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CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SUMBA BARAT, INDONESIA: AN ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract:
This study examines how stakeholder relations shape sustainable cultural tourism and heritage management in Sumba Barat Regency, Indonesia. The study addresses four questions concerning government-private-sector relations, community participation, local economic benefits, and the use of tourism benefits for village heritage conservation. A qualitative design was employed using policy-document analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with 17 purposively selected stakeholders representing government, private tourism businesses, community and traditional leaders, an NGO, and a tourist. The findings show a persistent gap between tourism policy and implementation. Government-private-sector relations provide greater visibility and support to large tourism businesses, while locally owned enterprises receive less institutional attention. Community participation is uneven: Prai Ijing has developed relatively active community-based tourism, whereas Tarung remains largely community-managed with limited government support. Tourism revenues are concentrated among hotels, restaurants, and external travel agents, while local economic benefits are more visible in handicraft sales and selected tourism villages. Heritage-conservation support is also geographically selective. The study proposes a contextual stakeholder model that connects government, private-sector, and community action with four sustainability dimensions: economic, social, environmental, and cultural. The model emphasizes continuous capacity building, fair benefit sharing, stronger inter-stakeholder coordination, and the protection of local cultural values.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Heritage Management, Local Community, Stakeholder Collaboration, Sustainable Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism development increasingly requires destinations to reconcile economic opportunity with community well-being, environmental stewardship, and cultural continuity. Contemporary cultural-tourism research treats heritage not simply as an attraction but as a living resource whose sustainability depends on relationships among governments, businesses, residents, and other stakeholders (Richards, 2018; Terkenli & Georgoula, 2022). This is particularly important in remote and culturally distinctive destinations, where tourism can create employment and markets for local products but can also intensify power asymmetries, benefit leakage, commodification, and pressure on local practices. Evidence from World Heritage and community-based tourism settings shows that meaningful participation and access to decision-making are central to sustainable tourism outcomes (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2019). In a different organizational setting, competence, work environment, motivation, and digital adoption have been studied as influences on employee performance (Budiherwanto & Rohmah, 2026).

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Sumba Island in East Nusa Tenggara provides a relevant context because its tourism appeal is closely connected to traditional villages, megalithic sites, Pasola, Wulla Poddu, weaving, architecture, and other living cultural practices. Within Sumba Barat Regency, tourism development has accelerated since the international recognition of Nihi Watu Resort. The study reports that tourist visits to West Sumba increased from 4,778 in 2016 to 93,984 in 2018, while hotel occupancy increased from 7.64% to 19.70% between 2015 and 2017. These developments create a clear policy question: whether increasing tourism activity is translating into inclusive local development and sustained heritage protection.

Stakeholder research suggests that tourism sustainability is strongly conditioned by the quality of relationships among public authorities, private businesses, and communities. Wondirad et al. (2020) demonstrate that weak stakeholder collaboration can allow tourism benefits to bypass communities, while Dolezal and Novelli (2022) show that power and partnership are critical to community-based tourism in Bali. Governance is likewise shaped by trust, power, and social capital (Nunkoo, 2017). More recent work emphasizes co-creation, collaborative networks, and stakeholder-centred approaches as mechanisms for strengthening sustainable cultural tourism (Liang et al., 2023; Perkins et al., 2022; Albu et al., 2024).

Despite this growing literature, less is known about how stakeholder relationships operate in culturally distinctive and comparatively peripheral Indonesian destinations such as Sumba Barat, especially when formal tourism master plans coexist with uneven implementation at village level. The present study therefore examines the relationship between government, private-sector, and community actors and asks four questions: (1) How do government–private-sector relations influence cultural tourism development in Sumba Barat? (2) To what extent are local communities involved in tourism planning and implementation? (3) How are tourism benefits distributed within the local economy? and (4) How are tourism benefits translated into heritage conservation at village level? By answering these questions, the study develops a contextual stakeholder model for sustainable cultural tourism in Sumba Barat.

METHODS

Research Design and Data Sources

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to examine the interaction between tourism policy, local identity, cultural sites, and destination development in Sumba Barat Regency. The design combined three sources of evidence: (1) content analysis of tourism and cultural-heritage policy documents; (2) participant observation; and (3) in-depth interviews. The combination was used to compare formal policy intentions with stakeholder experiences and observed tourism practices.

Policy analysis covered National Law No. 10 of 2009 on Tourism, National Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Conservation, East Nusa Tenggara Regional Regulation No. 9 of 2019, and Sumba Barat Regency Regional Regulation No. 13 of 2015 concerning the 2015–2025 Tourism Development Master Plan. Participant observation was undertaken by the researcher as a native of Sumba Barat and was used to contextualize interview accounts. Seventeen informants were purposively selected from government, village administration, large and medium hotels, restaurants, village tourism management, craftsmen, traditional leaders (Rato), an NGO, and a tourist. Interviews were conducted remotely during COVID-19 restrictions using voice calls and written responses.

