

## **Community-Based Tourism to Support Sustainable Tourism: Comparative Study in Sesaot (Indonesia) and Ban Na San (Thailand)**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the dynamics of community-based tourism (CBT) as a pathway to sustainable development in two culturally distinct Southeast Asian contexts: Sesaot Village in Lombok Barat, Indonesia, and Ban Na San District in Surat Thani, Thailand. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research integrates triangulated data from interviews, observations, and document analysis, framed through a source-by-triangulation method. This study adopts content analysis and finds for: (1. Community participation and empowerment); (2. Sustainable governance and institutional synergy); (3. Capacity building and socio-cultural benefits); (4. Local challenges and institutional barriers). The findings reveal that while Sesaot relies heavily on informal leadership, cultural values, and grassroots participation, Ban Na San operates within a more structured and state-supported tourism governance framework. Despite these differences, both communities exhibit strong local identity, willingness to innovate, and a commitment to sustainability. The study concludes that CBT is most effective when it empowers communities through inclusive governance, sustained capacity-building, and locally relevant tourism strategies. These findings contribute to theoretical discussions on grassroots development and offer practical implications for CBT implementation.

**Keywords:** Community-Based Tourism (CBT), Sustainable Tourism, Empowerment, Participatory Governance, Capacity Building.

### **Abstrak**

Studi ini mengeksplorasi dinamika pariwisata berbasis masyarakat (CBT) sebagai jalur menuju pembangunan berkelanjutan dalam dua konteks Asia Tenggara yang berbeda secara budaya: Desa Sesaot di Lombok Barat, Indonesia, dan Distrik Ban Na San di Surat Thani, Thailand. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan data triangulasi dari wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, yang dibingkai melalui metode sumber-demi-triangulasi. Studi ini mengadopsi analisis konten dan menemukan untuk: (1. Partisipasi dan pemberdayaan masyarakat); (2. Tata kelola berkelanjutan dan sinergi kelembagaan); (3. Peningkatan kapasitas dan manfaat sosial-budaya); (4. Tantangan lokal dan hambatan kelembagaan). Temuan tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa sementara Sesaot sangat bergantung pada kepemimpinan informal, nilai-nilai budaya, dan partisipasi akar rumput, Ban Na San beroperasi dalam kerangka kerja tata kelola pariwisata yang lebih terstruktur dan didukung negara. Terlepas dari perbedaan ini, kedua komunitas menunjukkan identitas lokal yang kuat, kemauan untuk berinovasi, dan komitmen terhadap keberlanjutan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa CBT paling efektif ketika memberdayakan masyarakat melalui tata kelola inklusif, pengembangan kapasitas yang berkelanjutan, dan strategi pariwisata yang relevan secara lokal. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada diskusi teoretis tentang pembangunan akar rumput dan menawarkan implikasi praktis untuk implementasi CBT.

**Kata Kunci:** Pariwisata Berbasis Komunitas (CBT), Pariwisata Berkelanjutan, Pemberdayaan, Tata Kelola Partisipatif, Pembangunan kapasitas.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism has long been positioned as a catalyst for local economic growth and cultural revitalization. However, the effectiveness and sustainability of tourism development significantly depend on how it engages and empowers the local community. In response to the growing critiques of mass tourism and top-down development approaches, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emerges as an alternative paradigm that emphasizes participation, equity, and empowerment (Asker et al., 2010).

CBT is not merely a tourism model but a transformative framework that enables communities to maintain control over resources, preserve local wisdom, and foster inclusive development. This is evident in studies such as Widyawati et al. (2023), who analyzed the implementation of CBT in Pangandaran and found that structured community involvement could enhance both tourism experiences and resident well-being. Similarly, Yulianti & Dharma (2022) emphasized the importance of participatory planning in Pulau Merah Beach, where the role of Pokdarwis (local tourism groups) becomes central to community mobilization and cultural representation.

Despite these potentials, challenges persist. The study by Napitupulu (2023) highlights that many CBT initiatives struggle due to limited local capacity, weak institutional collaboration, and the absence of enabling policies. These limitations often result in community disempowerment or superficial involvement in decision-making processes. Moreover, Putra & Budi (2020) point out that sustainable CBT requires not only community participation but also strategic leadership often embodied in “local champions” who act as bridge-builders between formal structures and grassroots needs.

