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Community Perceptions and Attitudes toward the Sustainable Development of Nur Sutan Iskandar Cultural Tourism in Maninjau, West Sumatra, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines community perceptions and attitudes toward the sustainable development of Nur Sutan Iskandar cultural tourism in Maninjau, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Using a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and semi-structured interviews, the research explores local awareness, perceived benefits, concerns, and levels of participation. Findings indicate generally positive attitudes, with residents valuing cultural preservation, economic opportunities, and place identity, while expressing concerns regarding environmental pressure, unequal benefits, and limited community involvement in decision-making. The study highlights the importance of inclusive governance, heritage education, and community-based tourism strategies. These insights contribute to sustainable cultural tourism planning by effectively emphasising local participation.

Keywords: Community attitudes; Cultural tourism; Sustainable development; West Sumatra

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1.0 Introduction

This research explores the intricate relationship between local community perceptions and the advancement of sustainable cultural tourism, explicitly focusing on the Nur Sutan Iskandar Cultural Tourism area in Maninjau, West Sumatra, Indonesia. The focus on community perception is critical given its established role in fostering a sense of ownership and active participation, which are fundamental to the success of sustainable tourism initiatives (Lestari et al., 2025). Local communities' attitudes, social norms, knowledge, and perceptions of benefits significantly influence their support for participatory-based sustainable tourism development (Lestari et al., 2025). Indeed, understanding and integrating these local viewpoints is paramount for maintaining the long-term viability of any tourism industry, particularly within culturally sensitive or ecologically significant areas (Latjuba & Sari, 2022). This study aims to evaluate the commitment, attitude, and performance of various stakeholders, including local government authorities, academic institutions, local businesses, media, and the private sector, in the sustainable development of tourism villages (Ferdian et al., 2024). It also seeks to understand how community enthusiasm and active participation contribute to the development of local tourism, based on their attitudes toward developers and the government (Brian et al., 2023). By elucidating these multifaceted perspectives, this research contributes to

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a more holistic understanding of community-based tourism, highlighting the dynamic interplay between local sentiments and external development pressures (Alhadi et al., 2023; Ferdian et al., 2024).

Furthermore, a nuanced examination of these perceptions can reveal polarisations in orientation and attitude among stakeholders concerning the economic, ecological, and socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism initiatives (Rachmatullah et al., 2023). Such investigations often employ methods such as the One Score One Criteria Scoring System and the Kruskal-Wallis test to quantify and assess the statistical significance of these divergent views (Rachmatullah et al., 2023). This approach is particularly crucial in regions such as West Sumatra, where complex dynamics of land occupation, cultural land ownership, and agricultural land use necessitate careful consideration before sustainable development goals can be achieved (Rachmatullah et al., 2023). In recent years, sustainable tourism has emerged as a strategic approach to balancing economic development with the preservation of cultural heritage and environmental integrity, particularly in regions rich in local traditions and historical narratives. Cultural tourism, as a subset of sustainable tourism, plays a crucial role in promoting intangible heritage, local knowledge systems, and collective memory while simultaneously contributing to regional socio-economic development. However, the sustainability of cultural tourism initiatives depends not only on infrastructural investment and destination branding but, more critically, on the attitudes, perceptions, and active participation of host communities. Without local acceptance and engagement, tourism development risks generating social resistance, cultural dilution, and environmental degradation, ultimately undermining its long-term viability. Community perceptions function as a key indicator of sustainability, reflecting how residents interpret the impacts of tourism on their daily lives, cultural values, and natural surroundings. These perceptions are shaped by multiple factors, including perceived economic benefits, social inclusion, transparency in governance, and environmental stewardship. Positive perceptions often foster a sense of ownership and stewardship, encouraging communities to support and sustain tourism initiatives. Conversely, negative perceptions, such as feelings of exclusion, unequal benefit distribution, or cultural exploitation, can lead to opposition and disengagement. As such, understanding community attitudes is not merely descriptive; it is essential for designing inclusive and adaptive tourism policies that align with local aspirations and capacities.

