

Research Article

# Local Community Synergy in Cultural Tourism Management : Realizing Environmental Sustainability in Tourism Villages

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**Abstract:** The Nyanggring cultural tourism village in Tlemang Village, Lamongan, is a local wisdom-based tourism development initiative with a focus on environmental sustainability. Synergy between local communities and managers is key to creating this sustainability. However, challenges in implementing environmentally friendly management and actively involving the community are still faced. This study uses a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques and participatory observation. Research informants consisted of local communities, tourism village managers, and policy makers. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in sustainability-based cultural tourism management. The findings show that collaboration between the community and managers in preserving culture and the environment is very significant. The community is involved in maintaining cultural sites, managing cultural tourism villages, and developing local tourism products. However, there are still challenges such as lack of capacity training and minimal incentives for communities who are active in management. The synergy between the local community and the Nyanggring tourism village managers in Tlemang Village has made a positive contribution to environmental sustainability, but requires more support in terms of training and policies to optimize the results.

**Keywords:** Community Participation; Sustainable Environment; Synergy; Tourism Village.

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the tourism sector has experienced rapid growth and has become one of the main pillars of the global economy. Alongside this rapid development, however, various challenges related to sustainability have emerged, particularly concerning environmental conservation and the management of local cultural heritage (Bose & Khan, 2022; Liu, Dou, Li, & Cai, 2020). In response to these issues, the concept of sustainable tourism has been introduced, emphasizing the importance of achieving a balance between tourism development and the preservation of natural and cultural resources (McKercher, 2022; Vongvisitsin, Huang, & King, 2024). One increasingly popular form of sustainable tourism is community-based tourism (CBT), which positions local communities as the primary actors in managing tourism destinations. This model aims not only to maximize economic benefits for local communities but also to ensure the preservation of the environment and local cultural values (Eprilianto et al., 2023; Susanto & Indarti, 2023).

Theoretically, community-based tourism emphasizes the importance of active local community involvement in every stage of tourism village management, from planning and implementation to the evaluation of tourism activities (Ansel & Gash, 2008; Febrianti, Eprilianto, Ma'ruf, & Pradana, 2023). It is expected that such participation will generate more equitable and sustainable benefits, particularly in terms of environmental conservation and the protection of cultural heritage (Kurniawan & Artisa, 2023). Nevertheless, the

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implementation of this concept in practice often encounters numerous challenges, including conflicting interests among stakeholders, limited community capacity in tourism destination management, and difficulties in achieving a balance between economic development and environmental protection (Schweinsberg, Sharpley, & Darcy, 2022; Rastegar, 2020). As such, the management of cultural tourism villages, which integrates local wisdom with environmental sustainability, plays a strategic role in promoting tourism models that offer economic advantages while preserving ecosystems and local cultural identity (Puspitasari, Haryono, & Febrianti, 2021; Maharani, 2022).

A concrete example of this approach can be found in Tlemang Village, Lamongan Regency, East Java, Indonesia, which is currently developing the Nyanggring Cultural Tourism Village. This village utilizes its local wisdom, including cultural traditions and natural resource management practices, to build a tourism destination that directly benefits the surrounding community (Eprilianto, Ma'ruf, Pradana, Hilmi, & Habibah, 2022). The management of Nyanggring Tourism Village integrates several key elements, from preserving traditional arts and cultural festivals to implementing sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism practices. Interestingly, while many tourism villages in Indonesia have adopted similar culture- and nature-based tourism models, not all of them have succeeded in effectively managing the synergy between local communities and tourism managers (Haryono, Febrianti, & Eprilianto, 2023).

Previous studies have widely examined the dynamics of relationships between communities and tourism village managers in various regions. Generally, these studies emphasize the importance of sustainability in tourism village management and the involvement of local communities in decision-making processes (Widiyani et al., 2021; Ayuningsih, Pridia, & Teviningrum, 2019). However, most of these studies tend to focus primarily on economic and social aspects, with relatively limited research addressing how effective collaboration can be achieved in managing culture-based tourism villages that also prioritize environmental sustainability (Safitri, Myrna, & Usman, 2022). In fact, the success of tourism villages in optimizing their cultural and natural tourism potential heavily depends on a comprehensive understanding of the relationships and dynamics among local communities, tourism managers, and other relevant stakeholders (Eprilianto et al., 2023; Rodrigues, Breda, & Rodrigues, 2024). Local communities, with their traditional environmental wisdom and cultural knowledge, play a critical role in ensuring that tourism development does not harm the natural environment or erode their cultural identity (Huda, Nurhaeni, & Suharto, 2020).

