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The Role of Social Structure in Tourism Governance in Village Communities of Soppeng Regency

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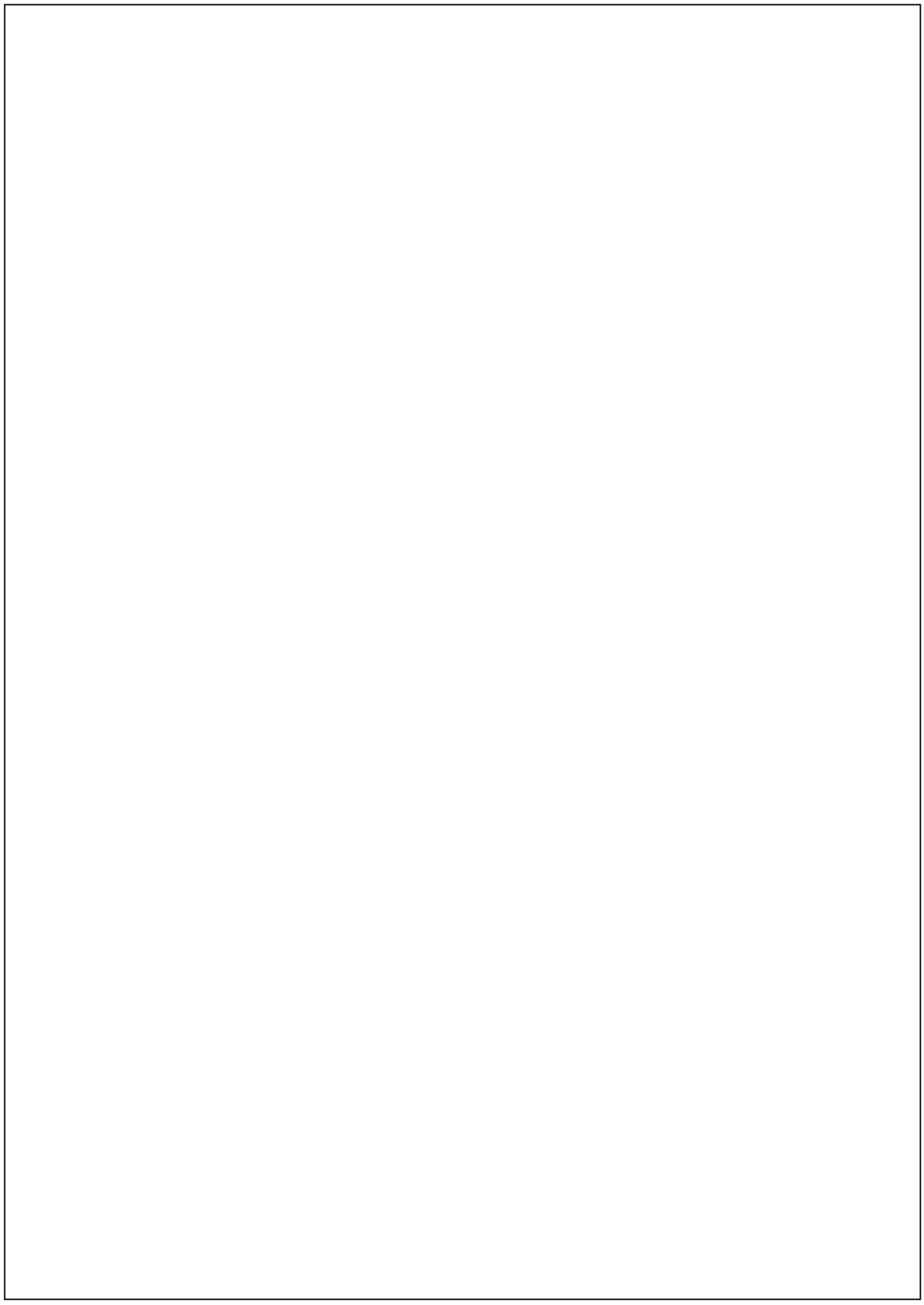
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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the role of social structure in community-based tourism governance in Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi. The main focus of the study is how social actors such as traditional leaders, village heads, and local community groups are involved in decision-making and implementation of tourism activities at the village level. The research used a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving participatory observation, in-depth interviews with 50 key informants, and documentation in three tourism villages: Lompulle, Bulue, and Mattabulu. The results show that local social structure is the main driver in maintaining harmony between cultural preservation and economic exploitation through tourism. Tourism governance is not top-down, but based on consensus, mutual cooperation, and deliberation mechanisms. Social structure also plays an important role in reducing conflict and strengthening collective solidarity. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of recognizing local social structures as strategic social capital in the development of sustainable tourism. Recommendations are directed at strengthening community capacity and institutional recognition of village social systems.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has become one of the sustainable development strategies adopted by many developing countries, including Indonesia. In the rural context, tourism development is not only aimed at increasing regional income, but also at strengthening local identity and expanding community participation in the development process (Nugroho, 2017). The Government of Indonesia through Minister of Villages and Transmigration No. 5/2016 has encouraged the establishment of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) and Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) as instruments for inclusive and community-based tourism village management.

