

Social Capital and Village Autonomy in Tourism Development

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ABSTRACT

Community-based tourism village development has emerged as a strategic approach to sustainable rural development in Indonesia. However, the success of tourism village development is not solely determined by natural resource potential and infrastructure support, but is strongly influenced by the social capacity of local communities. Social capital, comprising trust, social norms, and social networks, plays a crucial role in fostering village autonomy in tourism management. This study aims to examine in depth the role of social capital in strengthening the autonomy of Nglanggeran Tourism Village, Patuk District, Gunungkidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, which is widely recognized as a successful example of sustainable community-based tourism development. This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including village officials, tourism managers (Tourism Awareness Group/Pokdarwis), community leaders, youth groups, and local residents. Data collection was complemented by field observations and document analysis. Qualitative data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis framework follows a structure of empirical field findings, verbatim quotations from informants, and theoretical interpretation based on social capital theory. The findings reveal that social capital plays a significant role in strengthening the autonomy of Nglanggeran Tourism Village. Trust is built through transparency in tourism management and village financial administration, which encourages consistent community participation

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, rural tourism development has increasingly been recognized as an alternative strategy to stimulate local economic growth while preserving the social and cultural sustainability of rural communities. This approach positions local communities as the primary agents of development through the management of tourism potential based on local resources and indigenous knowledge. The concept of tourism villages represents a concrete manifestation of community-based tourism (CBT), emphasizing participation, empowerment, and community autonomy (Sunaryo, 2013). In this context, the success of tourism villages is measured not only by the number of tourist arrivals but also by the community's capacity to manage tourism independently and sustainably.

Numerous studies indicate that many tourism villages experience dependency on external actors, such as government agencies, investors, or private enterprises, particularly in planning, financing, and management processes (Damanik & Weber, 2006). Such dependency can weaken the position of local communities and threaten the long-term sustainability of tourism village development. Consequently, village autonomy has become a critical issue in rural tourism development studies. Village autonomy reflects the ability of communities to make decisions, manage resources, and control development trajectories in accordance with local needs and values (Nugroho, 2018).

In efforts to achieve village autonomy, social capital is widely regarded as a key enabling factor. Social capital refers to social networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation and collective action within a community (Coleman, 1988). Putnam (1993) argues that social capital significantly contributes to the effectiveness of local institutions and the success of community-based development. In tourism village contexts, social capital enables communities to build trust, maintain solidarity, and manage competing interests arising from tourism activities.

Previous studies on tourism villages in Indonesia demonstrate that strong social capital promotes active community participation in tourism planning and management (Prayogo & Kusumawardhani, 2017). Trust among community members and between communities and tourism managers reduces conflict, while social norms such as **gotong royong** reinforce collective commitment to tourism sustainability. Additionally, internal and external social networks provide access to information, promotion, and partnerships that support tourism development (Fukuyama, 1995).

Nglanggeran Tourism Village in Gunungkidul Regency represents one of Indonesia's most successful examples of community-based tourism, having received national and international recognition. This success warrants deeper examination, particularly from the perspective of social capital and village autonomy. While previous studies have largely focused on economic and institutional aspects, research that explicitly links social capital with village autonomy in tourism management remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the role of social capital in promoting village autonomy in Nglanggeran Tourism Village. The study is expected to contribute theoretically

to social capital and rural tourism literature, and practically to policy formulation for tourism village development oriented toward strengthening social and institutional capacity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Capital in Rural Development

Social capital is a central concept in rural development studies due to its close relationship with local communities' capacity for cooperation in achieving shared development goals. Conceptually, social capital is understood as a non-material resource emerging from social relationships, encompassing trust, norms, and social networks that facilitate collective action (Coleman, 1988). In rural development contexts, social capital functions as a foundation for strengthening community capacity in resource management, collective problem-solving, and program sustainability.