In light of these considerations, this study aims to fill the gap in the existing literature by exploring how synergy between local communities and tourism village managers can be developed to promote environmental sustainability in the management of a cultural tourism village, with Nyanggring Tourism Village in Tlemang, Lamongan, serving as a case study. This research is driven by the need to develop a more holistic and sustainable tourism village management model that not only delivers economic benefits but also preserves the environment and protects local cultural traditions (Febrianti & Eprilianto, 2023).

Specifically, this study seeks to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the creation of synergy between local communities and tourism village managers in maintaining environmental sustainability. Furthermore, it aims to analyze the role of local communities in preserving culture and the natural environment through active participation in tourism village management, and to explore the challenges encountered in managing environmental sustainability within Nyanggring Cultural Tourism Village. In addition, this study intends to formulate effective management strategies to address these challenges. The findings of this research are expected to make a valuable contribution to the development of sustainable, inclusive, and environmentally friendly culture-based tourism village management models in Indonesia, while also serving as a reference for policymakers, tourism managers, and community groups in designing and implementing community-based tourism practices that are both economically beneficial and ecologically responsible (Bose & Khan, 2022; Ansel & Gash, 2008).

## 2. Literature Review

The rapid growth of tourism as a global economic sector has been accompanied by increasing concerns regarding its environmental and socio-cultural impacts. In response, the concept of sustainable tourism has gained prominence, emphasizing a balance between economic benefits, environmental preservation, and the protection of local cultural heritage (Sharpley, 2009; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Collaborative governance refers to processes where

public agencies engage with non-governmental stakeholders in collective decision-making to address public issues that cannot be effectively resolved by a single actor. This approach emphasizes inclusivity, consensus-building, and shared responsibility among diverse participants. In the context of environmental management, studies have shown that collaborative governance can lead to more sustainable outcomes by fostering trust and mutual learning among stakeholders. Similarly, in the realm of education, cross-sector collaborations have been instrumental in implementing digital education initiatives, demonstrating the versatility of collaborative governance across different sectors. Within this framework, community-based tourism (CBT) has emerged as an alternative model, placing local communities at the center of tourism development processes. Several scholars have argued that CBT not only ensures economic benefits for the host communities but also enhances environ

mental stewardship and cultural pride (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Salazar, 2012). While these arguments are theoretically compelling, their practical realization often reveals complex dynamics and unresolved tensions among stakeholders.

Previous studies on CBT have predominantly highlighted the economic and social benefits of community participation. For instance, studies by Okazaki (2008) and Suansri (2003) found that active community involvement in tourism planning and management enhances income distribution, fosters social cohesion, and strengthens local identity. However, both studies acknowledged that limited community capacity and unequal power relations between stakeholders often hinder effective participation. Although these works advocate for inclusive planning, they tend to underexplore how environmental sustainability objectives are integrated into these processes, an omission that risks undermining the long-term viability of CBT initiatives.

Furthermore, research in Indonesia's tourism villages, particularly in East Java and Bali, offers valuable insights into the application of CBT in cultural tourism contexts. Sakti (2016), for example, identified that while community involvement improved economic and social outcomes in East Java's tourism villages, challenges in environmental management persisted. The study recommended capacity-building programs to address this issue but did not sufficiently examine the collaborative mechanisms between community members and tourism managers necessary to achieve environmental goals. Similarly, Astina et al. (2018) in their study on Bali's cultural tourism villages concluded that community involvement reinforced local identity and preserved cultural practices. Nevertheless, environmental management was treated as a secondary concern, with limited discussion of how to balance ecological preservation with the pressures of increasing tourist numbers.

Contradictions in the literature also exist regarding the universality of CBT's benefits. While many scholars advocate its potential for empowering communities, other studies caution that CBT outcomes are highly context-dependent (Tolkach & King, 2015; Zapata et al., 2011). Factors such as community cohesion, local leadership, external stakeholder influence, and market demand conditions significantly shape the success of CBT models. This context-dependency raises questions about the generalizability of earlier findings, particularly when applied to communities with different socio-economic structures or environmental vulnerabilities.

