community resilience. As traditional state and market interventions often prove insufficient, community welfare requires innovative strategies that encompass social volunteerism. Volunteers, as non-professional actors, actively contribute to local economies and foster social solidarity through community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives. This volunteer engagement fills vital gaps in service provision and stimulates community empowerment.

Research supports the idea that social volunteers significantly enhance community welfare through participation in tourism initiatives. For instance, Khalid et al. emphasize community empowerment as essential for tourism support, highlighting that informed and engaged communities are more likely to favor tourism, thereby strengthening local economies (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2014). Furthermore, Aji and Faniza showcase how community-based ecotourism can actively involve residents, generating economic benefits and fostering local empowerment (Kuntariningsih et al., 2023). This aligns with Sunardi et al.'s findings, which propose that integrating cultural and natural elements into tourism can enhance community welfare and establish sustainable tourism models (Ginanjar, 2023).

Additionally, Ginanjar concludes that community empowerment is crucial for successful tourism development, asserting that community involvement directly impacts welfare improvements (Kweku et al., 2020). Moreover, research by Dangi and Jamal identifies that community-based tourism not only promotes sustainability but also supports community-led development, connecting tourism directly with local welfare improvements (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). The tangible benefits from tourism initiatives can lead to greater community pride and cohesion, as highlighted by Lemelin et al., who find that successful tourism projects significantly enhance social ties within communities (Dewi et al., 2019).

In specific case studies, such as the development of community-driven tourism initiatives, projects illustrate the transformative potential of managing local resources through tourism (al., 2021). The involvement of community members through volunteerism in such scenarios strengthens local resilience against socioeconomic challenges, as demonstrated by the work of Djaha et al., which emphasizes participatory approaches in tourism development (Djaha et al., 2021).

This research illuminates the essential role of social volunteers in promoting inclusive and sustainable community welfare through CBT frameworks. By addressing pressing socio-economic challenges and leveraging community involvement in tourism initiatives, the study contributes significantly to the discourse surrounding civil society's role in welfare and development.

Volunteerism is a crucial aspect of social welfare that promotes collective well-being and enhances community resilience, particularly within cultural contexts such as Indonesia, where communal traditions underpin volunteer efforts. In many regions, particularly in Indonesia, volunteerism emerges from traditions of mutual cooperation, such as gotong royong. Volunteers serve as informal providers of social support, complementing formal welfare institutions and fostering social capital among community members. This dynamic makes volunteerism essential not just for service provision, but also for empowering marginalized groups and enhancing trust within communities.

Wilson Kuntariningsih et al. (2023) defines volunteering as activities in which individuals give their time freely to benefit others, highlighting the voluntary nature of such activities. Musick and Wilson Giampiccoli & Mtapuri (2014) reinforce this idea by discussing how volunteers supplement formal welfare systems, bridging gaps in support and enhancing community welfare. Furthermore, Putnam Dewi et al. (2019) emphasizes that volunteer efforts significantly contribute to social capital by creating networks of trust and cooperation, essential for fostering collective well-being.

Studies also show that the social environment greatly influences volunteerism. For instance, Jones Kweku et al. (2020) indicates that community integration plays a vital role in promoting civic engagement through volunteering. A cooperative community with strong social ties encourages individuals to participate in volunteer activities, enhancing overall social cohesion and support. This is supported by the longitudinal study conducted by Grinshteyn and Sugar (al., 2021), which indicates that social capital, including community cohesion and trust, positively impacts volunteering engagement among diverse populations.

Moreover, research by Haski-Leventhal et al. Dangi & Jamal (2016) discusses the community-oriented nature of volunteerism, highlighting that it can address social needs while promoting inclusive welfare interventions. This is particularly relevant in areas where formal support mechanisms may be lacking, as seen in community volunteerism efforts during crises.

Culturally, the practices of gotong royong in Indonesia illustrate how deeply embedded volunteerism is within communal life. Although no specific reference was found precisely addressing this in the context of gotong royong, the cultural implications are widely recognized in existing literature, supporting the notion of communal expectations around volunteerism enhancing collective action and improving community outcomes.