The relevance of community empowerment in CBT is even more critical when viewed from a comparative perspective across different socio-cultural settings. While Indonesia has advanced in promoting village tourism through regulatory support and village funds, Thailand, particularly through its successful Ban Na San model, demonstrates a high level of integration between environmental stewardship, agro-tourism, and education-based tourism programming (Wadee, 2024). However, comparative research is still scarce in examining how structural, cultural, and institutional contexts influence the outcome of CBT initiatives.

To address this gap, this study applies a triangulated qualitative approach combining source, method, and theoretical triangulation to explore how community empowerment is fostered in two distinct locations: Sesaot in Lombok Barat, Indonesia, and Ban Na San in Surat Thani, Thailand. Both sites represent active tourism villages with strong cultural identities and participatory potential. Through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and theoretical synthesis, this research aims to uncover the conditions under which CBT fosters meaningful empowerment and how localized leadership, governance dynamics, and socio-cultural capital intersect in shaping tourism’s trajectory. By advancing this comparative framework, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on grassroots development, sustainable tourism, and community resilience. It also responds to the call for context-sensitive methodologies that respect the diverse paths to empowerment across Southeast Asian communities.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

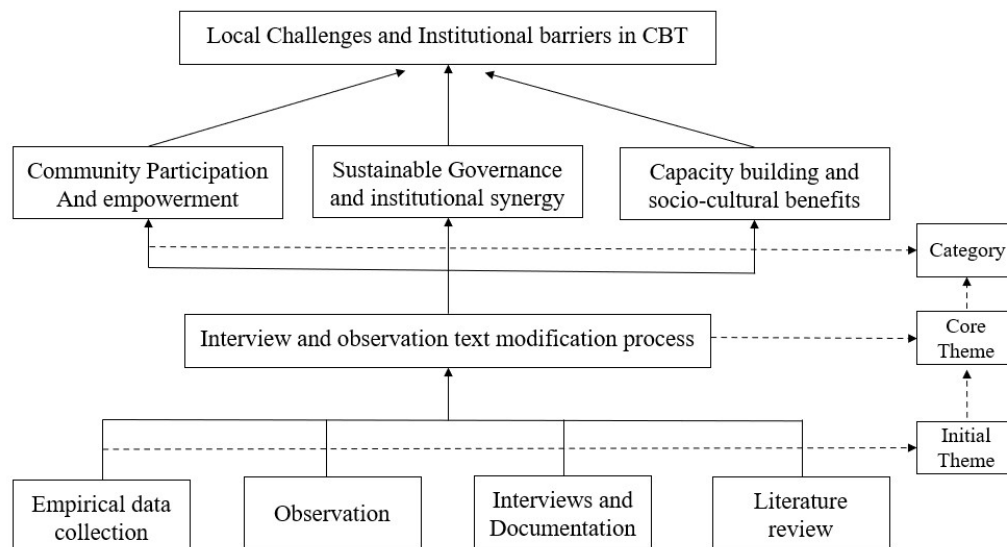
This study adopts a qualitative case study method, as described by Kuswarno (2009), which offers a detailed and holistic exploration of social realities. According to Mulyana, the case study approach allows researchers to capture and explain multiple aspects of a group, organization, community, or social process within its real-life context. It provides an opportunity to understand complex interactions in a way that is grounded in lived experiences.

This method was chosen because, as Bogdan and Biklen (1982) explain, qualitative research typically focuses on a particular setting or unit of analysis. In this research, the emphasis is placed on understanding how Community-Based Tourism (CBT) functions as a means of empowering local communities, specifically in Sesaot Village, Indonesia, and Ban Na San District, Thailand. Rather than merely evaluating CBT as a program, this study investigates how people engage with it, how they participate, lead, collaborate, and benefit. It aims to uncover the dynamics of empowerment from the perspective of those directly involved, acknowledging their voices, practices, and aspirations.

To ensure depth and rigor, this research uses a triangulated approach:

1. Source triangulation involves gathering insights from a variety of stakeholders, including community leaders, tourism organizers, local entrepreneurs, and government actors.
2. Method triangulation combines in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document review to cross-validate findings and capture both verbal and non-verbal dimensions of practice.
3. Theoretical triangulation draws on several frameworks to interpret the data, such as Scheyvens' Empowerment Model (1999), Jamal and Getz's Theory of Collaborative Tourism (1995), and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC, 2021) criteria.

