



Social Dynamics and Community Resilience in a Tourism Dependent Heritage Area Slarong Cave Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

Tourism destinations function not only as economic spaces but also as social systems where community livelihoods and interactions shape sustainability, particularly in small-scale heritage tourism and post-pandemic contexts.

This study examines the social dynamics of a tourism-dependent community in the Slarong Cave area, focusing on social interaction, livelihood strategies, and community resilience.

A qualitative case study was conducted using observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Informants were purposively selected, and data were analyzed through an interactive model with triangulation.

Findings show strong social capital through cooperation and mutual support, which supports economic resilience. However, high dependence on tourism creates vulnerability, while weak integration of cultural products and limited infrastructure constrain economic opportunities and visitor engagement.

The sustainability of small-scale heritage tourism is socially embedded, relying on community interaction and adaptive practices. Strengthening community-based economic integration and improving infrastructure are key to enhancing resilience and tourism performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations are not only economic spaces but also social arenas where interactions, livelihoods, and cultural meanings are continuously negotiated. In the context of small-scale heritage tourism, the sustainability of a destination is closely linked to the social dynamics of the communities that depend on it. Previous studies have emphasized the role of tourism in generating regional income and promoting heritage conservation (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990), yet there remains limited attention to how local social relations and community-based practices shape the resilience of tourism-dependent areas, particularly in post-crisis situations.

Slarong Cave, located in Guwosari, Pajangan District, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region, represents a tourism destination that integrates historical significance with a relatively preserved karst landscape. Its association with the historical struggle of Prince Diponegoro and its proximity to the urban center of Yogyakarta position it as a potential site for both educational and recreational tourism. However, beyond its physical and historical attributes, Slarong Cave functions as a socio-economic space where local communities engage in tourism-related activities, including small-scale trade and craft production. These activities form the basis of local livelihoods, making the community highly dependent on the continuity of tourist flows.

From a social perspective, tourism areas often generate patterns of interaction that reflect forms of social capital, including cooperation, trust, and information exchange among local actors (Putnam, 2000). Such social capital plays a crucial role in sustaining economic activities, especially in contexts where formal institutional support is limited. In addition, the concept of community resilience highlights the ability of local communities to adapt to external shocks, such as economic downturns or disruptions in tourism flows (Adger, 2000; Biggs et al., 2012). In tourism-dependent communities, resilience is often manifested through informal cooperation, diversification of income sources, and collective adaptation strategies.

Despite its potential, Slarong Cave faces multiple challenges related to environmental conservation, infrastructure limitations, and fluctuating tourist visitation. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges by significantly reducing visitor numbers and weakening local economic activities (Utami & Kafabih, 2021; Sugihamretha, 2020). While existing tourism studies have examined destination recovery and sustainable management (UNWTO, 2021), there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of how local communities socially and economically respond to such disruptions within small-scale heritage tourism contexts.

Furthermore, community-based tourism (CBT) literature emphasizes that local participation and the integration of cultural products into tourism experiences are essential for achieving sustainable outcomes (Suansri, 2013). However, in many cases, local economic activities—such as traditional crafts—remain weakly connected to the overall tourism system, resulting in limited value creation and increased vulnerability to external market fluctuations. This gap suggests the need to examine tourism not only as a development strategy but also as a social system embedded in everyday community practices.



Therefore, this study aims to analyze the social dynamics of a tourism-dependent community in the Slarong Cave area by focusing on patterns of interaction, livelihood strategies, and community adaptation in the face of changing tourism conditions. By positioning tourism as a socio-economic context rather than merely a development object, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how local social structures influence the sustainability of small-scale heritage tourism destinations.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the social dynamics of a tourism-dependent community in the Slarong Cave area. A qualitative case study is appropriate for examining complex social interactions, meanings, and adaptive strategies within a specific real-life context (Yin, 2018). This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how local communities construct and sustain their livelihoods within a tourism environment, particularly under conditions of uncertainty and change.

The research was conducted in the Slarong Cave tourist area, located in Guwosari, Pajangan District, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region. This site was selected purposively due to its dual characteristics as a heritage tourism destination and a community-based economic space, where local residents actively engage in tourism-related activities such as trading and craft production. The area also represents a context of post-pandemic recovery, making it relevant for analyzing community adaptation and resilience.

Research participants consisted of destination managers, local traders, small business owners, and community members who are directly involved in or affected by tourism activities. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their knowledge, experience, and level of engagement in the tourism system (Patton, 2015). This sampling strategy ensures that the data reflects diverse perspectives within the local socio-economic structure.

