

Community participation in Indonesian sustainable tourism: A systematic review of models, impacts, and gaps

Florianus Pruda Muda 

Master of Management, Universitas Teknologi Yogyakarta, Campus 1, Jl. Siliwangi (Ringroad Utara),
Jombor, Sleman, D.I. Yogyakarta 55285, Indonesia

**e-mail: florianuspmuda@gmail.com*

Received 16 June 2025

Revised 11 July 2025

Accepted 12 August 2025

ABSTRACT

Community participation plays a vital role in sustainable tourism development by promoting social equity, environmental stewardship and local economic empowerment. However, systematic reviews that assess the diversity of participation models, their effectiveness across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, and their impacts on vulnerable groups in Indonesia are lacking. This study aimed to synthesize peer-reviewed literature to identify community participation models in sustainable tourism and examine their outcomes, best practices, implementation barriers, and research gaps. Using the PRISMA-based Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, 54 articles published between 2018 and 2025 from reputable databases were analyzed thematically. The findings show that models such as Community-Based Tourism (CBT), multi-stakeholder collaboration, and local wisdom-based approaches contribute significantly to improving livelihoods, preserving cultural identity, and conserving ecosystems. Nonetheless, challenges persist, including symbolic participation, unequal benefit distribution, and the limited inclusion of women, youth, and indigenous communities. This study highlights the importance of hybrid approaches combining top-down policy with bottom-up initiatives, strengthening local institutions, and ensuring inclusive governance. Future research should incorporate social justice frameworks and conduct long-term impact evaluations to enhance the transformative potential of community participation in sustainable tourism governance in Indonesia.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Community Participation, Community-Based Tourism (CBT), Local Wisdom, Vulnerable Groups, Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of sustainable tourism has become a global strategic agenda, including Indonesia, which seeks to balance economic growth, environmental preservation, and social well-being (Su et al., 2022). During the past decade, Indonesia's tourism sector has experienced significant growth. However, the distribution of benefits remains uneven. Data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicate a surge in tourist visits; however, economic gains tend to be concentrated among large-scale businesses. This leaves local communities, such as artisans, homestay operators, and micro-entrepreneurs, at a disadvantage (Rosyid et al., 2021; Murniati & Syamsiah, 2022). This underscores the urgency of adopting a community-centered approach, as the inequitable distribution of tourism benefits has economic implications as well as social and ecological consequences, particularly in tourist villages and underdeveloped regions, such as East Nusa Tenggara.

In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government has issued policies promoting sustainable tourism, including Minister of Tourism Regulation No. 14 of 2016, which emphasizes the importance of active local community participation in destination management (Utami et al., 2023). This policy strengthens the practice of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and other forms of collaborative participation, which have been shown to effectively balance economic benefits with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Su et al., 2023). In several regions such as Sleman and Bandung, community involvement has been integrated into local tourism policy planning (Yuliana, 2022), reflecting a growing local commitment to sustainable principles.

Numerous studies have explored community participation in the context of sustainable tourism in Indonesia, including the effectiveness of CBT models, role of social capital, and their contributions to the development of tourism villages (Permana et al., 2023; Nur et al., 2024). However, significant gaps in the literature remain, particularly the lack of systematic reviews that comprehensively assess various participation models; evaluate their social, economic, and environmental effectiveness; identify best practices and implementation challenges; and analyze their impacts on vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and indigenous communities.

Furthermore, existing research has rarely examined the long-term impacts of community participation, nor has it adequately addressed the regional and cultural diversity that characterizes Indonesia. Previous studies have also tended to overlook issues of social justice and benefit distribution, including the potential for conflicts of interest among stakeholders.

This systematic review aims to address these gaps by synthesizing findings from reputable academic publications on community participation models in sustainable tourism development in Indonesia. It examines their effectiveness, implementation challenges, impacts on vulnerable groups, and best practices, and offers strategic recommendations and directions for future research. This study is expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions to policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities in realizing inclusive and sustainable destination management.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Participation Models and Governance

The Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model emphasizes the active involvement of local communities in the initial stages of destination development. Within CBT, residents are not merely tourists' subjects, but also owners and managers, giving them the opportunity to design tourism experiences that respect local cultural and environmental values. Research by (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Su et al., 2022) indicates that community ownership schemes can enhance economic inclusivity through job creation and micro-entrepreneurship while preserving local traditions. Concurrently, participatory governance, which brings the private sector, NGOs, and community members into a collaborative framework, fosters open dialogue that minimizes conflicts of interest and strengthens policy legitimacy (Di Franco et al., 2025). For instance, the implementation of CBT and participatory governance in the

study area resulted in adaptive management practices, where community members participated in technical training and village tourism program planning.