By combining these forms of triangulation, the case study aims to provide a rich, trustworthy, and meaningful account of how CBT can serve as a platform for sustainable community empowerment across different cultural and institutional settings (figure 1).



**Figure 1. Findings of Research Results**

Source: Data processed using the triangulation technique

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To reflect the triangulated qualitative approach outlined in the research method, integrating source, method, and theoretical triangulation, this section presents the key findings from Sesaot (Indonesia) and Ban Na San (Thailand) by focusing on the core dimensions of community-based tourism (CBT): participation, governance, capacity building, and challenges. The findings are drawn from in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders, field observations, and document analysis, and are interpreted using

relevant theoretical frameworks including Scheyvens' empowerment model, Jamal and Getz's collaborative planning theory, and the sustainability principles of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). Through this integrated lens, the discussion explores how localized leadership, socio-cultural capital, and institutional arrangements intersect to foster (or inhibit) meaningful community empowerment in sustainable tourism practice. And to support the discussion section, the author attached 15 key informants from Sesaot Village and Ban Na San District (table 1 and table 2).

**Table 1. Profile of informants in the research at the Sesaot Village location**

No	Agency/Department	Initials M/F
1.	Department of tourism West Lombok Office	ER/M-Se1
2.	Acting Head of Sesaot Village	Mu/M-Se2
3.	The Head of BUMDES	Dod/M-Se3
4.	The Head of Pokdarwis	Dan/M-Se4
5.	The Head of POKJA	Ed/M-SE5
6.	Community Chair	Don/M-Se6
7.	Academics of the University of Mataram	Ds/M-Se7
8.	MSMEs	Ib/F-Se8
9.	MSMEs	Ku/F-Se9
10.	Local Community	Ar/M-Se10
11.	Local Community	Sa/M-Se11
12.	Local Community	Ru/M-Se12

Source : Data processed by researcher

**Table 2. Profiles of informants in the study at the Ban Na San District site**

No	Agency/Department	Initials M/F
1.	Head of National Park (CBT Chair)	Sr/M-Su1
2.	Academy	Pt / F-Su2
3.	Local Community	Wp/F-Su3

Source : Data processed by researcher

### Community Participation and Empowerment

Community participation is a foundational element in the success of community-based tourism (CBT), as demonstrated in both Sesaot Village and Ban Na San District. In Sesaot, engagement is deeply rooted in local cultural values such as *gotong royong* (cooperation), where collective initiatives like weekly clean-up programs, homestay management, and local product development showcase strong grassroots ownership. According to the head of Pokdarwis (Dan/M-Se4), "*We clean the area not just because tourists come, but because this is our forest, we protect it as part of our life.*" This sense of community-led stewardship reflects findings from Analisis Karakteristik Champion Desa Wisata di Pulau Lombok, which emphasizes the importance of social cohesion and cultural identity in fostering participatory tourism (Syahputra et al., 2022).

In contrast, Ban Na San exemplifies a more structured form of participation, often associated with conservation education and seasonal agricultural activities. CBT initiatives here often include themed experiences such as rambutan harvesting and school-based environmental programs. As local community shared, "*Tourists join us during rambutan harvest, but they also learn about our way of living, and that's what makes them want to come back*" (Wp/F-Su3). Similar thematic approaches have been noted in CBT

development strategies across Southeast Asia, where nature-based tourism is blended with cultural learning and ecological awareness (Ginting et al., 2023).

Although both communities demonstrate strong commitment, the nature of their participation structures differs. Sesaot relies on informal leadership and organically formed networks, while Ban Na San benefits from institutional collaboration with conservation bodies and tourism education providers. These findings align with Scheyvens' (1999) empowerment model, which asserts that psychological and economic empowerment are more likely when communities have genuine control and shared benefit from tourism ventures.

Other scholars have also noted that community empowerment is enhanced when participation is paired with sustained capacity-building efforts and formal institutional recognition (Afridinal, 2021; Heryanti et al., 2022). The Sesaot case reflects a bottom-up approach led by communal values, while Ban Na San illustrates a top-down yet inclusive structure supported by policy and education. Despite these differences, both models reaffirm that CBT flourishes when participation is deeply embedded in the lived experiences, traditions, and long-term aspirations of the local community.