A recurring criticism in CBT research concerns the conceptual clarity and operationalization of sustainability indicators. Scheyvens (1999) proposed a well-cited framework combining empowerment and sustainability metrics but acknowledged difficulties in measuring intangible outcomes such as community pride or environmental awareness. More recent works (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2017) have echoed these concerns, arguing that many CBT studies adopt overly simplistic indicators, failing to capture the complex trade-offs between economic development and ecological preservation. Consequently, the environmental dimension of CBT remains under-researched, with insufficient attention to how communities and tourism managers negotiate environmental priorities in everyday decision-making.

Another significant limitation of prior research is the tendency to focus on individual stakeholder perspectives without adequately investigating the synergy-building processes between local communities and tourism managers. For example, while Okazaki (2008) emphasized the importance of stakeholder collaboration, little empirical evidence was provided on how effective collaboration unfolds in practice, particularly in rural tourism village contexts. Moreover, studies rarely address how power dynamics, conflicts of interest, or capacity asymmetries affect environmental sustainability outcomes in CBT initiatives.

Given these gaps, this study seeks to advance the literature by examining how synergy between local communities and tourism village managers can be fostered to achieve environmental sustainability in a culture-based tourism village setting. By focusing on Nyanggring Tourism Village in Tlemang, Lamongan, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which environmental conservation is negotiated and operationalized in rural community-based tourism destinations. It addresses the limitations of earlier studies by not only assessing community participation outcomes but also by critically exploring the collaborative processes, institutional arrangements, and contextual factors that shape environmental management in CBT settings.

In summary, while existing research provides a strong foundation for understanding the socio-economic impacts of community-based tourism and its potential for cultural preservation, it often falls short in critically examining the environmental dimension and the collaborative dynamics between key stakeholders. This study positions itself to fill this scholarly gap by investigating these underexplored areas, offering both theoretical and practical implications for the development of sustainable, inclusive, and environmentally responsible tourism village models in Indonesia and similar contexts.

### 3. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method (Yin, 2018) to explore in depth the synergy between the local community and the Nyanggring cultural tourism village managers in order to realize environmental sustainability in Tlemang Village, Lamongan. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore the social, economic, and environmental dynamics that occur in the community and understand the local context related to the management of cultural and sustainability-based tourism villages (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study was chosen because this study focuses on the phenomenon that occurs in one specific location, namely Tlemang Village, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the management of tourism villages that involve the community in maintaining environmental sustainability (Stake, 1995).

The main focus of this study is to explore the synergy between the local community and the Nyanggring tourism village managers in the context of environmental sustainability. More specifically, this study emphasizes: the collaboration process, challenges and obstacles, and the impact of environmental sustainability resulting from the practice of managing tourism villages that involve the local community. The research subjects consist of several groups that are relevant to the process of managing tourism villages and environmental sustainability, including: 1) local communities: individuals or groups directly involved in tourism village management activities, such as tourism business actors, traditional figures, cultural figures, and communities who participate in preserving culture and the environment in Tlemang Village, Lamongan; 2) tourism village managers: parties responsible for managing tourism activities in Tlemang Village, including village business managers, tourism awareness group administrators, and other local communities; and 3) local government: government agencies that have a role in policies and regulations related to the development of tourism villages and environmental sustainability in Lamongan Regency consisting of the Lamongan Regency Tourism and Culture Office and the Tlemang Village Government, Lamongan (Eprilianto et al., 2023).

Data sources consist of primary data sources and secondary data sources obtained through the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several data collection techniques used in this study are: in-depth interviews, namely semi-structured interviews conducted with various key informants, such as tourism village managers, community leaders, tourism business actors, and government officials. This interview aims to dig deeper into information about the role of the community in managing tourism villages and the challenges they face; participant observation: researchers conduct direct observations at tourism village locations to observe interactions between the community and tourism managers, as well as management practices related to environmental and cultural preservation. This observation also allows researchers to directly understand the dynamics that occur in the field; and documentation studies: analysis of relevant documents, such as village regulations, annual tourism management reports, and policies related to environmental sustainability, are used to complement data obtained from interviews and observations (Yin, 2018).