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to capture the physical condition of the tourism area, patterns of visitor movement, and everyday interactions among local actors. In-depth interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to tourism dependence, economic activities, and social relationships. Documentation, including field notes, photographs, and relevant records, was used to support data triangulation and provide contextual evidence.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied triangulation techniques, including method triangulation, source triangulation, and theoretical triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Method triangulation involved comparing data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation. Source triangulation was conducted by cross-checking information among different informant groups, such as managers, traders, and community members. Theoretical triangulation was applied by interpreting the data through multiple conceptual lenses, particularly social capital, community resilience, and community-based tourism, to ensure analytical depth and consistency.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). During the data

reduction stage, relevant information related to social interaction, livelihood strategies, and community adaptation was identified and coded. The data were then organized into thematic categories, such as cooperation patterns, economic vulnerability, and collective resilience. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn by linking empirical findings with theoretical frameworks to interpret how social dynamics shape the sustainability of the tourism-dependent community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism Decline and Livelihood Vulnerability

Tourist visitation patterns at Slarong Cave have experienced a significant decline since the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in reduced economic circulation within the local community. This condition reflects the vulnerability of tourism-dependent livelihoods, particularly in small-scale destinations that rely heavily on seasonal and weekend visits (UNWTO, 2021). The decline not only affects destination performance but also directly impacts local traders and small business actors whose income depends on visitor presence. From a social-dynamics perspective, this situation illustrates how tourism functions as a structural economic driver, where disruptions in visitor flows translate into immediate livelihood instability. In line with the concept of community resilience, such shocks require adaptive responses from local actors to sustain their economic activities (Adger, 2000; Biggs et al., 2012). However, limited diversification of attractions and weak integration of local products into tourism experiences contribute to a slower recovery process.



Figure 1 Atmosphere in the Slarong Cave area

Social Capital and Cooperative Economic Practices

One of the most significant findings of this study lies in the strong pattern of social interaction among local traders. The relationships observed are characterized by cooperation, mutual assistance, and information sharing, reflecting the presence of bonding social capital within the community (Putnam, 2000). These interactions include sharing production resources, exchanging market information, and providing emotional support, particularly among elderly traders who rely on tourism as their primary source of income.

Rather than competing, traders tend to adopt collective strategies, such as coordinating production during peak seasons and distributing orders among members. These practices function as an informal economic safety net, enabling the community to cope with fluctuating demand and limited access to formal support systems. This finding supports previous studies suggesting that strong social capital enhances the adaptive capacity of communities facing economic uncertainty.

Table 1. Social Interactions Among Traders

Category of Social Interaction	Form of Interaction	Activity Examples	Implications for Economic Resilience
Informal Cooperation	Helping each other in certain production processes	Borrowing labor or tools to fulfill large orders	Speeds up order completion and reduces delays
Production Information Exchange	Sharing techniques or simple patterns	Senior craftsmen give guidance on patterns or materials	Improves product quality and consistency
Market Information Exchange	Sharing information about collectors, prices, or orders	Informing about stock needs or price changes	Stabilizes income in a fluctuating market
Daily Social Support	Emotional relationships as a small community	Visiting each other and working while chatting	Reduces economic pressure and strengthens social cohesion
Relations with Collectors	Collective distribution collaboration	Sending production results through the same collector	Reduces distribution costs and facilitates marketing
Seasonal Order Distribution	Arrangement of labor and time	Helping each other during wedding seasons	Increases production capacity without additional workers

Furthermore, this cooperative structure demonstrates that the sustainability of tourism-dependent areas is not solely determined by physical attractions or infrastructure, but also by the strength of local social systems. In this context, tourism sustainability is socially embedded, relying on everyday practices of collaboration and trust.

Craft Production as Cultural Labor and Economic Vulnerability

The production of wooden fan crafts represents both a cultural expression and a livelihood strategy for the local community. However, its contribution to the tourism sector remains limited due to weak integration into the overall tourism experience. Most sales are generated through external demand, such as wedding souvenirs, rather than direct tourist consumption

Figure 2 Local Fan Craft Products



From the perspective of **community-based tourism (CBT)**, this condition indicates a disconnect between local cultural production and destination value creation (Suansri, 2013). Ideally, cultural products should be embedded within tourism experiences through activities such as workshops, demonstrations, or storytelling. The absence of such integration reduces the economic value of local crafts and increases dependence on unstable external markets.