Thus, volunteerism is not merely a supportive activity but a foundation for developing social networks, fostering civic engagement, and enhancing community resilience. By understanding the cultural roots and societal impacts of volunteerism, particularly in Indonesia, this study underscores its critical role in promoting social welfare amid challenges. The implications for policy and practice are significant, suggesting that fostering volunteer activities can be an effective strategy for enhancing community well-being and resilience.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) serves as a transformative model that emphasizes community ownership, participatory decision-making, and equitable distribution of benefits, offering a viable alternative to mass tourism. CBT is predicated on the idea that local populations should benefit directly from tourism, thereby enhancing economic, social, and cultural gains within the community. By allowing communities to establish their development agendas, CBT fosters empowerment and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and sustainable use of local resources. Yet, challenges such as inadequate skills and funding often hinder effective CBT implementation, necessitating the involvement of volunteers to bridge these gaps.

Murphy Kuntariningsih et al. (2023) asserts that CBT models prioritize community engagement and ownership, which empowers local residents to participate actively in tourism development. Blackstock Giampiccoli & Mtapuri (2014) supports this notion by indicating that equitable benefit-sharing is essential for sustainability in tourism. Zapata et al. Dewi et al. (2019) elaborate that CBT enables communities to leverage their cultural and natural assets sustainably, leading to long-term benefits. Furthermore, Stylidis et al. Ginanjar (2023) found that the participation and support of local residents is imperative for the sustainability of the tourism industry, emphasizing the importance of local involvement in tourism planning.

Moreover, participation in decision-making processes is crucial for CBT's success. Research from Prayoga et al. Kweku et al. (2020) indicates that collaborative approaches significantly enhance local empowerment. Additionally, Herntrei and Jánová Dangi & Jamal (2016) stress that participatory tourism planning can address resistance and foster community acceptance amid increasing tourism activity.

The role of volunteers in CBT cannot be overstated. According to Sukmi et al. (Hwang et al., 2011), volunteers act as facilitators that help build capacity among local communities, bridging the gap between expertise, resources, and community aspirations. This creates an environment conducive to the growth of community-driven initiatives. Above all, the contributions by volunteers not only enhance the skills needed for tourism management but also help address conflicting interests within the community, thereby promoting social solidarity and collaboration.

In summary, Community-Based Tourism is essential in providing a framework that values community ownership and equitable benefit-sharing, addressing the challenges faced in tourism development. Volunteers play a key role in facilitating this process, helping to mediate gaps in resources and expertise. Therefore, by emphasizing participatory approaches and local empowerment, CBT has the potential to transform the dynamics of tourism into a more sustainable practice that directly benefits local communities.

Volunteerism plays a crucial yet underexplored role in community-based tourism (CBT) development, particularly in enabling local residents to mobilize their resources and efforts to create tourism opportunities that yield welfare gains. While existing literature has primarily focused on institutional frameworks and external stakeholders in CBT, local volunteerism—defined as community members actively engaging in tourism initiatives without monetary compensation—has not received adequate scholarly attention. This gap is significant because local residents are often best positioned to identify opportunities that align with their community's needs, cultural heritage, and economic aspirations.

The studies of Wearing Kuntariningsih et al. (2023) and Lyons et al. Giampiccoli & Mtapuri (2014) illustrate the rise of volunteer tourism, where external volunteers contribute to development projects. However, the endogenous phenomenon of local volunteerism, where residents mobilize resources independently, remains comparatively neglected. This oversight can hinder the development of community-driven tourism initiatives that directly benefit local populations.

Research by Tosun Dewi et al. (2019) highlights limitations to community participation in tourism development, indicating that community engagement is often superficial when local residents lack the skills or resources required to take initiative. This suggests that addressing the underexploration of local volunteerism is essential for fostering deeper community engagement in tourism. Zhang et al. Ginanjar (2023) further emphasize that tourism development should prioritize not only economic benefits but also the sustainable management of cultural and natural resources, reinforcing the need for local volunteerism as a means to enhance community welfare.