2. 2 Effectiveness and Impact Evaluation

To assess the effectiveness of community participation in sustainable tourism, the literature has identified three main dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. Economically, CBT has been shown to increase household income and create new entrepreneurial opportunities aligned with SDG 1 and 8 (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Su et al., 2022). Socially, community involvement strengthens social cohesion, preserves cultural heritage, and enhances tourist satisfaction (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019). Environmentally, local communities contribute to conservation efforts, waste management, and carbon footprint reductions (An & Alarcón, 2020). For example, field studies in the area have found that local participation reduces coastal ecosystem degradation while restoring traditional fishing practices. To measure both direct and indirect impacts comprehensively, the Local Economy-Wide Impact Evaluation (LEWIE) method is recommended, with social and environmental indicators co-developed with the community to ensure relevance and validity (Di Franco et al., 2025).

2. 3 Best Practices and Challenges

Based on case studies from Banyuwangi and other regions, the best practices include establishing local tourism committees as formal decision-making bodies, implementing continuous training programs, and providing fiscal incentives to build community capacity. Public–private partnerships have also proven effective in developing supporting infrastructure and enforcing mandatory environmental certifications for tourism businesses (Su et al., 2022). However, several challenges persist: top-down control often renders participation symbolic; benefit distribution tends to favor larger enterprises over micro-operators; and geographic, social, and gender barriers limit full community access to policymaking processes (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019).

2. 4 Impacts on Vulnerable Groups

As highlighted in the literature, sustainable participation presents both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, participatory initiatives provide space for indigenous communities to express traditions and maintain local wisdom; on the other hand, unequal narrative control can lead to cultural commodification (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Women often face social and structural barriers to equal participation, necessitating targeted training programs and involvement of female facilitators (Li et al., 2020; Lundberg & Fredriksson, 2021). Youth play a crucial role in digital innovation and tourism marketing, although the digital divide poses a challenge that must be addressed through vocational training and digital literacy enhancement (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach through a structured systematic literature review to explore the landscape of community participation in sustainable tourism development in Indonesia. The review is guided by six interrelated research questions that direct the focus of the analysis: (1) What types of community participation models have been implemented in sustainable tourism development in Indonesia? (2) How effective are these models for achieving social, economic, and environmental outcomes? (3) What barriers and challenges emerged during the implementation of these models? (4) How do these models affect vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and indigenous communities? (5) What best practices can be identified based on empirical field findings? (6) What research gaps remain regarding the direct and indirect benefits of community participation?

To answer these questions, relevant literature was systematically collected from reputable academic databases, primarily from Scopus. The search strategy employed Boolean operators and keywords such as

“sustainable tourism,” “community engagement,” “participatory governance,” “CBT,” “community participation models,” and “Indonesia.” This method followed the guidelines of (Kusniati and Hapsari, 2024), who emphasized the importance of keyword variation to ensure thematic comprehensiveness. The inclusion criteria specified empirical articles published between 2018 and 2025 in peer-reviewed, open-access journals with full-text availability and clear relevance to community-based tourism development in the Indonesian context. Studies were excluded if they were purely conceptual, bibliometric, not focused on Indonesia, or did not directly address tourism participation.

The selection process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, which involved four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and final inclusion. From an initial total of 382 articles, 167 underwent full-text screening and 54 met all criteria for inclusion in the final analysis. Each selected article was carefully examined for details, such as publication year, authors, methodology, type and structure of participation models, levels of community involvement, effectiveness dimensions, and relevance to the guiding research questions.

A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted by extracting and manually coding key information from each article. These codes were then grouped into thematic categories aligned with the six research questions, including types of participation models (RQ1); effectiveness across social, economic, and environmental dimensions (RQ2); implementation challenges and structural barriers (RQ3); inclusivity and exclusion of vulnerable groups (RQ4); documented best practices in the field (RQ5); and identified research gaps on measurable impacts (RQ6). This analytical strategy draws on the thematic synthesis framework proposed by (Zainudin and Surya, 2022), which enables pattern recognition across cases and supports conceptual development.

Triangulation techniques were applied to strengthen the credibility and reliability of the findings. Source triangulation was used to integrate insights from diverse empirical contexts across Indonesia, while theoretical triangulation incorporated frameworks from the participation theory and sustainable development. In addition, investigator triangulation was implemented through collaborative coding sessions to ensure consistent interpretation of themes and improve analytical objectivity.