The data collected will be analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach is used to identify key themes related to the synergy between local communities and tourism village managers, as well as aspects of environmental sustainability. The analysis

process is carried out through the following stages: data coding, theme compilation, and interpretation and conclusion.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

In the context of sustainable tourism management, synergy involves not only the relationship between local communities and tourism managers but also collaboration among government, academia, the business/private sector, mass media, and society at large (Anshari et al., 2021). Each of these sectors plays a complementary role in ensuring sustainable management from social, economic, and environmental perspectives (Astuti & Cahyadi, 2020). The findings of this study illustrate how these five sectors collaborate and address challenges in implementing sustainability principles within the Nyanggring Tourism Village.

### **4.1.1. Government Sector**

The government plays a pivotal role in providing policy support and regulatory frameworks to guide tourism village management in a structured and sustainable direction (Su et al., 2019). In Nyanggring, synergy between the village, district, and provincial governments—especially through the Tourism and Culture Office—is evident in policies that integrate cultural preservation with environmental sustainability. Field observations reveal that the district government provides financial assistance for tourism infrastructure development, including road improvements and public facility construction, as well as capacity-building programs for tourism managers and local communities.

Moreover, the government actively regulates environmental management policies, including waste control and water resource management. Despite these initiatives, the most significant challenge lies in coordinating inter-governmental efforts, particularly concerning long-term planning and securing larger budget allocations for sustainability programs.

### **4.1.2. Academic Sector**

Academics contribute to the management of Nyanggring Tourism Village through research, community engagement, and capacity-building initiatives focused on sustainable tourism practices (Astuti & Cahyadi, 2020). Universities such as Surabaya State University (Unesa) and Dr. Soetomo University Surabaya are actively involved in community-based research and service projects, promoting environmentally and culturally friendly tourism.

Field observations indicate that academics assist in developing training modules for tourism awareness groups and local entrepreneurs, emphasizing sustainable management practices. However, a major challenge persists in aligning academic recommendations with local practices. Often, scientific insights and theoretical models are not immediately adopted due to gaps between academic discourse and the community's field-based realities.

### **4.1.3. Business/Private Sector**

The business/private sector, particularly tourism operators and hospitality providers, plays a crucial role in supporting local economic development and environmental management in Nyanggring (Su et al., 2019). Enterprises such as homestays, restaurants, and cultural attractions generate significant income for the community. Observations highlight a growing shift among local entrepreneurs toward environmentally conscious business practices, including the management of family-owned enterprises and MSMEs.

Nonetheless, the business sector faces challenges related to tourist seasonality. During peak holiday periods, pressure on natural resources and public facilities intensifies, requiring rapid adaptation to manage both environmental and social impacts.

### **4.1.4. Local Community**

The local community in Tlemang Village serves as the frontline manager of Nyanggring's cultural tourism activities. Community members actively participate not only as beneficiaries but also as cultural custodians and environmental stewards (Anshari et al., 2021). They are directly involved in producing handicrafts, managing culinary ventures, and organizing cultural events that form the village's primary tourist attractions.

Observations reveal that most culinary and craft businesses are owned and operated by local residents, with many villagers working as tour guides who educate visitors on the village's history and traditions. However, limitations persist in tourism management knowledge and sustainability awareness. Many community members continue to rely on traditional practices

that, while valuable, may not sufficiently support the demands of modern, organized tourism management.

#### **4.1.5. Mass Media**

Mass media plays a significant role in enhancing the visibility and appeal of Nyanggring Tourism Village (Putra et al., 2020). Both local and national media—across print, digital, and broadcast platforms—have promoted the village’s cultural richness and natural landscapes. The media’s involvement is crucial in raising public awareness about the importance of cultural and environmental sustainability in tourism villages.

Collaborations with local radio stations, such as Radio Suara Lamongan and Radio Prameswari, alongside partnerships with local influencers, have helped promote Nyanggring’s tourism offerings. Observations indicate that increased media coverage has contributed to rising visitor numbers, thereby positively impacting the local economy. However, media attention remains irregular and event-driven, with routine tourism activities focused on sustainability often receiving insufficient coverage.

This study also examined community participation in tourism management using Cohen and Uphoff’s (1980) framework, which comprises four dimensions: participation in decision-making, implementation, utilization of results, and evaluation.