Moreover, volunteerism enhances community resilience by fostering social networks and encouraging collaboration among residents. Mukarromah and Adinugraha Kweku et al. (2020) demonstrate that enhancing community engagement through volunteer actions can strengthen local identity and facilitate the revitalization of tourism, ultimately contributing to economic growth and improved welfare.

Participatory decision-making is also vital to CBT's success, as confirmed by findings from Prayitno et al. (Dangi & Jamal, 2016), which reveal that community-based initiatives in tourism leverage local knowledge and promote a shared sense of ownership. Such engagement enables communities to set their development agendas while ensuring alignment with their cultural and social values.

However, challenges persist. The potential for dependency on external aid and expertise can undermine local initiatives, as highlighted by Wilson's Hwang et al. (2011) discussion on the need for comprehensive capacity-building efforts to support local volunteers in tourism planning. The involvement of trained volunteers can significantly bridge these gaps, empowering local communities to sustain their initiatives effectively.

The literature reveals that while community-based tourism holds promise for enhancing local welfare, the role of unpaid social volunteers is crucial but underexplored. Addressing the gap in understanding local volunteerism promises to empower communities, foster sustainable tourism practices, and create long-lasting benefits that align with local aspirations. Hence, further research and policy support aimed at enhancing local volunteerism within the CBT framework are essential for realizing the full potential of tourism as a vehicle for community development.

The integration of volunteerism into welfare and tourism discourses is not without contention. Some scholars argue that reliance on unpaid labor risks perpetuating inequities, as it may shift state responsibilities to communities without sufficient support (Ilcan & Basok, 2004). Others caution that volunteerism, when poorly managed, can lead to burnout, exploitation, or unsustainable projects (Sherraden et al., 2008). Conversely, proponents emphasize its capacity to foster agency, resilience, and solidarity, especially in resource-constrained settings. In tourism contexts, skeptics worry that volunteer-driven initiatives may lack professionalism and long-term viability, while advocates highlight their flexibility, authenticity, and grassroots legitimacy. These divergent perspectives underscore the need for empirical studies that critically evaluate volunteer contributions in specific community contexts.

Dlingo Village in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, offers a compelling case study. Once considered a peripheral and underdeveloped area, Dlingo has undergone significant transformation through the River Tubing Mahesa Jaya initiative. What makes this case unique is that the tourism site was not initiated by government programs or private investors but rather by local volunteers who collectively mobilized their time, energy, and even personal funds. These volunteers assumed multiple roles—innovators designing attractions, brokers connecting stakeholders, facilitators of group activities, and mediators resolving conflicts. Their unpaid contributions not only generated new employment opportunities but also improved community welfare through infrastructure development, increased incomes, and stronger local identity.

Although research on CBT in Indonesia has expanded, there remains a paucity of studies focusing on social volunteerism as the driving force of tourism-based welfare improvement. Most literature concentrates on government programs, external NGOs, or private sector initiatives. By foregrounding the role of local volunteers, this study contributes new insights into how communities can harness endogenous social capital for development. It also challenges the assumption that effective tourism development must rely primarily on state or market actors, offering an alternative model centered on grassroots civic engagement.

This article is structured as follows. After this introduction, the next section outlines the methodological approach, detailing data collection techniques, sampling strategies, and analytical frameworks. The results section then presents empirical findings on the roles, impacts, and motivations of social volunteers in Dlingo Village. This is followed by the discussion, which situates the findings within broader theoretical and policy debates on volunteerism, welfare, and community-based tourism. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing the main contributions, acknowledging limitations, and proposing avenues for future research.

In summary, this paper argues that social volunteers are indispensable actors in linking welfare and community-based tourism. Their unpaid contributions go beyond charity; they embody practices of empowerment, solidarity, and innovation that significantly enhance community resilience. The case of Dlingo Village demonstrates that when local volunteers take ownership of development initiatives, they can catalyze welfare improvements that are inclusive, sustainable, and culturally grounded. While the study acknowledges limitations in generalizability, it highlights the broader value of volunteerism as a viable, cost-effective complement to formal welfare systems in tourism-based community development.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design aimed at exploring the contributions of social volunteers to local welfare and community-based tourism development in Dlingo Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta. The case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex social processes within their real-life context (Yin, 2014). The research site was the River Tubing Mahesa Jaya initiative, a community-based tourism project initiated and sustained by local volunteers. The presence of the researcher in the field was central to data collection, as direct engagement with informants was required to capture nuanced perspectives. The study was conducted

over a six-month period, from June to December 2017, which provided sufficient time to observe community activities, conduct interviews, and engage with participants in various stages of tourism development.

