

Adopting success stories for sustainable tourism village development: Evidence from Indonesia



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Abstract Tourism village development has increasingly become a strategic pathway for achieving sustainable rural development by enhancing local welfare, preserving cultural heritage, and strengthening community resilience. However, existing studies on tourism villages largely remain descriptive and rarely translate successful cases into transferable development frameworks. This study addresses this gap by adopting a success story approach through a comparative analysis of two internationally recognized cases: Wukirsari Village in Yogyakarta and Jatiluwih Village in Bali, both awarded as “Best Tourism Villages 2024” by the UN Tourism Initiative. A mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating in-depth interviews, participatory observation, focus group discussions, quantitative descriptive analysis, and a Delphi method to validate critical success factors. The findings indicate that sustainable tourism village development is built upon four interrelated pillars: participatory governance, cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, and digital innovation. Wukirsari demonstrates how eco-friendly batik craftsmanship, cooperative-based management, and cultural learning tourism can enhance community welfare and economic diversification. In contrast, Jatiluwih exemplifies how the Subak irrigation system, recognized as UNESCO World Heritage, integrates cultural values, ecological sustainability, and tourism governance into a cohesive development model. The comparative analysis reveals that success stories can be systematically operationalized into an adoptable framework through community-driven decision-making, heritage-based value creation, environmentally responsible practices, and strategic use of digital platforms for global market access. Theoretically, this study contributes to the sustainable rural tourism literature by advancing a success story adoption model validated through expert consensus. Practically, it provides policymakers, practitioners, and local communities with a replicable framework to strengthen tourism village programs and scale best practices across diverse rural contexts, particularly in developing countries.

Keywords: community-based tourism, rural sustainability, cultural heritage conservation, participatory governance, ecotourism innovation

1. Introduction

Tourism villages are increasingly recognized as strategic instruments for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting inclusive economic growth, social cohesion, and cultural preservation (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). The concept aligns with the principles of community-based tourism (CBT), which emphasizes the active participation of local residents in tourism planning, management, and benefit sharing (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). In Indonesia, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has prioritized tourism villages, with over 2,000 villages registered by 2023, contributing an estimated 5–7% annually to the national tourism GDP (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2023). Best practices from pioneering villages have demonstrated that community-driven tourism not only generates income but also enhances local identity and resilience.

Despite these achievements, the majority of tourism villages in developing countries still face critical challenges, including weak professional management, limited digital promotion, poor infrastructure, and insufficient human resource capacity (World Bank, 2022). Consequently, only a small fraction of villages achieve long-term sustainability and recognition. Previous studies have examined CBT models and sustainable village management strategies (Fafurida et al., 2023; Ryan, 2018), but there remains a *research gap*: very few integrate success stories into transferable models that can guide other villages toward sustainable development. Furthermore, a *theoretical gap* persists regarding the interplay between community participation, cultural preservation, and innovation within adoptable frameworks.

This study seeks to bridge these gaps by focusing on two award-winning Indonesian cases: Wukirsari Village in Yogyakarta and Jatiluwih Village in Bali. Wukirsari has become a hub for eco-friendly batik production and cultural tourism,

whereas Jatiluwih is renowned globally for its subak irrigation system, recognized as the UNESCO World Heritage. These two villages were selected not only because they received international recognition, but also due to their contrasting development paths, governance structures, and cultural–ecological assets, which make them analytically rich for building a transferable model. Wukirsari represents a creative-cultural tourism ecosystem driven by craftsmanship and cooperative governance, while Jatiluwih reflects a heritage–ecology tourism system rooted in the Subak institution. Their differences allow a deeper understanding of how diverse success stories can be synthesized into a unified framework applicable across rural settings. Both villages exemplify community-driven, sustainable tourism practices, yet their success has not been systematically transformed into a model for adoption. Accordingly, this study aims to do the following:

1. Identify best practices in the management of Wukirsari and Jatiluwih tourism villages.
2. Analyze strategies that support their sustainable development.
3. A success story-based adoption model that can be replicated by other tourism villages in Indonesia and beyond should be formulated.