#### **4.2. Participation in Decision-Making**

Decision-making participation refers to the extent of community involvement in formulating plans and policies related to tourism village management (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). In Nyanggring, decision-making processes—such as determining tourism development plans, resource allocation, and cultural-environmental policies—involve multiple stakeholders, including government authorities, private businesses, and local communities.

Village deliberations and community forums provide platforms for local residents to discuss tourism initiatives, including homestay location selection, cultural activity planning, and environmental management strategies. However, research findings indicate that while these forums are open, community involvement often focuses on less strategic or technical issues, with more complex decisions typically made by the village government and tourism office (Anshari et al., 2021). This suggests that the community’s role in decision-making remains largely consultative rather than decisive.

At the policy level, regulations are generally formulated by district and provincial governments, with limited direct community participation. While local residents can provide feedback through village forums, their influence on higher-level policy decisions remains minimal.

#### **4.3. Participation in Implementation**

The second dimension pertains to community involvement in implementing tourism management policies (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). In Nyanggring, community members actively participate in providing homestay accommodations, organizing tour packages, and managing tourism facilities. They also contribute to cultural event coordination and the provision of local culinary services, all of which are essential for sustaining tourism operations.

Moreover, the community engages in environmental initiatives, such as waste management campaigns, water conservation, and promoting eco-friendly practices. For example, initiatives to reduce plastic waste and encourage biodegradable materials have gained community support. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in accessing training and resources needed to enhance service quality and implement larger-scale tourism programs.

#### **4.4. Participation in Utilization of Results**

This dimension concerns the extent to which communities benefit economically and socially from tourism activities (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). In Nyanggring, research findings confirm that the economic benefits of tourism are directly felt by homestay operators, food stall owners, artisans, and tour guides. Tourists interested in cultural experiences contribute to local income through the purchase of handicrafts, consumption of local cuisine, and participation in traditional events.

Social benefits are also evident, as tourism activities foster social cohesion, strengthen community solidarity, and enhance awareness of cultural and environmental preservation. Nevertheless, disparities persist in benefit distribution. Economic gains are often concentrated among groups with greater access to capital and infrastructure, while marginalized community members, though contributing to tourism preservation, may not enjoy equivalent rewards.

#### **4.5. Participation in Evaluation**

The final dimension involves community participation in evaluating tourism programs and policies (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). In Nyanggring, evaluation occurs through regular village meetings, where residents, tourism managers, and government representatives discuss issues such as infrastructure, environmental management, and social impacts.

Although these evaluations offer opportunities for community input, the processes are often informal and lack structured mechanisms for systematic assessment. Furthermore, evaluations tend to overlook long-term environmental impacts and do not always accommodate the perspectives of marginalized or less-organized community groups. This indicates limitations in evaluative participation that could hinder continuous improvements in tourism village management.

The study demonstrates that synergy among government, academia, the business/private sector, mass media, and the local community has contributed to creating a supportive environment for sustainable tourism management in Nyanggring. Each sector plays a complementary role: the government provides policy frameworks; academia offers research and training; the business sector generates economic opportunities; the media promotes tourism destinations; and the community acts as both the manager and preserver of cultural heritage.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain in inter-sectoral coordination, community empowerment, and environmental management amidst growing tourism demand. Strengthening these collaborative mechanisms will be essential to establish Nyanggring Tourism Village as a sustainable tourism model in the future.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Overall, the Nyanggring Village community is actively involved in the implementation of tourism activities, such as providing homestays, preparing tour packages, and implementing environmental conservation programs. They also feel the economic and social benefits of managing the tourism village, although there is an imbalance in the distribution of benefits, especially between community groups that are more directly involved in the tourism sector and those who are less involved. However, community participation in decision-making and evaluation is still limited. At the decision-making level, although there is a deliberation forum, strategic decisions are often taken by the government without full involvement from the community. Likewise, although evaluations are carried out, the process is often informal and not comprehensive enough, especially in assessing the long-term impacts of tourism on the environment and society. Recommendations that can be given include: Increasing Community Involvement in Decision-Making, Community Training and Empowerment To increase community capacity in managing tourism professionally and sustainably, More Even Distribution of Benefits, and More Structured and Comprehensive Evaluation. With these steps, the management of the Nyanggring Tourism Village can run more sustainably and provide greater benefits for the local community, as well as maintaining cultural and environmental sustainability for future generations.

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