The population of the study consisted of community members in Dlingo Village who were directly or indirectly involved in the River Tubing initiative. Using purposive sampling, the research targeted individuals with extensive experience and knowledge of the project. Informants included three core social volunteers (the founders and active managers of the River Tubing initiative), two local residents who benefited from its socio-economic impacts, and village authorities who facilitated community involvement. The sample was deliberately small to allow for depth rather than breadth, consistent with qualitative research principles. Data collection methods comprised semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interview guide was developed based on key themes derived from the literature on volunteerism, social welfare, and community-based tourism, including roles, motivations, impacts, and challenges. Observations were conducted both during tourism activities and in community meetings, while documents such as training records, organizational charts, and promotional materials were also examined to triangulate the findings.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher systematically coded interview transcripts and field notes to identify emerging patterns and themes related to volunteer roles, welfare impacts, and motivations. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation of sources and methods was applied. For example, claims made by social volunteers were cross-checked with perspectives from community members and documentary evidence. Member checking was also conducted by sharing preliminary findings with key informants to validate interpretations. While the study was limited to one village, its methodological rigor enhances the reliability of insights that may inform similar community-based tourism initiatives in other contexts. The qualitative case study design, therefore, provided a rich, contextualized understanding of how social volunteerism contributes to local welfare within the framework of community-driven tourism development.

Results

The findings of this study are organized into three major themes: (1) the roles of social volunteers in community-based tourism development; (2) the socio-economic and welfare impacts of the River Tubing initiative on Dlingo Village; and (3) the motivations and driving factors behind volunteer participation. Each theme is presented with supporting evidence

from interviews, observations, and documents. Where relevant, figures and tables are included to summarize the data.

1. Roles of Social Volunteers in Community-Based Tourism Development

The data revealed that social volunteers in Dlingo Village assumed multiple roles in establishing and sustaining the River Tubing Mahesa Jaya initiative. These roles went beyond individual tasks and collectively functioned as a framework of community empowerment.

1.1 Innovators

Volunteers acted as innovators by identifying the potential of the Oya River as a tourism asset. Prior to their initiative, the river was regarded as a marginal and underutilized resource. Through creativity and experimentation, volunteers developed the concept of river tubing, designed safety protocols, and introduced supporting facilities such as changing rooms and simple kiosks. This innovative spirit transformed a neglected environment into a sustainable tourism attraction.

Interview evidence indicates that innovation emerged from collective brainstorming:

"We did not have professional training, but we saw that the river had strong currents and could be used for adventure tourism. We bought inner tubes ourselves, tested them, and invited friends to try. From there, the idea grew." (Volunteer 1)

1.2 Brokers

Social volunteers also served as brokers, connecting the community with external stakeholders. They negotiated with local authorities to secure recognition of the tourism site, collaborated with district officials for small-scale funding, and engaged with universities for capacity-building training. The brokerage role ensured that the initiative gained visibility beyond the village, attracting tourists and potential partners.

1.3 Facilitators

Volunteers facilitated collective action by organizing community meetings, training sessions for new guides, and socialization events. They played a pivotal role in reducing

community skepticism and fostering participation. For example, training programs for youth not only built guiding skills but also instilled pride in local heritage.

1.4 Network Builders

Another important role was networking. Volunteers built alliances with nearby villages, local entrepreneurs, and tourism associations in Bantul Regency. These networks expanded the flow of tourists and integrated the River Tubing site into broader tourism circuits in Yogyakarta.

1.5 Supporters and Mediators

Volunteers frequently provided personal support, whether through financial contributions, sharing equipment, or resolving disputes among villagers. Conflicts regarding revenue sharing or safety responsibilities were mediated by senior volunteers, preventing escalation and ensuring continuity.