Data Analysis

Interview and documentary evidence were organized, reduced, interpreted, and compared across stakeholder groups. The analysis followed the qualitative sequence described in the original

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study, moving from raw-data management and reduction to interpretation and conclusion. Particular attention was given to convergence and divergence between policy documents, stakeholder statements, and observations. Four analytical themes were used to organize the findings: government–private sector relations, community participation, economic benefit distribution, and heritage conservation. This thematic structure directly corresponds to the research questions and supports a transparent connection between evidence and the proposed contextual model.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Tourism Policy Framework

Indonesia's tourism governance relevant to Sumba Barat operates across national, provincial, and regency levels. National tourism and cultural-conservation laws establish cultural values, local wisdom, protection, development, and community welfare as principles of tourism and heritage management. East Nusa Tenggara Regulation No. 9 of 2019 recognizes arts, culture, landscapes, and community life as tourism resources. At regency level, Regulation No. 13 of 2015 identifies four strategic tourism areas: Loli, Wanokaka, Tana Riwu, and Lamboya, with cultural tourism integrated differently across the four areas.

However, the existence of a formal policy framework does not guarantee implementation. The empirical evidence indicates that the principal challenge is the translation of policy into sustained collaboration and local capacity. This finding is consistent with governance research showing that sustainable tourism depends on institutional relationships, trust, power, and coordination rather than policy formulation alone (Nunkoo, 2017; Wondirad et al., 2020). It also supports recent Indonesian evidence that sustainable tourism policies can be constrained by uneven implementation and weak community capacity (Nurjaya, 2022; Laksmi & Saputra, 2025).

Government-Private-Sector Relations

The findings reveal an uneven relationship between government and private tourism businesses. Large hotels receive greater attention in tourism planning, whereas small and medium enterprises receive less institutional recognition. Nihi Watu, a foreign-owned five-star resort, reportedly employs 97% local workers and collaborates with the Sumba Hospitality Foundation to provide hospitality training. It also uses local architectural elements and traditional uniforms. Nevertheless, the general manager reported limited visibility of the government's tourism master plan. Morica Inn, a locally owned 20-room hotel, recruits local workers but reported no cooperation with local handicraft producers and described West Sumba as largely a transit destination.

These findings illustrate a distinction between employment localization and strategic inclusion. Hiring local workers can generate direct benefits, but it does not necessarily mean that local enterprises participate in destination planning, product development, supply chains, or cultural-tourism governance. The problem is therefore relational rather than simply financial. Stakeholder collaboration research indicates that sustainable outcomes depend on interaction structures and shared responsibilities among public and private actors (Wondirad et al., 2020; Cehan et al., 2021). The Sumba Barat case suggests that government policy should move beyond attracting investment toward building local supply-chain linkages and institutional mechanisms through which smaller businesses can influence tourism development.

Community Involvement in Cultural Tourism

Community participation varies markedly between villages. Prai Ijing, developed as a government-priority cultural tourism village since 2018, has adopted a community-based tourism model in which residents work as guides, parking attendants, handicraft sellers, and homestay

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operators. By contrast, Tarung is managed primarily through traditional village institutions and community cooperation, receives voluntary visitor contributions rather than standardized entrance fees, and reports limited direct tourism effects on residents.

The contrast between Prai Ijing and Tarung demonstrates that participation is shaped by institutional recognition, resources, and access to training. The original study also found that government training in culinary skills, handicrafts, and tourism awareness was conducted annually but without systematic follow-up. This creates a capacity-building problem: training events may increase short-term knowledge but are unlikely to produce durable organizational capability without continuity, mentoring, and monitoring. The finding is consistent with research showing that participation is constrained when communities lack knowledge, opportunity, and decision-making power (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2019). Recent Indonesian tourism-village research similarly emphasizes the need for structured participation and community capability rather than one-off involvement (Amalina & Listyorini, 2025; Ledewara & Pranoto, 2025).

Economic Benefits and Village Heritage Conservation

Tourism benefits in Sumba Barat are unevenly distributed. Hotels, restaurants, and travel agents capture substantial tourism expenditure, while local residents obtain more visible benefits in selected villages through handicrafts and other small-scale activities. Jakarta-based tour packages reportedly determine itineraries around highly marketable or Instagram-oriented attractions, while West Sumba can function as a transit point. Most residents in the studied villages continue to depend on agriculture and livestock.

The evidence indicates that tourism growth should not be equated with inclusive local economic development. Recent heritage-tourism research similarly finds that tourism and conservation can transform local livelihoods in ways that reduce the sustainability of traditional economic activities (Liu et al., 2022). Conversely, community-based tourism can increase local income when residents have meaningful roles in destination management and value creation (Nugroho & Numata, 2022; Ledewara & Pranoto, 2025). The policy implication for Sumba Barat is that tourism development should deliberately increase local procurement, handicraft market access, homestay participation, guiding opportunities, and community control over tourism products.