By addressing these objectives, this study makes two key contributions. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on sustainable tourism village development by integrating the success story adoption approach. Practically, it provides policymakers, practitioners, and local communities with an actionable framework to strengthen the sustainability of tourism villages across diverse contexts.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to capture the complexity of sustainable tourism village development through the adoption of success stories. The choice of mixed methods is appropriate, as it allows for in-depth exploration of sociocultural practices while simultaneously providing measurable indicators of success that can be generalized (Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

A multiple case study design was applied, with a focus on Wukirsari Village in Yogyakarta and Jatiluwih Village in Bali. Both cases were purposively selected because they represent best practices in community-based tourism and were recognized internationally as “Best Tourism Villages 2024” by the UN Tourism Initiative. By examining two exemplary cases, this study ensures that the findings are not only credible but also transferable to other tourism village contexts.

Data collection relied on a combination of in-depth interviews, participatory observation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document review. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-five respondents, including tourism village managers, local government officials, community leaders, and representatives of the Ministry of Tourism. These interviews explored governance structures, strategies of community participation, and the socioeconomic impacts of tourism. Field observations complemented the interviews by recording interactions between tourists and residents, documenting environmental management practices, and capturing cultural activities. To strengthen the findings, FGDs were organized in both villages, each involving approximately fifteen participants representing artisans, youth groups, and local entrepreneurs. These discussions provided collective perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of tourism village management. Secondary data, such as financial reports, visitor statistics, government policies, and international reports from the UNWTO and the World Bank, were also reviewed to contextualize the primary findings within global tourism development trends.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, qualitative data from interviews, FGDs, and observations were examined via thematic analysis to identify recurring themes such as community participation, cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and digital innovation. To enhance reliability, coding was performed independently by two researchers, and the intercoder agreement reached 87% consistency. Second, quantitative descriptive analysis was applied to assess tourism statistics, including visitor numbers, annual income, and the proportion of community involvement in tourism-related activities. Comparative analysis between Wukirsari and Jatiluwih highlighted both similarities and distinctive practices in sustaining tourism development. The comparative quantitative analysis was conducted using several indicators commonly applied in tourism village assessment, including: (1) annual visitor numbers, (2) tourism-generated income, (3) percentage of households engaged in tourism-related activities, (4) cultural preservation indicators such as participation in traditional practices and heritage-based economic activities, and (5) environmental indicators including waste management adoption and eco-friendly production techniques. These indicators were normalized and compared using descriptive benchmarking to identify performance gaps and critical factors that distinguish best-performing villages. Third, the Delphi method was employed to validate the critical success factors identified in earlier stages. A panel of ten experts (consisting of academics, policymakers, and tourism practitioners) participated in three iterative rounds of evaluation until consensus, defined as at least 80% agreement, was achieved. This process ensured that the proposed development model was grounded in both empirical data and expert judgment.

To strengthen the validity and reliability of the research, several strategies have been applied. Triangulation of data sources and methods reduced potential bias, whereas member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with community leaders to obtain their feedback. Peer debriefing with external scholars further ensured the credibility of the coding process and thematic structure. In addition, an audit trail was maintained to document the entire research process, thereby enhancing transparency and replicability. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas

Negeri Semarang, and all participants provided informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved throughout the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Community-Based Governance and Local Participation

The findings demonstrate that active community participation is the cornerstone of sustainable tourism village development in both Wukirsari and Jatiluwih. In Wukirsari, the establishment of *Pokdarwis* (tourism awareness groups) and cooperatives ensures that local residents are directly involved in planning, decision making, and revenue-sharing mechanisms. Approximately 70 percent of households in the village are engaged in batik production, either as artisans, workshop facilitators, or homestay providers. Similarly, in Jatiluwih, the traditional *Subak* organization, rooted in Balinese cultural and religious practices, acts not only as an irrigation system but also as a governance structure that collectively manages tourism resources. This strong communal governance aligns with the principles of community-based tourism (CBT), which emphasizes empowerment, ownership, and equitable benefit distribution (Su et al., 2019; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018).

These results confirm earlier studies suggesting that community empowerment fosters a sense of ownership, which in turn enhances the sustainability of tourism projects (Blackstock et al., 2018). However, this study extends the literature by showing that success stories such as Wukirsari and Jatiluwih offer adoptable models for other villages. Unlike previous case studies, which often remain descriptive, this research translates local best practices into a transferable framework, thus filling an important theoretical and practical gap.