Soppeng Regency in South Sulawesi Province has great potential in the village tourism sector, with the existence of natural, cultural and historical-based tourism objects. Some villages such as Lompulle Village and Pesse Village have begun to develop community-based tourism by prioritizing local uniqueness such as traditional rituals, historical sites, and ecotourism. However, various studies and local government reports show that tourism management in these villages has not fully run optimally due to participation inequality and internal conflicts that have not been addressed systemically (Soppeng, 2022).

The problem of tourism village governance cannot be separated from the dynamics of the social structure of the village community itself. Social structures-including power relations, social stratification, customary values, and kinship networks-play a major role in shaping patterns of interaction between local actors in tourism management. In many cases, the dominance of local elites and the lack of representation of marginalized groups have led to resistance to tourism programs that actually aim to improve welfare (Cole, 2006). This situation shows the tension between the idealization of participation and the social reality that takes place at the local level.

Most previous studies on village tourism in Indonesia have focused on economic aspects, destination development, or promotional strategies, without delving deeply into how social structures influence decision-making and benefit distribution in tourism management (Gunawan, 2018). In fact, in the perspective of tourism sociology, an understanding of social structure is crucial to uncovering power relations, social mechanisms, and cultural constraints that determine the success or failure of community-based tourism governance (Urry, J., & Larsen, 2011).

Using a sociological approach, it is important to explore how elements of social structure such as the role of traditional leaders, patron-client relationships, gender-based division of labor, and collective norms influence community engagement in village tourism governance systems. This approach enables the identification of both social barriers and potential local strengths in developing equitable, participatory and sustainable tourism. In addition, social structure is also closely related to community acceptance of innovations and changes brought by the tourism sector.

The context of Soppeng Regency is interesting to study because it has the characteristics of a community that still strongly holds traditional values and a patronistic social system. On the other hand, the local government and tourism

actors try to encourage the modernization of village tourism with a technocratic approach. The tension between these two poles opens a space for discussion on how village tourism governance can be designed by taking into account social realities and existing local structures.

Based on the description above, this article aims to analyze the role of social structure in influencing tourism governance in the village communities of Soppeng Regency. Through a sociological qualitative approach, this article seeks to reveal the social dynamics, power relations, and forms of participation that occur in the management of tourism villages. Thus, this paper is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of tourism sociology studies, as well as provide practical recommendations for strengthening tourism village governance based on local socio-culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Structure and Community Tourism Governance

Social structure plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of tourism governance at the village level. In many rural communities across Indonesia, social relations such as patron-client networks, customary leadership, and informal authority are fundamental in collective decision-making. Suyatna et al. (2024) emphasize that successful community-based tourism relies heavily on the legitimacy of traditional actors and the embeddedness of governance within local sociocultural contexts.

In this regard, tourism governance must be tailored to the prevailing social systems rather than imposed externally. When policy implementation disregards local social structures, resistance and exclusion often emerge. Therefore, a sociological understanding of social structure is essential for developing inclusive and sustainable tourism that aligns with the community's cultural and institutional realities.

Community Participation and the CBT Framework

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is widely promoted as a model that centers local communities in the development process. This approach emphasizes empowerment, equity, and collective decision-making. Wahid et al. (2020) assert that the presence of customary leaders and local value systems significantly influences the depth and quality of participation in tourism planning and management.

However, literature also highlights gaps in inclusiveness within CBT practices. Marginalized groups, including women and youth, often face barriers to full participation. Therefore, CBT must be supported by facilitative structures that promote critical awareness and ensure that the voices of all community members are represented in tourism governance.

Social Capital and Cohesion in Tourism Villages

Social capital—comprising trust, reciprocity, and community networks—is a vital asset for sustaining tourism initiatives in rural areas. Affandi et al. (2019) show that integrating social capital with tourism value chains can foster local

independence and resilience. Villages that rely on cooperative mechanisms such

as mutual aid, consensus-building, and cultural festivals demonstrate stronger tourism outcomes.