By integrating the six research questions throughout the review process, this study not only maps out the diversity and performance of participation models in Indonesia’s sustainable tourism landscape but also generates practical recommendations and identifies knowledge gaps to guide future research and policy innovation.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Types and Variations of Community Participation Models in Indonesian Sustainable Tourism

Community participation in the development of sustainable tourism in Indonesia is manifested through various models that reflect the local uniqueness, community needs, and complexity of tourism ecosystems. The most dominant model is Community-Based Tourism (CBT), in which the community is not only the object of tourism but also the main driving actor in the planning, management, and evaluation of tourism activities. The success of this model is reflected in studies conducted in Nglanggeran (Manaf et al., 2018; Suyatna et al., 2024) and Dermaji (Hariyadi et al., 2024), which demonstrate significant contributions to improving local welfare and environmental conservation through institutions, such as POKDARWIS and BUMDes. In addition, participation models based on local wisdom and spirituality are characteristic of tourism in various regions of Indonesia, which is rich in traditions and customary values. This approach places cultural values such as "Igya Ser Hanjob" in Papua, "Pamali" in Wakatobi, and the philosophy of "Tri Hita Karana" in Bali as the foundation of tourism governance (Marlina et al., 2020; Suamba et al., 2023; Praptika et al., 2024). Participation is not only administrative in nature but also normative and implemented based on the community's value system.

The collaborative multistakeholder model plays a central role. Collaboration among communities, governments, academia, business actors, and NGOs enables the establishment of an inclusive, efficient,

and sustainable governance system. Examples include Cibunut (Hermawan et al., 2024), Kebon Sirih (Adibroto et al., 2020), and Banyuwangi (Trisnanto et al., 2023), which highlight the importance of dialogue spaces between actors and proportional role distribution. Empowerment of women and vulnerable groups is also of great concern. Through training, digital literacy, and cooperative formation, previously marginalized groups now have space to actively participate in tourism management. In Lampung, women are the main drivers of ethnically based agrotourism development (Meutia et al., 2022), while in Taka Bonerate, economic diversification strategies have been implemented to expand access for coastal communities to tourism benefits (Praptiwi et al., 2021).

The community-based edutourism model integrates educational and tourism functions. Programs such as Edu Ortrad (Irfan et al., 2023) and the Language Tourism Village in Karanganyar (Wibowo et al., 2021) facilitate tourists in learning language, culture, and agriculture directly from the community, while strengthening local identity and social cohesion. In the context of global crises, social-ecological resilience has become a crucial framework for participation models. In Kuta, Bali, spiritual practices (niskala) and collective actions (sekala) are used to address the impact of the pandemic, creating an adaptation model rooted in local values (Praptika et al., 2024; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021). This underscores the cultural role of shaping community resilience. Another model is governance based on customary institutions such as Subak and traditional villages in Bali. Studies in Kutuh and Subak Bali reveal that the presence of strong traditional social structures encourages indigenous community involvement in more organized and sustainable tourism governance (Arifianto et al., 2023; Suamba et al., 2023; Muhamad & Kusdyana, 2025). Finally, the participatory agrotourism model shows the collective integration of the agricultural and tourism sectors. Communities in Karangtengah and Semoyo Herbal (Sriyadi, 2021; Widayati et al., 2024) have successfully developed agrotourism that strengthens local economic resilience while maintaining ecosystem sustainability.

Several studies have provided contextual findings that enrich the understanding of participation models. In Tenganan, collective participation in ecotourism has shifted toward individualism because of weak community governance and market pressure (Suyadnya et al., 2025). In Taka Bonerate, geographic challenges and limited digital access are the main obstacles to coastal community involvement (Praptiwi et al., 2021). In Lampung, women emerge as the main actors in culturally based agrotourism, showing the potential for locally based empowerment (Meutia et al., 2022). The dualism of participation between indigenous and non-indigenous communities in Bali indicates that the strength of traditional social structures plays a significant role in the effectiveness of participation (Arifianto et al., 2023). A study in Kuta, Bali also confirms that a combination of spiritual values and concrete collective actions forms the main foundation for building community resilience (Praptika et al., 2024).