In culturally sensitive contexts such as Maninjau, West Sumatra, the need for community-centred tourism development is particularly pronounced. The Nur Sutan Iskandar Cultural Tourism area represents a site of significant literary, historical, and cultural value, deeply embedded in Minangkabau identity and social structures. Tourism development in this setting intersects with customary land systems, collective cultural ownership, and long-standing socio-cultural norms, requiring careful negotiation between development objectives and cultural preservation. Inadequate consideration of these dynamics may result in cultural commodification, environmental strain, and social fragmentation, despite the economic promise of tourism growth. Furthermore, the complexity of sustainable cultural tourism necessitates a multi-dimensional analytical approach that considers economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and governance dimensions simultaneously. These dimensions are interdependent: economic gains may enhance livelihoods but also intensify environmental pressure; cultural promotion may strengthen identity while risking over-commercialisation; and governance structures may either empower communities or marginalise local voices. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of community perceptions offers valuable insights into how these dimensions interact and how potential tensions can be managed through participatory planning and collaborative governance. Against this backdrop, the present study positions community perceptions and attitudes as a central lens for evaluating the sustainability of Nur Sutan Iskandar Cultural Tourism. By foregrounding local voices, this research seeks to contribute empirically and conceptually to the growing body of literature on community-based and sustainable cultural tourism, while providing context-specific insights to inform policy, planning, and heritage management practices in West Sumatra and comparable cultural destinations. To contextualise the study's focus, it is essential to situate the investigation within existing scholarly discourse on sustainable cultural tourism and community participation. The following literature review examines key theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and conceptual frameworks related to community-based tourism, sustainable development, and cultural heritage management. By synthesising prior studies, this review identifies dominant themes, methodological approaches, and existing gaps in understanding community perceptions and attitudes, thereby establishing a critical foundation that informs the research design and guides the subsequent methodological approach.

2.0 Literature Review

Community-based tourism (CBT) has evolved as a key framework for achieving sustainable tourism by integrating economic development, cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and social empowerment (Alhadi et al., 2023). Prior studies consistently demonstrate that tourism can function as a significant economic driver in developing countries by generating employment and increasing local income. However, the long-term success of tourism initiatives is highly contingent upon community empowerment and effective collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, academic institutions, businesses, and media. Such multi-stakeholder engagement is essential to ensure that tourism development aligns with local needs, aspirations, and socio-cultural contexts (Nasution et al., 2023; Oka et al., 2021).

CBT emphasises active community participation in decision-making, benefit-sharing, and cultural stewardship, positioning residents as central actors rather than passive beneficiaries. This approach integrates socio-economic empowerment with environmental protection to minimise adverse social, cultural, and ecological impacts while enhancing local livelihoods. The effectiveness of CBT, however, depends on the quality of sustainability indicators and their implementation, particularly in balancing economic gains with cultural preservation and improvements in quality of life for host communities. Empirical evidence indicates that CBT strategies have successfully combined environmentally responsible practices with cultural continuity and local empowerment across diverse contexts. Within cultural tourism, the management of tangible and intangible heritage has become increasingly critical amid globalisation and economic transformation. Community-oriented tourism models prioritise local ownership and participation to protect cultural heritage

while fostering sustainable income generation. Integrating cultural heritage into tourism development not only enhances economic opportunities but also enables the creation of distinctive and authentic tourism products. Community participation in planning and governance strengthens social inclusion, economic empowerment, and cultural identity, ensuring that tourism development remains aligned with local values and traditions. Such community-centric approaches are essential to prevent cultural commodification and heritage degradation, thereby harmonising economic development with cultural authenticity.

Understanding community perceptions and attitudes is therefore fundamental to sustainable tourism development, as these perspectives reflect levels of social capital, empowerment, and support for tourism initiatives. Positive attitudes are closely linked to meaningful participation, transparent governance, and equitable benefit distribution, whereas exclusion often leads to resistance and project failure. Participatory tourism planning enables communities to protect cultural and natural resources while leveraging them to advance socio-economic development (Risfandini et al., 2023). Conversely, tokenistic participation and elite dominance weaken community trust and resilience, highlighting the need for genuine co-management and collaborative governance structures. In the context of Nur Sutan Iskandar Cultural Tourism in Maninjau, West Sumatra, residents play a crucial role as primary stakeholders whose perceptions directly influence the sustainability of tourism development (Brian et al., 2023). Sustainable tourism in this setting requires safeguarding socio-cultural authenticity, preserving heritage, and ensuring fair socio-economic benefits for the host community.