Putnam (1993) emphasizes that communities with high levels of social capital tend to exhibit more effective local institutions and stronger civic participation. Trust among residents and between communities and village governments fosters stable cooperation and reduces social costs such as conflict and excessive monitoring. Social norms, such as mutual cooperation and collective responsibility, serve as behavioral control mechanisms that maintain consistency in development processes (Coleman, 1988).

Furthermore, social networks enable rural communities to access information, knowledge, and resources both internally and externally. Fukuyama (1995) argues that trust-based networks enhance cooperation efficiency and strengthen development sustainability. In rural development, social networks not only reinforce internal cohesion but also enable selective and controlled collaboration with external actors. Thus, social capital becomes a strategic element in strengthening participation, institutional effectiveness, and village autonomy.

Village Autonomy

Village autonomy in tourism contexts refers to the capacity of local communities to manage, control, and develop tourism activities based on local potential, values, and interests in a sustainable manner. Autonomy does not imply isolation from external collaboration but rather the ability to determine development directions without excessive dependency on government, investors, or external actors (Nugroho, 2018). Autonomous tourism villages remain open to partnerships while maintaining bargaining power and decision-making control.

From a participatory development perspective, Chambers (1997) asserts that autonomy can only be achieved when local communities act as subjects rather than objects of development. In tourism villages, this is reflected in community involvement across planning, management, and evaluation stages. Indicators of autonomy include destination management, homestay operations, tourism attractions, and equitable benefit distribution.

Indonesia's Village Law (Law No. 6 of 2014) provides a legal foundation for villages to develop local potential, including tourism, through village-scale

authority. In tourism villages, autonomy is reflected in strong local institutions such as Pokdarwis, transparent financial management, and local human resource capacity (Sutoro, 2014). Moreover, village autonomy is strongly influenced by social capacity, enabling communities to cooperate, manage conflict, and sustain tourism development (Sunaryo, 2013).

Community-Based Tourism

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a tourism development approach that positions local communities as primary actors in planning, management, and benefit utilization. CBT emerged as a critique of mass tourism models that marginalize local communities and generate negative socio-economic and environmental impacts (Damanik & Weber, 2006). In CBT, communities are not merely beneficiaries but also retain control over resources and development directions. Murphy (1985) emphasizes that CBT requires active community involvement throughout tourism development stages to ensure alignment with local social and cultural values. Community participation is essential for tourism sustainability, as local residents possess contextual knowledge and direct interests in environmental and cultural preservation.

Goodwin and Santilli (2009) argue that CBT aims to improve local welfare through equitable benefit distribution, capacity building, and protection of socio-cultural resources. Consequently, CBT success is measured not only by economic growth but also by increased community autonomy and social well-being. In rural development, CBT effectively integrates economic, social, and environmental objectives (Sunaryo, 2013), making it a viable pathway toward sustainable and equitable village development.

Research Model

This research model is developed to explain the relationship between social capital and village self-reliance in the development of community-based tourism villages. Social capital is positioned as the core concept, consisting of trust, social norms, and social networks (Putnam, 1993). These three elements are understood as social resources that influence the capacity of rural communities to engage in sustained collective action. Within this model, social capital functions as a driving factor that strengthens community participation, enhances the effectiveness of local institutions, and improves the capacity for managing village-based tourism. Village tourism self-reliance is defined as the community's ability to independently plan, manage, and utilize tourism activities without excessive dependence on external actors (Nugroho, 2018).