Overall, it can be concluded that there is no universal model for community participation in the development of sustainable tourism in Indonesia. Each model has its own strengths and limitations, and is only effective if adapted to local social, cultural, and ecological contexts. The CBT model is institutionally strong, but requires continuous support and capacity enhancement. The local wisdom-based approach provides social legitimacy, but may weaken if commodified by the market. Multi-actor collaboration promises efficient governance, but requires consistent coordination and trust. Empowerment models for vulnerable groups promote social justice, yet they face access and capacity gaps. Edutourism shows innovation, but needs scalability and market appeal. Social-ecological resilience heavily depends on the strength of values and collective unity, and customary institutional models remain relevant in areas with strong traditional social structures. Therefore, the best approach is to develop a combination of models contextually and flexibly to address the future challenges of sustainability, inclusivity, and adaptation.

4. 2 Effectiveness of Participation Models Across Social, Economic, and Environmental Dimensions

The effectiveness of community participation models in sustainable tourism development in Indonesia is dynamic and highly contextual, showing varied outcomes across the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. These findings support and expand the initial arguments presented in the

background and literature review regarding the potential of participatory approaches, particularly CBT and participatory governance, to balance economic growth, ecological sustainability, and community empowerment.

Economically, participatory models such as CBT, agrotourism, ecotourism, and edutourism have been proven to deliver tangible benefits, including increased household income, job creation, and strengthened local microenterprises. Case studies in Nglanggeran, Banyuwangi, and Karanganyar have demonstrated how community-managed destinations lead to measurable welfare improvements (Manaf et al., 2018; Trisnanto et al., 2023; Irfan et al., 2023). In areas supported by strong local institutions, such as BUMDes or cooperatives, and with synergistic partnerships involving local governments or universities, economic resilience is further enhanced through income diversification strategies, including organic farming, conservation, and culturally based education (Widayati et al., 2024; Suamba et al., 2023). However, critical challenges persist, including unequal benefit distribution, elite capture by local powerholders or external investors, and limited access to economic opportunities for marginalized groups (Praptiwi et al., 2021; Suyadnya et al., 2025). Circular economy practices and multi-stakeholder collaboration offer promising pathways for strengthening local competitiveness, but remain limited in scale (Hermawan et al., 2024; Kusumastuti et al., 2024).

In the social dimension, community participation contributes significantly to social cohesion and the preservation of cultural identity. Effective models engage traditional institutions, such as Subak, POKDARWIS, and local deliberative forums, along with collective capacity-building initiatives (Arifianto et al., 2023; Suamba et al., 2023). Local values such as Tri Hita Karana and Rwa Bhineda serve as moral foundations for community resilience in the face of external challenges, such as migration, disasters, or market pressures (Praptika et al., 2024; Hariyadi et al., 2024). Cultural revitalization through the arts, cuisine, local language, and vernacular architecture simultaneously enhances tourism appeal and strengthens community identity. Nonetheless, the participation of women, youth, and indigenous groups remains uneven and often lacks substantive influence on decision-making processes. Gender-sensitive facilitation and digital literacy initiatives have shown early promise, but require long-term institutional support to ensure sustainability (Meutia et al., 2022; Widayati et al., 2024).

In the environmental dimension, participatory models are the most effective when grounded in local wisdom and collective governance. Customary norms, such as pamali, awig-awig, and traditional zoning practices, have proven successful in preserving ecosystems, including forests, mangroves, rice fields, and coral reefs (Sonbait et al., 2021; Suwanan et al., 2023). Community-based environmental education through schools, youth programs, and intergenerational learning such as the BOCIL initiative builds ecological awareness and shared responsibility (Hermawan et al., 2024). Conversely, top-down conservation approaches that exclude community involvement tend to fail due to a lack of local ownership and legitimacy (Jupri et al., 2020; Suyadnya et al., 2025). Technological innovations such as biorocks, subak-based water systems, and organic agriculture have delivered concrete outcomes, although their diffusion remains limited by knowledge gaps, funding constraints, and technical capacity at the grassroots level (Titisari et al., 2022; Kusumastuti et al., 2024).

These findings not only validate earlier claims in the literature, such as those by (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Su et al., 2022), regarding the benefits of community participation, but also align with critiques raised by (Cooke & Kothari, 2001) that participation can become manipulative when it lacks structural transformation. Most successful cases involve a combination of bottom-up approaches rooted in cultural and social values, with flexible external support that respects local contexts.