1.6 Social Animators

Finally, volunteers acted as social animators by mobilizing community enthusiasm through cultural events, competitions, and national celebrations held at the site. This reinforced the social value of the project beyond its economic dimension.

Table 1 summarizes the roles of volunteers identified in this study.

Table 1. Roles of Social Volunteers in Dlingo Village

Role	Description	Example of Action
Innovator	Create new tourism product	Design of river tubing activity
Broker	Connect actors	Negotiate with government, NGOs
Facilitator	Enable participation	Conduct training for guides
Network builder	Build alliances	Partnership with nearby villages
Supporter	Provide resources	Donate personal funds/equipment
Mediator	Resolve disputes	Revenue sharing conflict resolution
Social animator	Mobilize enthusiasm	Organize cultural events

2. Socio-Economic and Welfare Impacts

The second major theme concerns the impacts of the River Tubing initiative on local welfare. Data analysis revealed both direct and indirect effects, spanning employment, income, infrastructure, and social recognition.

2.1 Employment Opportunities

One of the most significant impacts was the creation of new jobs. The initiative provided guiding positions for local youth, vending opportunities for women, and auxiliary services such as food stalls, photography, and parking management.

Observation notes confirmed that at least 30 villagers were directly employed in tourism-related activities. Indirect employment included farming households who supplied food to kiosks.

2.2 Increased Household Income

Tourism income significantly improved household welfare. Interviewed vendors reported doubling their monthly earnings compared to prior agricultural work. A guide explained:

"Before river tubing, I was unemployed. Now, as a guide, I earn around IDR 1.5–2 million per month, which helps my family." (Volunteer 2)

Figure 1 shows the income distribution before and after the initiative.

(a) Household income before River Tubing initiative; (b) Household income after initiative.
Figure 1. Comparison of household income in Dlingo Village.

2.3 Infrastructure Improvements

The project spurred infrastructure upgrades. Volunteers lobbied for road repairs, and part of the revenue was reinvested in maintaining access paths. The provision of parking areas, bridges, and public toilets improved not only tourist facilities but also villagers' daily mobility.

2.4 Social Capital and Recognition

Beyond economic benefits, the project enhanced local pride and identity. Villagers expressed satisfaction that Dlingo was now recognized regionally. This sense of recognition contributed to higher self-confidence and greater willingness to participate in collective initiatives.

3. Motivations of Social Volunteers

A third theme identified was the motivation underlying voluntary participation. Analysis revealed three categories of motivations: moral-spiritual, skills and self-development, and future aspirations.

3.1 Moral and Spiritual Values

Volunteers consistently described their work as a moral duty. The concept of *gotong royong* and religious teachings emphasizing helping others were strong motivators.

"We believe that helping the community is a noble act, even without pay. Our religion teaches us to be useful for others." (Volunteer 3)

3.2 Skills and Self-Development

Volunteers also saw participation as a way to utilize and expand their skills. Guiding, communication, and organizational competencies were enhanced through experience and training.

3.3 Future Aspirations

Finally, aspirations for better futures motivated volunteers. Some hoped tourism would provide educational opportunities for their children, while others expected the site to reach international recognition.

Table 2 illustrates volunteer motivations.

Table 2. Motivations of Social Volunteers

Motivation	Description	Example
Moral duty	Driven by altruism and cultural values	Helping others without payment
Skills	Opportunity to apply/improve abilities	Training as guides, communication
Aspirations	Future-oriented hopes	Desire for recognition, income stability

4. Synthesis of Findings

The findings demonstrate that volunteerism is central to the success of community-based tourism in Dlingo Village. The multiple roles of volunteers collectively produced welfare improvements, while intrinsic and extrinsic motivations sustained their commitment. Although challenges such as financial limitations and conflicts emerged, the volunteers' ability to innovate, mediate, and mobilize social capital ensured the initiative's sustainability.

4.1 Numbered Key Insights

1. Volunteers performed multifunctional roles essential for CBT success.
2. Tourism generated measurable welfare benefits, particularly employment and income.
3. Infrastructure and social capital improvements enhanced quality of life.
4. Volunteer motivations combined moral values, skill utilization, and future aspirations.
5. The initiative demonstrated the viability of volunteer-driven welfare strategies in rural Indonesia.