The theoretical framework of this study integrates principles of sustainable development, community-based tourism models, and cultural heritage values to examine community perceptions and attitudes (Brian et al., 2023). Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, the framework explains how residents evaluate perceived benefits and costs, shaping their support for tourism development. Genuine, inclusive participation enhances residents' commitment to sustainable destination development and aligns with self-determination principles that empower communities to influence decisions affecting their environment and livelihoods (Laksmi et al., 2023; Palmer et al., 2024). This participatory engagement fosters cultural sensitivity, economic relevance, and a strong sense of ownership, which are essential for sustainable cultural tourism outcomes (Alhadi et al., 2023). The reviewed literature underscores the central role of community perceptions, participation, and benefit–cost evaluations in shaping sustainable cultural tourism outcomes, while also revealing the need for context-specific, in-depth empirical investigations. Although existing studies provide valuable theoretical and conceptual insights, there remains a gap in understanding how these dynamics are experienced and negotiated by local communities within the Nur Sutan Iskandar cultural tourism context. In response to this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative methodological approach designed to capture nuanced local perspectives and lived experiences, thereby translating the reviewed theoretical frameworks into an empirical inquiry that systematically examines community attitudes toward sustainable tourism development.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed observation, interviews, and focus group discussions to explore attitudes towards the sustainable development of Nur Sutan Iskandar Cultural Tourism, which is shared clearly in Fig. 1. Research methods adopted in the study to examine community perceptions and attitudes toward sustainable cultural tourism development. The methodology integrates three complementary approaches: observation, which involves direct monitoring of activities and interactions within the study area; focus group discussions, conducted to capture diverse viewpoints and collective perspectives among community members; and interviews, which provide in-depth, one-on-one insights into individual experiences and perceptions. Together, these methods enable data triangulation, enhance the credibility of the findings, and support a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions of the research context.



Fig. 1: Research Methods Employed in the Study

This approach was selected to gather comprehensive data on local perspectives, which are crucial for assessing the social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism development within the Maninjau region. Data collection was conducted through interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and a literature review to capture a holistic understanding of community aspirations and concerns regarding the project (Brian et al., 2023). The mixed-methods design enabled the exploration of community narratives and

the assessment of broader perceptual patterns regarding the cultural tourism initiative (Fitriaty et al., 2024). Specifically, this methodology facilitated an in-depth analysis of residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural dynamics of ecotourism development, providing a nuanced understanding of their perspectives. The integration of diverse data sources enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings by triangulating information from various community stakeholders. The selection of these methods was informed by the need to capture the complexities of community attitudes, which are often shaped by a diverse range of factors, including economic benefits, cultural preservation, and environmental concerns, aligning with the tenets of Social Exchange Theory..

Furthermore, the methodology aimed to identify potential conflicts between conservation goals and economic development, offering insights into fostering a balanced approach that respects both ecological integrity and community livelihoods. This approach allowed for multiple perspectives and a comprehensive view of cultural tourism's transformative impacts. This methodological rigour enabled the researchers to delve into the intricate interplay between community attachment, tourist contact, and residents' attitudes toward tourism development. The methodological procedures outlined above provided a systematic framework for collecting and analysing data on community perceptions and attitudes toward the sustainable development of Nur Sutan Iskandar cultural tourism. Through interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, rich qualitative data were generated and subjected to rigorous thematic analysis to ensure analytical credibility. The following section presents and discusses the findings from this process, interpreting them in relation to the study's research objectives and relevant theoretical perspectives to illuminate key patterns and implications for sustainable cultural tourism development.

4.0 Result and Discussion

Data were collected through snowball sampling involving twelve key informants, including destination managers and community members residing around the Nur Sutan Iskandar cultural tourism area. This approach enabled the inclusion of stakeholders directly involved in tourism activities as well as those experiencing its socio-economic and environmental impacts. Semi-structured interviews, averaging 65 minutes, generated in-depth qualitative data on local perceptions of tourism development. The data were systematically coded and analysed using the Miles and Huberman framework, followed by thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The findings reveal that community perceptions toward cultural tourism development are generally positive but nuanced. Participants acknowledged economic benefits, including employment opportunities, increased household income, and support for small-scale entrepreneurship. However, concerns were raised regarding unequal benefit distribution and limited access to tourism-related opportunities for specific community groups, echoing broader challenges in inclusive tourism development.