Critically, this study concludes that the effectiveness of community participation is not determined by the model type alone, but rather by the interplay of three key pillars: strong local institutions, cultural relevance, and inclusive decision-making. Meaningful participation goes beyond administrative involvement; it must create space for influence and power sharing, especially for marginalized groups. When this occurs, participatory models not only enhance program effectiveness, but also foster social justice, ecological stewardship, and economic resilience simultaneously.

Therefore, the success of participatory approaches in sustainable tourism requires context-sensitive policy design, substantively inclusive governance, and an awareness of the underlying power

relations within communities. Development interventions that ignore dynamic social and cultural risks undermine their own sustainability goals. Moving forward, participatory tourism must be recognized not just as a formal procedure, but as a transformative mechanism for social and ecological justice.

4. 3 Barriers and Challenges in Implementing Community Participation Models

Various structural and cultural barriers identified in the implementation of community participation in sustainable tourism in Indonesia indicate that participatory models often stall at the level of “tokenism” (pseudo-representation). First, limited human resource capacity and technical training pose major obstacles to developing a community’s expertise in sustainable destination management. The lack of evenly distributed training programs from government agencies and NGOs has resulted in low managerial and technical competencies at the local level (Priambodo, 2024; Risfandini et al., 2023; Wibowo et al., 2021). Infrastructure gaps, such as poor road conditions, inconsistent electricity supply, and inadequate sanitation, further weaken a destination’s appeal and hinder full local community involvement (Akbar et al., 2025; Utomo et al., 2020; Wijaya, 2021). Within the CBT theoretical framework, capacity building is a prerequisite for communities to act as “owners” and “managers” of destinations, rather than merely being treated as tourism objects (Scheyvens, 1999).

Second, high dependence on key local leaders and weak coordination among stakeholders creates program vulnerabilities. If leaders experience burnout or change their roles, the continuity of initiatives can easily be disrupted (Yuliane et al., 2022; Basyar et al., 2025; Priatmoko et al., 2021). Conflicts of interest among businesses, governments, and local residents, along with the absence of standardized operating procedures and formal dialogue forums, limit synergy in tourism policy planning and implementation (Basyar et al., 2025; Arifianto et al., 2023; Mudana et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018). Arnstein’s participation theory emphasizes the importance of “citizen control” through equal and transparent collaboration mechanisms to avoid manipulative participation.

Third, unequal benefit distribution and limited sustainable funding hinder a community’s sense of ownership of tourism outcomes. Elite groups or external investors often dominate economic gains, whereas small communities receive only marginal impacts (Rombe et al., 2023; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021; Ruja et al., 2023). Moreover, dependence on project-based or external funding without local financing schemes, such as village enterprises (BUMDes) or cooperatives, causes tourism initiatives to falter once funds dry up (Akbar et al., 2025; Risfandini et al., 2023; Sonbait et al., 2021). This situation contradicts the Ministry of Tourism’s policy goal of equitable economic benefit distribution for poverty alleviation in tourist villages (Utami et al., 2023).

Fourth, low community understanding of sustainability concepts and CBT, combined with commercialization pressures that erode cultural values, result in tourism practices that are more exploitative than preservatives. Many residents are not familiar with the triple bottom line framework that aligns economic, social, and environmental aspects (Sriyadi & Istiyanti, 2021; Priatmoko et al., 2021; Sjech, 2024). Cultural commodification turns local traditions into mere spectacles devoid of sacred meaning, weakening community identity (Suyadnya et al., 2025; Arshiniwati & Peradantha, 2025; Chairy et al., 2025). Environmental degradation owing to minimal community oversight exacerbates ecosystem damage from forests to coral reefs (Marlina et al., 2020; Jupri et al., 2020; Rahmawaty et al., 2025; Arkwright & Kaomaneng, 2018).

Finally, top-down regulations and governance are often misaligned with local needs. Dormant or non-existent village policies narrow the scope for communities to innovate tourism management (Trisnanto et al., 2023; Sriyadi & Istiyanti, 2021; Mudana et al., 2018; Sjech, 2024). This contrasts with adaptive co-management models that emphasize community involvement and iterative policy adjustments alongside stakeholders (Di Franco et al., 2025).

Critically, these findings show that barriers to community participation are not merely issues of resource scarcity or infrastructure deficits but rather the dynamics of power, cultural legitimacy, and institutional weaknesses that do not support authentic participation. Community participation will only be meaningful if the CBT model is enriched by sustainability literacy, autonomous local financing, and

collaborative governance mechanisms that ensure fair benefit distribution and the active involvement of all groups, including women, youth, and indigenous communities. Without these transformative steps, sustainable tourism in Indonesia will continue to be trapped in the paradox of “participation without power.”