Heritage conservation is similarly selective. The government provides restoration support of approximately IDR 30 million per traditional house for designated villages that maintain authenticity using natural materials, while traditional leaders receive limited ritual support. These mechanisms can contribute to conservation, but their geographic selectivity means that villages outside government-priority areas may receive fewer resources. Recent scholarship on heritage management argues that sustainable models require community engagement and collaborative governance rather than conservation measures designed exclusively from outside the community (Liorančaitė-Šukienė & Jurėnienė, 2025; Muliati et al., 2026).

Sustainable Cultural Tourism Challenges

Four interrelated challenges emerge. First, knowledge and human-capacity gaps limit communities' ability to participate effectively in tourism. Second, policy implementation is inconsistent: the master plan exists, but some village and private-sector actors report limited awareness of or connection to it. Third, cultural commodification can occur when cultural symbols are used for tourism without sufficient attention to their meanings and community authority. Fourth, training programs are insufficiently continuous to build long-term capacity.

These findings reinforce the argument that sustainability is a governance process rather than a fixed tourism product. Recent work on cultural heritage tourism highlights the need to integrate economic, environmental, social, and cultural considerations, while participatory planning is

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necessary but not sufficient without institutional follow-through (Valkama et al., 2023; Nag & Mishra, 2023). The Sumba Barat case therefore adds a destination-level perspective showing how policy gaps, uneven power, and selective benefit distribution interact to shape sustainable heritage management.

CONTEXTUAL STAKEHOLDER MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM

Based on the empirical findings, this study proposes a contextual stakeholder model consisting of three stakeholder groups—government, private sector, and community—linked to four sustainability dimensions: economic, social, environmental, and cultural. The government functions as a facilitator, policy planner, coordinator, and promoter; the private sector serves as an investment and market bridge while supporting local products and cultural tourism; and the community functions as an active participant and cultural custodian with a role in planning, implementation, and benefit sharing.

The model differs from a simple stakeholder list because it specifies the relational mechanisms required for sustainable outcomes. Government should create transparent coordination and monitoring mechanisms; private businesses should connect local producers to tourism value chains; and communities should receive continuous capacity development and meaningful decision-making authority. These mechanisms are consistent with stakeholder collaboration research, which emphasizes interaction, networks, and shared responsibility (Wondirad et al., 2020; Perkins et al., 2022), and with recent work highlighting co-creation and community-centred tourism development (Liang et al., 2023).

Operationally, the model requires four linked actions: continuous training and mentoring; local economic integration through procurement and market access; heritage safeguards based on community-defined cultural values; and multi-actor monitoring of tourism policy implementation. This contextualization is especially relevant for Sumba Barat because villages differ in institutional recognition, tourism readiness, and access to government support. A uniform development strategy may therefore reproduce existing inequalities rather than reduce them.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the central sustainability challenge in Sumba Barat is not the absence of tourism resources or formal policy, but the uneven relationships through which tourism development is implemented. Government–private-sector relations favour larger tourism businesses, community participation varies substantially between villages, tourism benefits are concentrated among hotels, restaurants, and external travel agents, and heritage-conservation support is stronger in government-priority villages. At the same time, Prai Ijing demonstrates that community-based tourism can generate local economic, social, and cultural benefits when communities receive institutional support.

The study contributes a contextual stakeholder model that links government, private sector, and community actors with economic, social, environmental, and cultural sustainability. The model extends existing community-based and stakeholder approaches by emphasizing the implementation gap between policy and local practice. Its main practical implication is that tourism planning in Sumba Barat should prioritize relationship-building, continuous capacity development, local value-chain integration, and community authority over cultural resources rather than focusing primarily on visitor growth.

Government should strengthen coordination among tourism, village, and cultural institutions; establish follow-up mechanisms for training; expand support beyond designated flagship villages; improve infrastructure that encourages longer visitor stays; and create mechanisms that protect local

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producers from unfair price bargaining. Private-sector actors should increase procurement from local producers, collaborate with community organizations and NGOs, and develop cultural-tourism products with community consent. NGOs can support product quality, promotion, skills development, and private–community linkages. Communities should strengthen tourism knowledge, youth participation, entrepreneurship, and the management of local cultural resources.

Future research should compare government-priority and independently managed villages, examine tangible and intangible heritage separately, and investigate how tourism value chains affect household livelihoods over time. The study was conducted remotely during COVID-19, faced difficulties obtaining government data, and was constrained by limited previous research and documentation on West Sumba. Future field-based research should therefore use longer observation periods and, where feasible, include a broader range of community households and tourism businesses.

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