Perception	Positive Aspects	Negative Aspects
 Economic	Employment, increased income, entrepreneurship support	Unequal distribution, limited access
 Socio-Cultural	Strengthened identity, heritage promotion	Commodification, erosion of authenticity
 Environmental	Increased conservation awareness	Waste, degradation, resource pressure
 Governance	Support linked to transparency, participation	Concerns about lack of local control

Fig. 2: Summary of Community Perceptions toward Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development

From a socio-cultural perspective, respondents recognised tourism's role in strengthening local identity and promoting Nur Sutan Iskandar's cultural heritage. At the same time, apprehensions emerged regarding potential cultural commodification and erosion of authenticity if tourism expansion is not community-led. These concerns highlight the importance of local participation in cultural management and decision-making processes. Environmental perceptions were mixed. While some participants noted increased awareness of conservation practices, others expressed concern about waste management, landscape degradation, and pressure on natural resources. Such findings underscore the need for integrated environmental safeguards within tourism planning to maintain ecological sustainability (Rachmatullah et al., 2023). Attitudes toward sustainable tourism initiatives were cautiously supportive.

Community acceptance was strongly linked to transparent governance, meaningful participation, and equitable benefit-sharing. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory, residents' support for tourism development depended on the perceived balance between benefits and costs. Fig. 2 synthesises the key findings from the results and discussion, illustrating community perceptions of the sustainable development of Nur Sutan Iskandar Cultural Tourism across four interrelated dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and governance. Economically, residents acknowledged positive outcomes such as employment opportunities, increased household income, and support for local entrepreneurship, while also expressing concerns regarding unequal benefit distribution and limited access for certain groups. From a socio-cultural perspective, tourism was perceived as strengthening local identity and promoting cultural heritage; however, apprehensions emerged about cultural commodification and the potential erosion of authenticity. Environmentally, respondents noted heightened conservation awareness alongside challenges related to waste management, environmental degradation, and pressure on natural resources. In terms of governance, community support was closely linked to transparency and meaningful participation, whereas concerns centred on insufficient local control over decision-making. Overall, the figure reflects the nuanced and conditional nature of community support, consistent with the study's application of Social Exchange Theory, where perceived benefits and costs shape residents' attitudes toward sustainable cultural tourism development.

These findings reinforce existing literature emphasising that genuine community engagement and collaborative governance are essential for sustainable cultural tourism outcomes. The results and discussion highlight the multifaceted nature of community perceptions toward the sustainable development of Nur Sutan Iskandar cultural tourism, revealing both supportive attitudes and critical concerns related to economic benefits, cultural integrity, environmental sustainability, and governance. By interpreting these findings through established theoretical perspectives and prior studies, the analysis underscores the conditions under which community support for tourism development is strengthened or constrained. These insights provide a basis for synthesising the study's key contributions and form the foundation for the concluding section, which summarises the main findings, outlines practical implications, and proposes recommendations for enhancing sustainable and community-centred cultural tourism development.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined community perceptions and attitudes toward the sustainable development of Nur Sutan Iskandar cultural tourism in Maninjau, West Sumatra. The findings indicate that residents generally view cultural tourism positively, particularly for its potential to generate economic opportunities and strengthen cultural identity. However, concerns regarding unequal benefit distribution, environmental pressure, and the risk of cultural commodification remain significant. These mixed perceptions highlight that community support for tourism development is closely tied to the balance between perceived benefits and costs and the extent of meaningful community participation. Overall, the sustainability of Nur Sutan Iskandar cultural tourism depends on inclusive governance, cultural sensitivity, and environmentally responsible practices that align with local values and aspirations.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, tourism planning should prioritise community-based governance, ensuring that residents are actively involved in decision-making and benefit-sharing processes. Second, capacity-building programs should be implemented to enhance local skills and enable broader participation in tourism-related economic activities. Third, cultural heritage management guidelines are necessary to prevent excessive commercialisation and to safeguard the authenticity of Nur Sutan Iskandar's legacy. Fourth, environmental management measures, including waste control and resource conservation strategies, should be integrated into tourism development plans. Finally, future research is encouraged to adopt a mixed-methods approach with a larger sample size to further our understanding of the long-term socio-economic and environmental impacts of cultural tourism in Maninjau.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This study contributes to sustainable cultural tourism research by highlighting the role of community perceptions in shaping inclusive and sustainable tourism development, with specific insights into cultural heritage tourism governance and community participation.

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