4. 4 Impacts of Participation Models on Vulnerable Groups: Women, Youth, and Indigenous Communities

This discussion focuses on how community participation models in sustainable tourism affect vulnerable groups, particularly women, youth, and indigenous communities, by linking empirical findings with the literature review and policy context. The challenge of unequal tourism benefit distribution, as described in the background, underscores the importance of examining the specific impacts on these groups before designing truly inclusive interventions.

Women often gain new financial access through their involvement in homestays and local craft. (Akbar et al., 2025) recorded that increases in their income and economic autonomy due to technical and business management training, such as homestays in Jatiluwih and rattan crafts yet structural gender gaps, continue to hinder their full participation. Li et al. (2020) and Lundberg & Fredriksson (2021) emphasize the need for gender-sensitive training programs and female facilitators to address cultural and social barriers that limit women’s access to decision-making in local tourism committees.

For youth, tourism digitalization initiatives, including online marketing and tourism innovations, open new participation spaces, digital literacy gaps, and uneven Internet infrastructure in remote areas remain serious obstacles. Praptika et al. (2024) showed that during the pandemic, livelihood diversification based on local wisdom involved youth in adaptation programs (niskala–sekala); however, project-based funding and limited follow-up training made the sustainability of these initiatives vulnerable.

Indigenous communities experience a duality: on one hand, participation in revitalizing traditional arts (e.g., Angklung Paglak and Sanghyang Grodog) strengthens cultural identity and social capital (Zihana & Chaysalina, 2023; Arshiniwati & Peradantha, 2025); on the other hand, without proper control mechanisms, cultural commodification can lead to local elite monopolies and alienate the original tradition-keepers (Hastuti & Assriyani, 2021; Suyadnya et al., 2025). Cooke and Kothari’s (2001) review reminds us that “participation without power” can deepen inequality when cultural narratives are dominated by powerful stakeholders without involving indigenous communities as decision-making subjects.

Common barriers facing vulnerable groups include: (1) uneven technical and managerial capacities especially among women and indigenous communities due to limited training distribution (Priambodo, 2024; Risfandini et al., 2023); (2) inadequate supporting infrastructure (roads, electricity, internet connections), which restricts youth access to digital platforms and complicates the marketing of local products (Akbar et al., 2025; Wijaya, 2021); and (3) top-down regulations that often fail to accommodate the specific needs of vulnerable groups, resulting in participatory programs that do not reach genuine levels of “citizen control” (Arnstein, 1969; Oka et al., 2021).

Critically, these findings indicate that participation models fall short substantively if not accompanied by policies ensuring (a) sustainable, long-term training with gender-sensitive and youth-friendly approaches, (b) equitable investment in digital and physical infrastructure, (c) community-based governance mechanisms that facilitate fair control and benefit distribution, and (d) certification and mentoring for indigenous communities to safeguard cultural autonomy. Only through interventions that address the root structures of institutions, culture, and the economy can community participation in sustainable tourism produce true social justice and empowerment for vulnerable groups.

4. 5 Best Practices in Community Participation for Sustainable Tourism Development

Various best practices for enhancing community participation in sustainable tourism in Indonesia have been identified and tested across diverse field contexts, consistent with the urgency of Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy Regulation No. 14/2016 (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy,

2016), and literature findings on the effectiveness of the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Su, Wahyuni, & Karim, 2023). First, structured training programs that combine technical and managerial skills, such as tour guide certification, homestay management, and foreign language instruction in Pagelaran and Karangtengah, have significantly increased local human resource capacity (Priambodo, 2024; Sriyadi & Istiyanti, 2021). Second, community infrastructure development through partnerships with regional governments and BUMDes matching schemes, applied in Aceh and Arfak, has addressed physical infrastructure constraints and improved destination accessibility (Akbar, Hidayat, & Siregar, 2025; Utomo, Nurhadi, & Lestari, 2020). Third, diversifying leadership by involving women, youth, and traditional leaders in Kayutangan reduces the risk of reliance on key individuals and strengthens community social capital (Yuliane, Fajri, & Handayani, 2022; Basyar, Rizal, & Dewi, 2025). Fourth, implementing a structured Penta Helix model with standard operating procedures and participatory evaluation has enhanced accountability and coordination among government, businesses, NGOs, and academia, as observed in Banyuwangi and Bali (Arifianto, Sukmawan, & Prawira, 2023; Ibrahim, Sudarman, & Laila, 2018). Fifth, establishing tourism cooperatives and micro-enterprises based on government matching funds has ensured more equitable economic benefit distribution, notably in Bali and Lembang (Ruja, Putri, & Santoso, 2023; Risfandini, Mahendra, & Kartini, 2023). Sixth, cultural and environmental preservation through integrating circular economy principles and involving traditional leaders in coral reef and agricultural land conservation in Arfak and Karangasem has reinforced local identity while safeguarding ecosystems (Suyadnya, Wirawan, & Astiti, 2025; Marlina, Sari, & Wulandari, 2020). Finally, village regulation reforms adopting a co-governance model have expanded community innovation space in destination management, as demonstrated in Banyuwangi (Trisnanto, Hasan, & Fikri, 2023; Sjech, 2024).