### **Sustainable Governance and Institutional Synergy**

The governance of CBT plays a critical role in shaping how communities manage tourism and distribute its benefits. In Sesaot, the relationship between local tourism institutions such as Pokdarwis and BUMDes is often marked by role confusion and limited coordination. As described by (Dod/M-Se3), *"We often plan the same thing as Pokdarwis without knowing. There's no clear rule about who should lead what."* This friction reflects a broader challenge seen in many tourism villages, where institutional overlap can reduce program effectiveness and strain community trust (Dewi et al., 2022; Fitriani et al., 2020).

In contrast, Ban Na San benefits from a more structured model of governance, supported by coordinated efforts between the national park, educational institutions, and local tourism actors. This collaborative framework fosters more consistent tourism planning and implementation. A national park official, noted, *"We integrate conservation with tourism, and we always involve universities and schools. That's why it's sustainable"* (Sr/M-Su1). This reflects the success of CBT models in Indonesia and Thailand that emphasize inter-institutional collaboration, as shown in studies from Mansiman and Pangandaran (Ma'ruf et al., 2022; Widiastuti et al., 2021).

These findings support Jamal and Getz's (1995) theory of collaborative tourism planning, which argues that sustainable governance requires a shared vision and mutual accountability across sectors. Additionally, previous research has emphasized that institutional synergy, when backed by legal recognition and clear operational roles, enhances the effectiveness of CBT programs (Ariyanto & Pramita, 2022; Purnamasari, 2023). The contrasting cases in Sesaot and Ban Na San illustrate that sustainable governance is not only about regulation, but also about trust, communication, and shared responsibility.

### **Capacity Building and Socio-Cultural Benefits**

The development of CBT in both Sesaot and Ban Na San demonstrates the vital role of capacity building and the preservation of socio-cultural identity as intertwined elements of sustainable tourism. In Sesaot, initiatives such as homestay training, traditional culinary production, and youth-led digital promotion are becoming more common, though challenges remain. A local entrepreneur, shared, *"Before tourism, I sold snacks in the market. Now, visitors ask about our traditional recipes, I feel proud and confident"* (Ib/F-Se8). This statement reflects not only a shift in economic opportunity but also an increase in cultural self-esteem and social recognition.

Despite this positive trend, many community members still struggle with limited access to technology, digital marketing skills, and formal training. A Department of tourism West Lombok Office highlighted that *“young people are eager to help promote tourism, but most of them don’t know how to use digital platforms effectively”* (Er/M–Se1). This concern is echoed in previous studies, such as in Pangandaran and West Sekotong, where the lack of technical knowledge and infrastructure were identified as major barriers to maximizing CBT potential (Widiastuti et al., 2021; Ramadhani et al., 2023).

In contrast, Ban Na San integrates tourism activities with environmental education and agricultural programs. These include guided tours during the rambutan harvest and participatory workshops for school children, enhancing the transmission of ecological knowledge and cultural values across generations. Academics involved in the development of CBT (Pt/F–Su2) noted that *“CBT here is not just for income; it teaches youth to value nature and tradition.”* This model aligns with findings from Setanggor and Genggelang Villages in Lombok, where cultural and religious values are woven into tourism offerings to ensure the community retains control over how their heritage is shared (Feriadin, 2021; Sulaeman et al., 2023).

Empirical studies also show that when CBT supports both material benefits and socio-cultural renewal, it tends to increase long-term community commitment and cohesion (Maulana et al., 2022; Marlina & Susanti, 2023). In both research sites, CBT has not only created jobs and improved livelihoods but also strengthened collective identity through festivals, rituals, and storytelling. This reinforces the notion that community empowerment is not only an economic process, but one that involves emotional connection, cultural dignity, and intergenerational learning.

### **Local Challenges and Institutional Barriers**

Despite the encouraging development of community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives in Sesaot and Ban Na San, both communities continue to face notable challenges that limit the long-term sustainability of their programs. In Sesaot, infrastructural limitations remain a significant barrier. Inadequate road access, substandard sanitation facilities, and poor digital connectivity hinder the visitor experience and restrict the community’s ability to engage in online promotion. A local resident, emphasized, *“Tourists want to come, but they complain about the road and toilets. We need support, not just ideas.”* (Ar/M–Se10). This situation mirrors findings from Sukarara and Setanggor Villages in Lombok, where underinvestment in physical and digital infrastructure limited the capacity of residents to benefit fully from tourism opportunities (Kurniawan et al., 2021; Feriadin, 2021).