These values not only support harmonious conflict resolution but also ensure fair benefit distribution. As such, strengthening social capital should be prioritized alongside infrastructure development in tourism policies. Investing in social cohesion enhances ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability in village tourism management.

Digitalization and Social Transformation Challenges

Digital transformation is reshaping tourism governance, especially through platforms for promotion, online bookings, and tourist engagement. Widjanarko et al. (2020) argue that rural tourism needs to adapt to technological advances while maintaining its cultural identity. Engaging youth as digital ambassadors becomes essential in this transition, as they often bridge the gap between traditional values and modern practices.

Nonetheless, without inclusive strategies, digitalization can deepen social divides and undermine communal values. Capacity-building initiatives in digital literacy must be aligned with efforts to revitalize local wisdom—such as deliberative decision-making and mutual respect (sipakatau). In doing so, technology becomes an empowering tool rather than a source of disempowerment in rural tourism governance.

METHODOLOGY

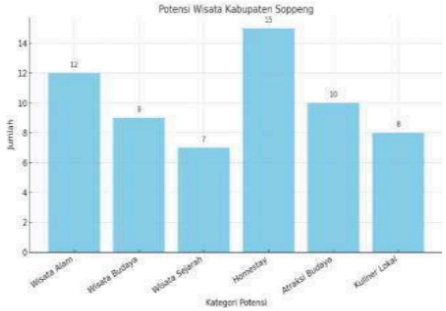
This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the role of social structures in tourism governance in the village communities of Soppeng Regency. This approach allows an in-depth understanding of complex social dynamics, such as power relations, social norms, and participation patterns of village communities, which cannot be measured quantitatively (Yin, 2018). The researcher acted as the main instrument (human instrument) who designed semi-structured interview guides, conducted participatory observations, and systematically recorded field data. This instrument focused on exploring the roles of traditional leaders, village heads, tourism actors, women, and youth in the community-based tourism management system.

Data collection was conducted over three months using three main techniques, namely: (1) in-depth interviews with key informants who were purposively selected based on their involvement in tourism management and social position in the village; (2) participatory observation in three active tourism villages, namely Lompulle Village, Bulue Village, and Mattabulu Village; and (3) documentation of village deliberation archives, local policies, and social media of tourism communities. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis method through the stages of data reduction, theme categorization, and interpretation of meaning, assisted by NVivo software for data organization. The coding process was conducted in open, axial, and selective coding to reveal the relationship between social structure elements and tourism governance practices (Braun, V., & Clarke, 2019).

To maintain validity and reliability, this study used source triangulation (various informants from the village social structure), method triangulation (interviews, observation, and documentation), and member checking to confirm findings with relevant informants. An audit trail was prepared to document the researcher's thought process and analysis so that it could be traced methodologically (Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, 1989). Data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives, thematic tables, and direct quotes from informants to strengthen the argumentation and linkage between empirical data and theories of social structure and participatory governance in village tourism.

RESEARCH RESULT

This research shows that social structure has a very significant role in tourism governance in the village communities of Soppeng Regency, with a particular focus on villages such as Lompulle, Bulue, and Mattabulu. The research found that traditional leaders and village heads serve as the main link between local values and tourism policy. According to one village head in Lompulle Village, "We decided to combine tradition with modern tourism, so that the community can feel the economic benefits without losing their cultural identity" (Interview, 2024). Traditional leaders not only play a role in decision- making regarding tourism policy, but also in the creation of local rules, such as the sharing of proceeds from the tourism sector and the management of tourism zones that reflect local customary beliefs.



Furthermore, the findings reveal that the social structure in the village community is not top-down, but rather based on collective participation involving various social actors. This is evident in the management of homestays and tour guide services, the majority of which are managed by the local community. In an interview with one of the homestay managers in Bulue Village, he stated, "We organize everything based on mutual agreement, although each individual has different tasks, all contribute according to their capacity" (Interview, 2024). This system of cooperation based on family values creates a solid social network among villagers involved in the tourism sector.

The role of patron-client relations between traditional leaders, village heads, and the community is very influential in strengthening social solidarity in tourism management. As expressed by one of the traditional leaders in

Mattabulu Village, "We are not only talking about the economy, but also about how to maintain a balance between the younger and older generations in utilizing existing tourism resources" (Interview, 2024). Through customary deliberation forums, the various parties involved in the management of tourist villages can resolve problems that arise in a peaceful and respectful manner. This process of deliberation demonstrates how the village's social structure facilitates inclusive dialogue, allowing different interests to be considered and brought together.