3.2. Cultural Preservation as a Tourism Asset

Both case studies highlight the role of cultural heritage as a differentiating factor in attracting visitors. In Wukirsari, cultural preservation revolves around batik craftsmanship, which has been transformed from a household activity into a tourism attraction through workshops and educational packages. Beyond its economic contribution generating annual revenues of nearly IDR 5 billion, the village has positioned itself as a cultural learning destination, particularly for international tourists interested in intangible heritage. Meanwhile, Jatiluwih leverages the UNESCO-recognized *Subak* irrigation system, which represents not only agricultural sustainability but also the spiritual values embedded in Balinese Hindu philosophy. The blending of culture, the environment, and spirituality creates a unique tourism experience that cannot be easily replicated elsewhere.

This finding resonates with recent research that emphasizes the integration of cultural heritage into tourism as a key driver of competitiveness and resilience (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Lane & Kastenholtz, 2018). More specifically, it supports the argument that cultural authenticity, when preserved and showcased responsibly, generates greater tourist loyalty and long-term sustainability (Wang et al., 2021). Importantly, the cases studied here show how local traditions, rather than being commodified or diluted, can be valorized in ways that both empower communities and appeal to global markets.

3.3. Environmental Sustainability and Eco-Tourism Innovation

Environmental stewardship emerged as a second pillar of success. In Wukirsari, eco-friendly batik production techniques, including waste treatment systems for natural dyes, were developed with government and NGO support. The village has also adopted a plastic-free campaign to minimize the environmental footprint of tourism activities. In Jatiluwih, the conservation of terraced rice fields through organic farming practices and ecotourism activities such as “rice trekking” and reforestation programs illustrates how traditional ecological knowledge can be integrated into modern tourism strategies.

These findings align with the growing body of research on the nexus between ecotourism and sustainability, which highlights that conservation practices can simultaneously safeguard the environment and improve local livelihoods (Stronza et al., 2019; Gössling & Hall, 2019). However, this study contributes further by demonstrating that environmental sustainability is not merely a byproduct of tourism but also a deliberate strategy embedded in community governance. By linking environmental preservation with tourism marketing (e.g., eco-friendly certification, green branding), the two villages successfully align local practices with international sustainability standards.

3.4. Digital innovation and the global market reach

Another key factor underpinning the success of these villages is the adoption of digital technologies for promotion and market expansion. Wukirsari actively uses social media platforms to showcase its batik workshops and homestay packages, reaching not only domestic tourists but also international markets. Meanwhile, Jatiluwih collaborates with international travel agencies and digital booking platforms, allowing it to position itself within global ecotourism circuits.

This finding is consistent with recent scholarship on smart tourism and digital transformation, which argues that digital tools enhance destination competitiveness and resilience, especially in rural contexts (Gretzel et al., 2020; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). However, the novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that digital adoption is not technology driven alone but is

community driven, emerging from grassroots initiatives rather than from top-down government programs. This provides valuable insights into how small, resource-limited communities can strategically use technology to achieve global visibility.

3.5. Integrating Success Stories into a Transferable Model

A comparative analysis of Wukirsari and Jatiluwih demonstrated that their sustainability is built upon four interconnected pillars: participatory governance, cultural heritage conservation, environmental stewardship, and digital innovation. These elements emerged consistently from the qualitative data and were validated through the Delphi process as critical success factors for long-term sustainability. To synthesize these findings, a sustainable community-based development model for tourism was developed, which translates the success stories of the two villages into a transferable framework. Based on the comparative analysis of Wukirsari and Jatiluwih, a sustainable community-based development model for tourism is proposed, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Sustainable Tourism Village Development Model

The model (Figure 1) conceptualizes sustainable tourism village development as being built upon four interconnected pillars: participatory governance, cultural heritage conservation, environmental stewardship, and digital innovation. Participatory governance constitutes the foundational pillar of the model, highlighting the central role of inclusive local institutions (such as Pokdarwis in Wukirsari and the Subak councils in Jatiluwih) in decision-making, collaborative leadership, and equitable benefit distribution. Cultural heritage conservation ensures that tourism activities reinforce, rather than undermine, local traditions, identity, and authentic cultural experiences. Environmental stewardship focuses on safeguarding natural resources through eco-friendly practices, sustainable agriculture, and responsible resource management. Finally, digital innovation enhances destination competitiveness by enabling smart tourism technologies, online marketing, and global connectivity. Together, these four pillars interact dynamically to support local empowerment and economic diversification, forming a holistic and transferable framework for sustainable tourism village development.