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a case study approach, which allows for an in-depth understanding of social dynamics and inter-actor relationships within the real context of a tourism village (Yin, 2018). The model places empirical findings as the foundation for analysis in explaining how social capital shapes the self-reliance of community-based tourism villages.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of social capital in promoting tourism village self-reliance. A qualitative approach is chosen because it enables the exploration of meanings, experiences, and social dynamics that emerge within the real-life context of rural communities (Creswell, 2014). The case study method is applied to comprehensively examine community-based tourism management in Nglanggeran Tourism Village as a single, holistic case (Yin, 2018).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected key informants, including village officials, tourism managers (Pokdarwis), community leaders, youth representatives, and village residents. Supporting data were obtained through field observations and documentation. Data analysis was conducted thematically through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Data validity was ensured through source and methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility of the research findings.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings reveal that the development of Nglanggeran Tourism Village is closely linked to the strong social capital embedded within the community. Social capital serves as the primary foundation in fostering village self-reliance in community-based tourism management. Field findings indicate that the most prominent elements of social capital include trust, social norms, and social networks, which interact dynamically to shape the collective capacity of the village community.

Trust as the Foundation of Tourism Management Self-Reliance

Trust emerges as the most dominant element of social capital in the management of Nglanggeran Tourism Village. Interview results indicate a high level of trust among community members, village authorities, and tourism managers (Pokdarwis). This trust is reflected in transparency regarding financial management, role distribution, and decision-making processes related to tourism activities. The community grants legitimacy to Pokdarwis to manage tourism destinations without excessive supervision, based on confidence that management practices are transparent and accountable.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Fukuyama's (1995) argument that trust constitutes the core of social capital, capable of reducing social transaction costs and strengthening long-term cooperation. The high level of trust in Nglanggeran Tourism Village enables tourism management processes to operate more effectively and efficiently while minimizing internal conflict. Trust also reinforces village self-reliance, as community members feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the sustainability of village tourism.

Social Norms and the Culture of Mutual Cooperation

The study finds that social norms, particularly the values of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and social solidarity, remain well preserved in Nglanggeran Tourism Village. These norms serve as behavioral guidelines in various tourism-related activities, including homestay management, tourism events, and environmental maintenance. Community participation in tourism activities is driven not solely by economic motives, but also by collective awareness to maintain the image and sustainability of the tourism village.

These social norms function as mechanisms of social control that maintain consistency in collective action. Coleman (1988) emphasizes that strong social norms encourage cooperative behavior and prevent opportunistic actions within communities. In the context of Nglanggeran Tourism Village, norms of mutual cooperation strengthen community participation and foster a sense of collective ownership over tourism management. This condition represents a key indicator of village self-reliance, as the community does not rely entirely on instructions or interventions from external actors.

Social Networks and the Role of Local Actors

The findings also indicate that social networks play a crucial role in supporting the self-reliance of Nglanggeran Tourism Village. Internal social networks are built through harmonious and collaborative relationships among residents, while external networks develop through partnerships with local governments, tourism communities, media, and supporting institutions. Village youth play a strategic role in building and maintaining external networks, particularly through the use of social media and digital promotion.

Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bonding social capital and bridging social capital. The findings demonstrate that Nglanggeran Tourism Village possesses both types of social networks. Bonding social capital strengthens internal community cohesion, while bridging social capital provides access to information, promotion channels, and external collaboration opportunities. The existence of these social networks enhances the village's capacity to manage tourism independently, as partnerships can be formed without relinquishing local control over tourism management.

Social Capital and the Strengthening of Local Institutions

Strong social capital also contributes to the strengthening of local institutions, particularly Pokdarwis as the tourism management organization. The findings show that Pokdarwis functions not only as a technical implementer of tourism activities, but also as a platform for coordination and communication between the community, village government, and external stakeholders. The presence of Pokdarwis, supported by trust and community participation, enhances the village's capacity to manage tourism sustainably.

These findings support Putnam's (1993) view that social capital contributes to the effectiveness of local institutions. Strong local institutions represent a key indicator of tourism village self-reliance, as they enable villages to manage resources, make decisions, and resolve problems internally.