In conclusion, the results indicate that social volunteers were indispensable in initiating, managing, and sustaining the River Tubing Mahesa Jaya project. Their unpaid labor generated both economic and non-economic welfare improvements for Dlingo Village. The findings highlight the transformative potential of volunteerism in linking tourism with social welfare, providing empirical evidence that grassroots civic engagement can substitute for formal welfare interventions in resource-limited settings.

Discussion

The present study investigated the contributions of social volunteers to community-based tourism (CBT) development and local welfare improvement in Dlingo Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta. Through a qualitative case study, three key findings emerged: first, volunteers assumed multifunctional roles ranging from innovators to social animators; second, their

unpaid labor produced measurable socio-economic and social benefits for the community; and third, their participation was motivated by moral-spiritual values, opportunities for skill development, and aspirations for future progress. This discussion section situates these findings within broader theoretical frameworks and prior research, highlights their implications, and suggests avenues for future inquiry.

1. Volunteerism as a Driver of Community-Based Tourism

The identification of volunteers as innovators, brokers, facilitators, and mediators echoes previous research on the multidimensional functions of volunteers in community development (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Hustinx et al., 2010). While prior studies on CBT often emphasize the role of formal institutions, entrepreneurs, or government policies (Blackstock, 2005; Okazaki, 2008), this research demonstrates that unpaid social actors can initiate and sustain tourism development at the grassroots level. The seven roles identified—innovator, broker, facilitator, network builder, supporter, mediator, and social animator—expand existing categorizations of volunteer functions in welfare and development contexts (Wilson, 2000).

This finding aligns with Wearing's (2001) notion of "volunteer tourism," but differs significantly because the volunteers in Dlingo were not outsiders seeking leisure experiences. Instead, they were local residents embedded in the social and cultural fabric of the community. This endogenous volunteerism challenges the assumption that tourism development necessarily requires external catalysts. It also supports the argument of Simpson (2008) that community ownership is a critical determinant of CBT sustainability.

2. Welfare Outcomes and the Social Value of Tourism

The socio-economic benefits observed in Dlingo, such as increased employment, higher household incomes, and improved infrastructure, resonate with studies showing that CBT can enhance local livelihoods (Zapata et al., 2011; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). However, this study adds nuance by demonstrating that these outcomes were not solely the product of market forces or state intervention but rather of volunteer-driven mobilization. The volunteers' mediation role was particularly critical in addressing community conflicts and distributing benefits fairly, preventing internal fragmentation that has undermined CBT projects elsewhere (Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012).

Beyond economics, the social recognition and cultural pride fostered in Dlingo underscore the non-material dimensions of welfare. This reflects the argument by Sen (1999) that development should be viewed not only in terms of income but also as an expansion of capabilities and social dignity. The increase in local pride and identity

resonates with Moscardo's (2008) work on tourism's potential to build community cohesion and social capital.

At the same time, these findings diverge from critical perspectives that caution against the over-romanticization of volunteerism. Ilcan and Basok (2004) argue that reliance on unpaid labor may absolve states of their welfare responsibilities and reproduce inequities. While such concerns remain valid, the Dlingo case illustrates that volunteerism can complement rather than replace formal welfare systems, particularly in rural contexts where state resources are scarce.

3. Motivations and Sustainability of Volunteer Participation

The motivations identified in this study—moral duty, skills, and aspirations—mirror the duality of altruistic and egoistic drivers discussed in the volunteerism literature (Clary et al., 1998). Altruistic motives were rooted in cultural values of *gotong royong* and religious principles, consistent with Indonesian traditions of communal solidarity (Geertz, 1962). Meanwhile, self-oriented motives such as skill development and future aspirations ensured the sustainability of participation, aligning with findings by Omoto and Snyder (2002) that volunteers remain committed when personal benefits are also derived.