Moreover, this situation highlights the concept of **cultural labor**, where traditional skills are maintained by the community but are not fully recognized within the tourism economy. As a result, local producers remain economically vulnerable despite possessing culturally valuable resources. This finding suggests that strengthening the link between cultural production and tourism experience is essential for enhancing both economic resilience and cultural sustainability.

Infrastructure Limitations and Their Social Implications

The physical condition of tourism facilities in the Slarong Cave area shows uneven maintenance, particularly in family-oriented spaces such as playgrounds. Deteriorating infrastructure not only reduces visitor comfort but also affects the socio-economic dynamics of the community by limiting visitor engagement and length of stay.

Figure 3 Condition of Playground at Tourist Attraction Location



From a social perspective, inadequate infrastructure can be understood as a structural constraint that shapes local livelihood opportunities. Poor facility conditions may discourage repeat visits, thereby reducing income stability for traders and weakening the overall tourism ecosystem. This finding aligns with studies indicating that infrastructure quality significantly influences visitor satisfaction and economic outcomes (Widodo, 2019). Thus, infrastructure issues should not be viewed merely as technical problems, but as factors that directly affect community welfare and participation in tourism. Improving facility quality, therefore, becomes part of strengthening the social sustainability of the destination.

Environmental Features, Risk Perception, and Community Adaptation

Natural elements, such as the waterfall in the Slarong Cave area, play an important role in shaping the tourism experience. However, limited safety measures, slippery access paths, and the absence of interpretive signage contribute to increased risk perception among visitors. From the perspective of ecotourism and environmental management, safe access and environmental interpretation are crucial for enhancing visitor experience and ensuring sustainability (Sunkar & Santoso, 2018). At the same time, these limitations also influence community income, as reduced visitor comfort can lead to shorter stays and lower spending. Without proper management, tourism pressure on natural resources may result in environmental degradation, such as soil erosion and water quality disturbances (Farrant, 2017). In this context, community adaptation is not only economic but also ecological, requiring awareness and participation in maintaining environmental balance. This finding reinforces the idea that tourism sustainability depends on the interaction between environmental conditions, visitor experience, and community practices, rather than on physical attractions alone.

Without a clear management framework, tourism pressure has the potential to cause path erosion, soil compaction, and water quality disturbances—risks common to karst-based waterfall tourism (Farrant, 2017). Strengthening the path structure, implementing capacity-based visitation limits, and providing official viewing points can reduce direct pressure on wetlands and improve the visitor experience. Thus, the waterfall serves not only as a recreational attraction but also as an educational tool to introduce the ecological value of the Slarong area to tourists.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Slarong Cave is not merely a heritage tourism destination, but also a social and economic space in which local communities negotiate livelihood, cooperation, and cultural continuity. The findings reveal that the sustainability of the destination is closely linked to the social dynamics of the community, particularly the presence of strong social capital manifested through cooperation, information exchange, and mutual support among local traders. These informal social structures function as adaptive mechanisms that enable the community to cope with fluctuating tourist visitation and economic uncertainty.



The study also highlights that tourism decline, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, has exposed the vulnerability of tourism-dependent livelihoods. Limited integration of local cultural products, such as wooden fan crafts, into the tourism experience further weakens the economic resilience of the community. In addition, inadequate infrastructure and safety limitations not only affect visitor satisfaction but also have broader implications for local income stability and community participation in tourism activities.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the understanding of tourism as a socially embedded system, where sustainability is shaped not only by physical attractions and management strategies but also by everyday social relations and collective adaptation practices. By integrating perspectives of social capital, community resilience, and community-based tourism, this study offers a more nuanced view of how small-scale heritage destinations operate in contexts of uncertainty.

Practically, the findings suggest that tourism development strategies should move beyond infrastructure improvement and promotion, and instead emphasize the strengthening of community-based economic integration, such as incorporating local crafts into tourism experiences through workshops, demonstrations, and storytelling. In addition, improving basic infrastructure and safety measures is essential to enhance visitor comfort while supporting local economic activities.

This study is limited by its qualitative scope and focus on a single case, which may not fully represent broader tourism dynamics in other regions. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-method approaches, expand comparative case studies, and explore the role of digital tourism strategies in strengthening the connection between local communities and tourism markets. Further investigation into the long-term evolution of community resilience in tourism-dependent areas would also provide valuable insights.

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