The research also identified that tourism governance in these villages relies on informal mechanisms, such as deliberation to reach consensus, gotong royong, and the principle of sipakatau, which is derived from local cultural values. One informant, a young man who is also a tour guide in Bulue Village, explained, "We maintain the tradition of gotong royong in all tourism activities, including festival preparation, because it is part of our culture. All parties are involved regardless of status or position" (Interview, 2024). This approach ensures that no group feels marginalized in the decision-making process relating to tourism management.

In addition, this research also shows that social structures play an important role in reducing conflicts that arise in the management of tourism resources. For example, competition between youth groups for access to homestays or tourism access can be resolved through mediation by traditional leaders. For example, a youth in Lompulle Village said, "When there are differences of opinion, we deal with them through deliberation. Traditional leaders often remind us about the importance of maintaining harmony between people" (Interview, 2024). This reflects how social structures based on cultural values are effective instruments in maintaining social stability in the management of the village tourism sector.

Data obtained from interviews with a number of key informants show that social cooperation based on existing social structures enables the achievement of mutually beneficial common goals. Interview data with one of the festival organizers in Mattabulu Village shows, "The village festival that we organize every year always involves all elements of the village, both young and old, to create a sense of togetherness and a spirit of gotong royong that strengthens social relations among us" (Interview, 2024). In this case, social structure plays a role not only in the management of tourism resources, but also in creating a sense of ownership and active participation from all elements of the community.

The study also found that in tourism management, gender and age play an important role in determining the role and contribution of each individual in the social structure of the village. For example, although the role of women in homestay management and other tourism services is still limited, village women in Soppeng demonstrate an active role in supporting family economic activities. In an interview with a housewife who also manages a homestay in Bulue Village, she revealed, "Although I mostly take care of the house, I still feel involved in tourism activities because all our activities are based on mutual agreement and mutual support" (Interview, 2024).

Komponen Potensi Wisata	Mattabulu	Bulue	Lompulle
Jumlah Atraksi Wisata	8	6	5
Jumlah Homestay	6	4	3
Jumlah Paket Wisata	7	5	4
Jumlah Suvenir Unggulan	10	7	6
Jumlah Atraksi Budaya	3	2	3
Jumlah Atraksi Alam	5	4	4

Comparison of Tourism Village Potential of Soppeng Regency

Description:

1. Mattabulu offers various tourist attractions, including natural attractions such as the Valley of Love and Liu Pangie Waterfall, as well as cultural attractions such as the Petta Bulu Matanre site and the traditional art of mappadendang.
2. Bulue is known for its Lejja hot springs and Minawoe Waterfall, as well as the historical site of Datu Mario's Tomb.
3. Lompulle offers natural attractions such as Labempa and Walennae Geopark, as well as cultural attractions such as the Mappadendang harvest party.

Finally, this research shows that the sustainability of local wisdom-based tourism governance in Soppeng Regency is strongly influenced by the ability of social structures to adapt to changing times without abandoning cultural values that have long been part of community life. By prioritizing the principles of deliberation to reach consensus, mutual cooperation, and sipakatau, villages in Soppeng are able to create a tourism system that is not only economically sustainable, but also maintains and strengthens their social and cultural identity. In this case, the social structure in the village proves to be an important instrument in realizing inclusive and sustainable tourism governance.

DISCUSSION

Social structure plays a significant role in shaping tourism governance in the village communities of Soppeng Regency. The results of this study show that the roles of traditional leaders, village heads, and local community institutions are not only symbolic, but functional in determining the direction of local-based tourism policies and implementation patterns. Their presence strengthens the community's position in decision-making, especially related to tourism zoning, internal regulations, and distribution of economic benefits. This finding reinforces the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) approach that places the community as the main subject in tourism development, as proposed by (Hot et al., 2025), where local involvement is a fundamental condition for the sustainability of village tourism programs.

The patron-client relationship that exists between informal leaders and the community also strengthens social solidarity in tourism management. The involvement of various elements of the community, ranging from the older to the younger generation, shows a flexible division of roles while still respecting the

prevailing social hierarchy. For example, in homestay management activities or organizing cultural festivals, the village social structure functions as a coordinative vehicle that mediates economic practices with customary norms. This is in line with the study results (Wahid, Destrity, Malang, Timur, & Id, 2020) which state that social capital is a major asset in the development of tourism villages, especially in agrarian societies that still uphold family values and togetherness.