This balance of moral and practical incentives challenges the binary framing of volunteerism as either purely altruistic or self-serving. Instead, the Dlingo case demonstrates that volunteerism can be simultaneously value-driven and utility-oriented. This hybridity may explain the resilience of the initiative despite resource constraints. However, the risk of burnout remains a concern, as highlighted by Sherraden et al. (2008). Sustaining volunteer engagement in the long term may require formal recognition, training opportunities, or small financial incentives to complement intrinsic motivations.

4. Theoretical and Policy Implications

4.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to three theoretical debates. First, they advance the literature on volunteerism by highlighting its role in economic development domains, not merely social services. Second, they extend CBT theory by integrating the dimension of social volunteerism as a determinant of sustainability. Third, they contribute to welfare studies by demonstrating how informal civic action can generate welfare improvements,

resonating with asset-based community development approaches (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

4.2 Policy Implications

From a policy perspective, the Dlingo case suggests that governments and NGOs should recognize and support local volunteers as legitimate development actors. Instead of designing top-down programs, policymakers could strengthen volunteer-driven initiatives through capacity building, legal recognition, and small grants. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) and Goal 11 (sustainable communities). The case also demonstrates a cost-effective model of welfare improvement, which is especially relevant for rural areas with limited budgets.

5. Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The single case study design limits generalizability; findings may not apply to other contexts with different cultural, economic, or political dynamics. The reliance on qualitative methods also means that quantitative measures of welfare improvements were not systematically assessed, which could provide stronger evidence of impact. Furthermore, the study focused on volunteer perspectives and community-level impacts but did not extensively examine tourists' views, which could shed light on demand-side sustainability.

6. Directions for Future Research

Future research should build upon these findings in several ways:

1. Comparative Studies – Examining volunteer roles in multiple CBT sites across Indonesia or other countries would test the transferability of these findings.
2. Longitudinal Analysis – Tracking volunteer participation and welfare outcomes over time could provide insights into sustainability and burnout risks.
3. Quantitative Assessment – Integrating surveys and economic data would allow more precise measurement of welfare gains attributable to volunteer-driven initiatives.
4. Policy Evaluation – Researching how formal recognition or incentives for volunteers influence CBT outcomes could inform government programs.
5. Tourist Perspectives – Exploring how tourists perceive volunteer-driven CBT initiatives could provide insights into market sustainability and cultural authenticity.

7. Synthesis

In synthesis, the study affirms that social volunteerism is a powerful yet underappreciated driver of welfare-oriented tourism development. The Dlingo case illustrates how unpaid local actors can generate innovation, manage conflicts, and sustain initiatives that significantly improve community welfare. While challenges of sustainability and scalability remain, the findings underscore the need to reframe volunteerism not as peripheral but as central to development discourse. This perspective broadens the scope of welfare studies and tourism research by recognizing civic agency as a critical determinant of success.

The discussion has demonstrated that the roles, impacts, and motivations of social volunteers in Dlingo Village align with but also extend existing theories of volunteerism, social welfare, and CBT. By situating these findings within broader debates, the study contributes both empirically and theoretically to understanding how grassroots civic engagement can produce welfare gains through tourism. The implications are clear: supporting volunteer-driven initiatives offers a viable, low-cost pathway for sustainable community welfare, while also raising important questions about the balance between civic responsibility and state obligation.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that social volunteers play a pivotal role in linking welfare improvement with community-based tourism development in Dlingo Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta. By assuming multiple roles—innovators, brokers, facilitators, mediators, and social animators—volunteers were able to transform a neglected river into a sustainable tourism site, generating employment, increasing household income, improving infrastructure, and fostering community pride. Their participation was sustained by a combination of moral duty, skills development, and aspirations for the future.

The findings highlight that volunteer-driven initiatives can serve as cost-effective, culturally grounded models for rural welfare enhancement. Practically, this framework can be applied by policymakers and development practitioners to strengthen community resilience and foster inclusive tourism. For future research, comparative and longitudinal studies are recommended to examine the scalability and sustainability of volunteerism in diverse contexts, as well as its interaction with formal welfare policies.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

As the sole author, I was responsible for the conceptualization, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing of this manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to ethical considerations and the confidentiality of participants, the raw interview transcripts are not publicly available.

Declaration of interests statement

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

Additional information

No additional information is available for this article.

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