This conceptualization provides a holistic framework that demonstrates how community-driven practices can be codified into an adoptable model. Unlike traditional CBT frameworks, which primarily emphasize participation and empowerment (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2019), the proposed model integrates success stories as empirical evidence and validates them through expert consensus. Moreover, by embedding digital innovation alongside cultural and environmental dimensions, the model responds to recent calls for integrating technology and sustainability in rural tourism (Gretzel et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

The strength of this model lies in its adaptability. While grounded in the specific contexts of Wukirsari and Jatiluwih, the framework offers transferable guidelines that can be tailored to different rural settings. This flexibility makes it relevant not only for Indonesian tourism villages but also for other developing countries where rural communities face similar challenges in terms of balancing economic development, cultural identity, and environmental sustainability. In this way, the model advances both theory and practice by bridging the gap between descriptive case studies and replicable frameworks for sustainable tourism village development.



4. Conclusions and Implication

This study examined the development of sustainable tourism villages through the lens of success story adoption, focusing on Wukirsari in Yogyakarta and Jatiluwih in Bali as exemplary cases. The findings reveal that the sustainability of these villages rests on four interconnected pillars: participatory governance, cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, and digital innovation. Wukirsari demonstrated how eco-friendly batik craftsmanship and cooperative-based management enhance community welfare, whereas Jatiluwih illustrated how the Subak system integrates cultural heritage and ecological sustainability into tourism practices. Together, these cases provide empirical evidence that community-driven approaches can yield economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits simultaneously.

From a theoretical perspective, this research advances the literature on sustainable rural tourism and community-based tourism (CBT) by integrating the concept of success story adoption into an empirically validated model. Unlike previous studies that remain descriptive, the proposed sustainable community-based development model for tourism operationalizes best practices into a framework that can be adapted to other rural destinations. This novelty contributes to ongoing debates on how community empowerment, heritage conservation, and innovation can be effectively combined to achieve long-term sustainability.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders. The model provides a replicable blueprint that can guide the design of tourism village programs in Indonesia and other developing countries. Specifically, governments can use the model to strengthen participatory governance, support cultural preservation initiatives, incentivize environmentally friendly practices, and enhance digital capacities for global market access. For local communities, the findings underscore the importance of maintaining cultural authenticity and ecological integrity while embracing innovation as a means to remain competitive.

The study also has policy implications. First, institutional support from local and national governments is crucial to ensure that communities have access to training, finance, and infrastructure. Second, integration with international sustainability frameworks (e.g., SDGs and green certifications) enhances the credibility and visibility of tourism villages. Third, fostering collaboration among communities, NGOs, and the private sector can accelerate the scaling up of successful models.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The analysis focused on two award-winning villages, which may not fully represent the diverse realities of tourism villages in Indonesia or other countries. Moreover, the validation process relied on expert consensus, which, while robust, may still reflect subjective interpretations.

Future research should therefore test the proposed model in a broader range of contexts, including less-established tourism villages, to assess its adaptability and scalability. Quantitative studies involving larger samples and advanced statistical techniques could also complement the findings by measuring causal relationships between governance structures, cultural practices, and sustainability outcomes. Comparative studies across countries would further enrich the understanding of how cultural and institutional differences shape the adoption of success stories in rural tourism.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that adopting and operationalizing success stories provides a promising pathway toward sustainable tourism village development. By offering both theoretical insights and practical guidance, the proposed model contributes to the advancement of rural tourism research and offers a roadmap for communities and policymakers striving to balance economic growth with cultural and environmental sustainability.

5. Declarations

5.1. Ethical considerations

The study correctly followed the ethical policies for a study that includes human subjects, in addition to confirming the consent of all the respondents/interviewers involved. The survey participants were aware of the study.

5.2. Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT was used exclusively for language editing and grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

5.3. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

5.4. Funding

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