The role of social structure can also be seen in its ability to manage conflicts internally, especially those related to the distribution of tourism resources. In some cases, competition between youth groups to manage local tourist destinations can be facilitated by traditional leaders through village deliberation forums. This consensus-based approach reflects the principles of commons management as initiated by Elinor Ostrom and contextualized by (Suyatna, Indroyono, Yuda, & Firdaus, 2024) in their study in Nglanggeran. Informal mechanisms such as traditional meetings, family consensus, and symbolic consultation are effective instruments in reducing conflict and ensuring the continuity of equitable tourism governance.

Gender and age dimensions also play an important role in the social structure of tourism management in the village. Women, while not always formally occupying strategic positions, contribute greatly to the daily practices of tourism such as culinary management, lodging, and welcoming guests. Village youth are involved in guiding, arts, and digital promotion activities. This shows that tourism governance has begun to accommodate social inclusiveness. As explained by (Wahid et al., 2020), sustainable tourism village development requires cross-age and gender involvement to create social synergies that are adaptive to change..

Furthermore, local social structures have proven effective in maintaining a balance between cultural preservation and the economic demands of tourism. Values such as gotong royong, sipakatau (mutual respect), and consensus deliberation continue to be revitalized as a social framework in managing contemporary tourism. Tourism villages in Soppeng not only offer natural landscapes and cultural attractions, but also present a narrative of social cohesiveness as the main attraction. (Affandi, Permana, Yani, & Mursitama, 2019) noted that the success of tourism village management depends on the ability of local communities to negotiate traditional values with global economic dynamics.

However, the social structure is not entirely free from challenges. There are still limitations in terms of managerial capacity, access to training, and reliance on charismatic figures that can weaken long-term institutions. Therefore, collaborative interventions between local governments, universities and the private sector are needed to strengthen the socio-economic institutions of village communities. (Widjanarko, Santosa Utomo, Wibawa, & Wahyurini, 2020) suggested strengthening local capacity through need-based training schemes and incubation of local tourism businesses to avoid innovation stagnation.

The practical implication of these findings is the importance of integrating local social structures in the formulation of tourism policies at the regional level.

The Soppeng Regency Government needs to adjust the destination development approach to the social and cultural characteristics of the local community. By recognizing and empowering village social structures, tourism policies can be more inclusive, responsive and sustainable. This is also relevant to the participatory approach in village development listed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 11th pillar (sustainable cities and communities).

Thus, the findings of this study confirm that social structure is not a passive entity in the context of village tourism development. Instead, it functions as an organizational and normative force that shapes the direction, substance, and governance of community-based tourism activities. The success of tourism management in Soppeng Regency can serve as a model for other regions that have strong social structures and vibrant local wisdom. Further research is recommended to explore the dynamics of this social structure in the context of changes in digital technology and the creative economy in the tourism sector.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research confirms that social structures play a strategic role in community-based tourism governance in Soppeng Regency. Social structures consisting of traditional leaders, village heads, religious institutions, and other community groups become the foundation in determining the direction, legitimacy, and implementation of local tourism policies. In this context, local values such as deliberation, gotong royong, and sipakatau are proven to be informal mechanisms that maintain a balance between cultural preservation and the economic demands of tourism. The findings show that tourism governance in the village runs in a participatory manner, not top-down, with the active role of all elements of the community according to their social and cultural positions. Strong social relations, such as patron-client and family ties, are the forces that enable collective involvement in the management of tourist destinations. Such governance supports sustainability because it is based on consensus, social legitimacy and equitable distribution of benefits.

Based on these results, it is recommended that the government and tourism actors integrate local social structures in policy formulation and management of village tourism. The community-based approach needs to be strengthened with managerial training based on local wisdom and formal recognition of the village deliberation forum. Further research is recommended to explore the dynamics of social structure in the context of tourism digitalization and the role of the younger generation as agents of social transformation in the village tourism sector.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research should conduct comparative studies between tourism villages in different regions such as Soppeng, Yogyakarta, and Bali to identify how local social structures uniquely influence governance models. This approach can uncover both universal and context-specific strategies that communities employ to balance traditional authority with tourism development.

Further research is needed to investigate how women and younger generations can be more effectively included in tourism governance. By analyzing structural barriers and informal participation patterns, future studies

can offer policy recommendations for designing inclusive and community- centered governance frameworks aligned with sustainable development principles.

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