Empirical Perspective on Tourism Village Self-Reliance

Overall, the findings indicate that the self-reliance of Nglanggeran Tourism Village is reflected in the community's ability to manage tourism in a participatory, transparent, and sustainable manner. The village is capable of utilizing local potential, managing human resources, and establishing selective external collaborations. These findings align with Nugroho's (2018) concept of village self-reliance, which emphasizes the village's ability to control development directions in accordance with local interests. Thus, this study confirms that social capital is not merely a supporting factor, but a fundamental foundation in building community-based tourism village self-reliance.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that trust is the most dominant element of social capital in the management of Nglanggeran Tourism Village. High levels of trust among community members, tourism managers, and village authorities facilitate stable and sustainable cooperative relationships. This supports Fukuyama's (1995) argument that trust reduces social transaction costs and enhances collective efficiency. In the context of tourism villages, trust allows communities to grant legitimacy to local institutions such as Pokdarwis to manage tourism resources independently without excessive supervision. Consequently, trust becomes a critical prerequisite for village self-reliance in tourism management.

In addition to trust, social norms in the form of **gotong royong** and social solidarity play a significant role in strengthening village self-reliance. These norms encourage community participation in both routine and incidental tourism activities. This finding supports Coleman's (1988) assertion that social norms function as behavioral control mechanisms that promote cooperative actions and prevent opportunistic behavior. In tourism villages, mutual cooperation not only reinforces social cohesion but also fosters a strong sense of ownership over tourism management, thereby enhancing village self-reliance.

The discussion further highlights the role of social networks in supporting tourism village self-reliance. The findings indicate that Nglanggeran Tourism Village possesses strong internal and external social networks. Internal networks facilitate coordination and cooperation among residents, while external networks provide access to information, promotion, and collaboration opportunities. Consistent with Putnam's (2000) distinction between bonding and bridging social capital, both forms operate complementarily in tourism village development.

The active involvement of village youth in building external social networks, particularly through digital promotion, emerges as a key finding. This aligns with Prayogo and Kusumawardhani (2017), who argue that actively managed social networks can enhance participation and capacity in community-based tourism management. Thus, social networks contribute not only to resource access but also to the strengthening of tourism village self-reliance.

From an institutional perspective, strong social capital directly influences the effectiveness of local institutions. The findings show that Pokdarwis in Nglanggeran Tourism Village functions as a legitimate and trusted institution. This supports Putnam's (1993) argument that social capital enhances institutional

performance. Strong local institutions enable participatory, transparent, and adaptive tourism management, which is essential for long-term village self-reliance.

Finally, this study reinforces Nugroho's (2018) concept of village self-reliance, emphasizing the village's capacity to control development directions based on local interests. Tourism village self-reliance in this study is not interpreted as isolation from external actors, but rather as the ability to collaborate without losing local control and identity.

In the context of community-based tourism, these findings strengthen the argument that CBT success depends heavily on the social strength of local communities. As noted by Sunaryo (2013), community-based tourism can only be sustainable when communities possess adequate social and institutional capacity. Overall, this discussion confirms that social capital plays a strategic role in building tourism village self-reliance by shaping collective capacity through trust, social norms, and social networks, while offering both theoretical and practical contributions to tourism village development policies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study concludes that social capital plays a fundamental role in strengthening the autonomy of Nglanggeran Tourism Village in community-based tourism development. Trust, social norms, and social networks significantly enhance community participation, institutional effectiveness, and the village's capacity to manage tourism independently and sustainably. Social capital enables collective cooperation, internal conflict management, and strategic external collaboration without undermining local control. Therefore, village autonomy in tourism development depends not only on economic potential and natural resources but also critically on the strength of social capital as the foundation for sustainable rural tourism.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that tourism village development policies prioritize strengthening social and institutional capacity at the local level. Government interventions should adopt facilitative and participatory approaches, allowing communities to define priorities and manage tourism independently. Village governments and Pokdarwis should maintain transparency and accountability to sustain public trust. Furthermore, youth involvement in innovation, digital promotion, and network expansion should be continuously enhanced. Future studies are encouraged to conduct comparative analyses across tourism villages to deepen understanding of social capital's role in diverse community-based tourism contexts.

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