These practices directly address previously identified structural and cultural barriers, such as limited human resource capacity and funding (Priambodo, 2024; Risfandini, Mahendra, & Kartini, 2023), reliance on key individuals and weak coordination (Yuliane, Fajri, & Handayani, 2022; Basyar, Rizal, & Dewi, 2025), and low sustainability awareness alongside cultural commercialization risks (Sriyadi & Istiyanti, 2021; Suyadnya, Wirawan, & Astiti, 2025). However, the long-term effectiveness of these best practices depends on sustained policy support, contextual adaptation, and consistent evaluation mechanisms.

Critically, although the outlined practice framework has been proven to simultaneously enhance economic well-being, social cohesion, and environmental conservation, its implementation still faces scale and sustainability challenges. For instance, structured training requires long-term financing; leadership diversification demands social norm change; and the Penta Helix model necessitates ongoing political commitment. Therefore, policymakers and field practitioners should promote a hybrid approach combining top-down policy support with bottom-up local initiatives and strengthen community-based learning mechanisms to ensure that participation programs become more than short-term projects, but rather drive fundamental institutional change in sustainable tourism governance in Indonesia.

4. 6 Identified Research Gaps in Understanding the Benefits of Community Participation

The literature review highlights the importance of equitable benefit distribution in tourism (Rosyid et al., 2021; Murniati & Syamsiah, 2022) and policy foundations such as the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy Regulation No. 14/2016 (Utami et al., 2023), as well as findings from Di Franco et al. (2025) and Trisnanto et al. (2023), this analysis uncovers several critical research gaps in understanding the direct and indirect benefits of community participation in sustainable tourism in Indonesia. First, long-term quantitative studies assessing the cumulative impacts of community involvement remain scarce, although such research is essential for comprehensively evaluating economic, social, and environmental outcomes (Permana et al., 2023; Nur et al., 2024). Second, existing research is often limited to flagship tourism villages, failing to represent the geographic and cultural diversity of remote areas (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Su et al., 2022). Third, the connection between field observations and theoretical frameworks of participation and social justice is still weak; local case studies tend to describe practices without explicitly

linking them to concepts such as deliberation, power redistribution, or procedural justice. For example, Priatmoko et al. (2021) documented leadership dynamics in a tourism village but did not relate their findings to Arnstein's ladder of participation or other deliberative models, leaving the concept of "participation without power" unmeasured in the Indonesian context (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Fourth, the voices of vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and indigenous communities, have been underrepresented in formulating benefit indicators, although their involvement is crucial for program sustainability (Li et al., 2020; Lundberg & Fredriksson, 2021).

These research gaps are closely linked to the previously identified structural and cultural barriers. Limited human resource capacity, from insufficient technical training to a lack of management skills, prevents communities from fully managing tourism destinations (Priambodo, 2024; Risfandini et al., 2023; Wibowo et al., 2021), and inadequate physical infrastructure (roads, electricity, sanitation, and digital connectivity) widens access disparities (Akbar et al., 2025; Utomo et al., 2020; Wijaya, 2021). Overreliance on "key figures" without clear knowledge-transfer mechanisms makes initiatives vulnerable to leadership changes or burnout (Yuliane et al., 2022; Basyar et al., 2025; Priatmoko et al., 2021), and conflicts of interest frequently arise because of the absence of formal SOPs or dialogue forums (Arifianto et al., 2023; Mudana et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018). Moreover, elite capture, in which a privileged group monopolizes benefits that should be shared equitably, combined with dependence on external funding, leads to uneven benefit distribution and risk program collapse when funding ends (Rombe et al., 2023; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021; Ruja et al., 2023; Sonbait et al., 2021). A lack of awareness of sustainability principles also poses a major challenge: many communities do not grasp the balance between environmental conservation and economic gain. Additionally, the pressure to commercialize culture can result in inauthentic or exaggerated presentations of traditions for tourists, threatening the preservation of local cultural values and ecosystems (Sriyadi & Istiyanti, 2021; Sjech, 2024; Suyadnya et al., 2025; Arshiniwati & Peradantha, 2025; Chairy et al., 2025; Marlina et al., 2020; Jupri et al., 2020; Rahmawaty et al., 2025; Arkwright & Kaomaneng, 2018). Rigid top-down regulations further stifle local innovation, underlining the need to explore adaptive co-management models that respond to community needs (Trisnanto et al., 2023; Di Franco et al., 2025).