Beyond infrastructure, institutional clarity poses another critical obstacle, particularly in Sesaot. The overlapping functions of Pokdarwis, BUMDes, and village authorities often create confusion, conflict, and inefficiencies in tourism management. (Ds/M–Se7) an academition, noted that *“Without clear policies, CBT becomes personality-driven, it depends too much on individual leaders rather than systems.”* This concern echoes similar issues found in studies on tourism governance in Cibuntu and Cigadung, where limited legal frameworks and fragmented leadership structures resulted in inconsistent planning and weak accountability (Suryadi, 2020; Hidayat et al., 2022).

While Ban Na San enjoys more integrated institutional support, it faces its own set of challenges. The reliance on standardized tourism programs, often driven by external institutions, risks weakening local ownership and the authenticity of community experiences. (Wi/P–Su3) reflected, *“Sometimes I worry we lose our local flavor because everything is arranged too neatly.”* This insight is consistent with research on CBT in Mansiman and Mandalika, which cautioned against the commodification of culture and the

marginalization of traditional knowledge in overly formalized tourism settings (Ma'ruf et al., 2022; Sulaeman & Misnawati, 2023).

These findings suggest that the success of community-based tourism (CBT) cannot depend solely on community enthusiasm or institutional presence. As noted by Saufi, O'Brien, and Wilkins (2014), tourism governance often becomes dominated by conservation-focused institutions, which can inadvertently suppress local creativity and reduce opportunities for meaningful community agency, an issue that can also be observed in the more structured CBT approach found in Ban Na San. For CBT to thrive, it must be supported by adaptive governance systems, fair and transparent access to resources, and continuous dialogue among all stakeholders. As Ginting et al. (2023) emphasize, achieving sustainability in CBT requires more than policies on paper, it demands a flexible, inclusive, and context-aware framework that evolves alongside the needs, aspirations, and lived realities of the local population.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research underscores that community empowerment in community-based tourism (CBT) does not follow a single, fixed model. Instead, it emerges through a complex interplay of cultural values, participatory traditions, institutional relationships, and contextually grounded knowledge systems. In Sesaot, empowerment is shaped by strong local values like gotong royong (cooperation), which promote grassroots leadership and collective responsibility. However, limited infrastructure and unclear governance structures pose ongoing challenges that restrict the community's ability to scale its efforts sustainably.

In contrast, Ban Na San demonstrates a more organized and structured tourism governance system, supported by partnerships with conservation authorities and universities. While this coordinated model ensures greater consistency and access to institutional resources, it also presents a trade-off, risking a reduction in community-driven creativity and local autonomy due to externally designed programs.

Findings from both sites reaffirm that sustainable CBT depends on more than enthusiasm or policy frameworks. Effective capacity building and cultural affirmation, through training, mentoring, and cultural preservation, are critical to sustaining long-term participation. Yet, these aspects remain vulnerable in the absence of adaptive leadership, infrastructure, and a shared understanding of institutional roles. Moreover, the reliance on a few key individuals often limits broader community resilience, particularly in the face of leadership turnover or external shocks.

Theoretically, this study supports the framework developed by Asker et al. (2010), which emphasizes that successful CBT involves four interconnected pillars: active community engagement, supportive organizational structures, inclusive business development, and stewardship of natural and cultural assets. The cases of Sesaot and Ban Na San reveal how CBT must be seen not as a rigid blueprint, but as a flexible, evolving process shaped by the social, ecological, and institutional realities of each community.

The implications of this study are twofold. For practitioners and policymakers, it highlights the need to build governance models that are both responsive to local voices and capable of supporting long-term collaboration. For researchers, it contributes to ongoing discussions around sustainable tourism and grassroots empowerment by showing how the effectiveness of CBT is co-produced through everyday practice, shared ownership, and relational trust. Ultimately, CBT becomes most transformative when communities are not simply involved but empowered to lead, shape, and sustain tourism in ways that reflect their unique values and aspirations.

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