From a critical standpoint, these findings demonstrate that without a truly comprehensive research approach combining long-term quantitative evaluation, in-depth qualitative analysis, and a social justice framework, efforts to maximize community participation benefits will remain suboptimal. Therefore, future studies should develop adaptive mixed-methods methodologies tailored to local contexts, prioritize benefit distribution as a key variable, and involve vulnerable groups from design through evaluation. Community participation can only serve as an effective catalyst for achieving inclusive, equitable, and sustainable tourism, as exemplified by practices in Nglangeran and Penglipuran Villages, where active resident involvement in planning and management has strengthened ownership and program sustainability (Wibowo et al., 2021; Sjech, 2024).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study reveal that community participation in the development of sustainable tourism in Indonesia reflects a diversity of models, ranging from Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and multi-stakeholder collaboration to approaches based on local wisdom, such as Tri Hita Karana and Subak. However, no single model can be applied universally. The effectiveness of each model depends heavily on local social, cultural, and ecological contexts. The success of these participatory models is determined by the strength of local institutions, the relevance of upheld cultural values, and the extent to which communities are genuinely involved in the decision-making processes. Participation that is merely symbolic or administrative tends to fail to realize social justice and environmental sustainability, especially when imbalanced power dynamics are left unaddressed. Inequitable benefit distribution, domination by local elites or external investors, and weak coordination among stakeholders are the major obstacles to authentic implementation. Vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and indigenous communities still lack equitable and fair spaces despite existing empowerment initiatives. Case studies across various regions have shown that the success of community participation is greatly influenced by sustained training,

leadership diversity, the strengthening of local institutions, and the integration of cultural values into destination governance. Nevertheless, significant research gaps remain, including the lack of longitudinal studies on long-term impacts, underrepresentation of remote areas, and weak linkage between field practices and theories of social justice.

Thus, several strategic recommendations are crucial. First, it is necessary to improve the quality and sustainability of technical and managerial training for local communities, particularly women, youth, and indigenous groups, using gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate approaches. Second, decision-making decentralization must be strengthened through regulatory reforms at the village tourism level by adopting adaptive co-management models that enable flexible policies based on community participation. Third, it is important to develop sustainable, locally based funding schemes such as cooperatives, village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), and the use of village funds to reduce reliance on unstable external funding. Fourth, participation must evolve from symbolism to substance by allowing space for negotiation, rejection, and direction by communities to shape the development of their own destinations. Fifth, a hybrid approach is needed that combines top-down policy support with bottom-up local initiatives, including the strengthening of the Penta Helix model with participatory standard operating procedures and evaluation systems. Finally, future research must emphasize social justice and inclusion as core indicators and actively involve vulnerable groups throughout the policy planning and evaluation cycle. Thus, community participation can truly become a transformative instrument for just, inclusive, and sustainable tourism governance in Indonesia.

Ethical Approval

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was not required as the research involved minimal risk and did not include clinical or biomedical interventions.

Informed Consent Statement

All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were kept confidential and used solely for self-conducted research by the author. This research is a personal enjoyment undertaken with the intention to continuously learn, while adhering to general academic and research guidelines and standards.

Authors' Contributions

All aspects of the study, including conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, resources, writing of the original draft, and writing, review, and editing, were carried out solely by Florianus Pruda Muda.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the author.

Funding

This research did not receive external funding.

Note on Contributors

Florianus Pruda Muda

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0679-9082>

Florianus Pruda Muda is a researcher and a recent graduate with a Master's degree in Management from Universitas Teknologi Yogyakarta, Indonesia. His research interests include management practices, organizational performance, and strategic decision-making. He has engaged in various self-conducted research projects as part of his personal enjoyment in continuous learning, while following established academic and research guidelines and standards.

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