

# Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Sustainable Tourism Development: Evidence from Thailand and Indonesia's Community-Based Tourism Initiatives

MUHAMMAD YAMIN<sup>1</sup>, SLAMET ROSYADI<sup>1\*</sup>, SHADU SATWIKAWIJAYA<sup>1</sup>,  
WAHYUNINGRAT<sup>1</sup>, AGUS GANJAR RUNTIKO<sup>1</sup>, ISRAN KAMAL<sup>1</sup>, FAUZI FAISAL AKBAR<sup>1</sup>,  
ZAULA RIZKY ATIKA<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,  
Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Purwokerto,  
INDONESIA

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Social, Economics, and Humanities,  
Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama, Purwokerto,  
INDONESIA

*\*Corresponding Author*

**Abstract:** - This study aims to investigate the implementation of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) through cross-cultural analysis, by focusing on two case studies: the Ang Sila community in Mueang Chonburi, Thailand, and the Kemutug Lor Tourism Village in Banyumas Regency, Indonesia. In this regard, the implementation of CBT is evaluated based on five main dimensions: political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental, following the approach proposed by Suansri. In addition, the outcome of this research is discussed in relation to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 established by the United Nations. The research methodology followed the qualitative multiple case study strategy, combining semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and documentary research. Based on the outcomes, it can be argued that each site reaches sustainability goals through its own approach; while in the case of Thailand, the implementation of CBT relies on centralization backed up by Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), Indonesia's model implies village autonomy using the roles of community-based tourism groups (Pokdarwis) and village enterprise organizations (BUMDes).

**Key-Words:** - Community-Based Tourism (CBT), Cross-Cultural Analysis, Sustainable Development Goal 11 (United Nations), Governance Models, Qualitative Multiple Case Study, Rural Tourism, Local Institutions, Tourism Governance

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## 1 Introduction

The sustainable development of tourism in Southeast Asia entails a strategy sensitive to culture, considering all aspects of environmental preservation, empowerment of the community, and economic growth [1], [2]. In the context of this research, these issues are explored through cross-cultural analysis of CBT in Ang Sila Subdistrict, Mueang Chonburi, Thailand, and Kemutug Lor Tourism Village, Banyumas, Indonesia. The two locations have been selected based on differences in terms of institutional aspects. While Mueang Chonburi is an advanced case where specialized agencies like DASTA (Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration) operate, Banyumas is a developing village initiative

focusing on the involvement of local communities [3], [4].

The current research comes at a pertinent time amid the requirements for the understanding of the role of various cultural and institutional structures in terms of CBT implementation related to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11). While tourism plays an important part in national economic performance, providing about 20% of Thailand's national income and an annual growth rate of 15% in Indonesia, both countries are expected to come up with sustainability approaches in line with their cultures [5]. Although there has been much academic attention to cross-cultural CBT research, a considerable gap remains as regards the analysis of cross-cultural CBT related to the achievement of

SDGs, especially SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities [6], [7], [8].

In this way, this study addresses the research gap by investigating the sustainability of CBT through the lens of economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental dimensions using the theory developed by [9]. This paper contributes to the literature by conducting the first comparative analysis of CBT application in different cultures in conjunction with SDG 11, which provides evidence that debunks the concept of universal development models. The theory underpinning the study suggests that CBT depends on the alignment between formal organizational structures and informal cultural norms, as in the case of Thailand and Indonesia, where DASTA coordinates the activities in Thailand, while community-based tourism groups (Pokdarwis) and village enterprise organizations (BUMDes) coordinate tourism in Indonesia [4], [10], [11], [12].

## 2 Literature Review

Framework for SDG 11 is a transition from the traditional economic-based approach to tourism into a strategy that incorporates tourism into sustainable development goals [13], [14]. As a result, SDG 11, which focuses on safe, resilient, and sustainable cities, calls for tourism strategies that benefit and do not harm the community [15]. In the case of Southeast Asian countries, implementation of tourism policies according to SDG 11 has yielded more effective outcomes for the well-being of communities and environmental conservation in Thailand and Indonesia, among other countries [2], [16].

Community-Based Tourism has developed into a mainstream theory focusing on local governance and participation, where benefit-sharing is also emphasized [12], [17]. The findings from the Southeast Asian case studies indicate that using Suansri's five dimensions leads to better community empowerment outcomes than those using traditional tourism practices [7], [9]. Cross-cultural frameworks have become popular as researchers realize that there can be significant shortcomings in the sustainability of tourism when a generalized approach is employed without considering cultural differences related to governance and values [18]. Cross-cultural analysis of the tourism practice in Thailand and Indonesia has demonstrated that Thai communities operate within a hierarchical system based on Buddhism, whereas Indonesian communities operate within a consensus-based system rooted in adat systems [19], [20].

The governance of tourism relies heavily on the compatibility between the institutional structure and cultural values, particularly with respect to

participation and the benefits received from tourism [21]. There is ample research supporting the idea that sustainability within the industry requires compatibility between institutional structures and cultural values [22]. The success of tourism governance in Thailand lies in combining village-level governance mechanisms with tourism management structures, whereas Indonesian cases illustrate the importance of adhering to adat institutions [19], [23]. However, despite such progress, CBT initiatives have been difficult to implement due to capacity building issues, restricted market access, and balancing commercial viability with authenticity [17], [24], [25]. Cases of successful implementation in Thailand and Indonesia share some important characteristics [26], [27].

## 3 Method

In this study, the research design used is multiple case studies using a qualitative approach [28], which concentrates on CBT sustainability in Kemutug Lor Tourism Village, Banyumas Regency, Indonesia, and Ang Sila Subdistrict, Mueang Chonburi, Thailand. The model used to analyze the data is the five-dimensional sustainability model introduced by Suansri [9]. Although there may be an imbalance in the intensity of the fieldwork in each case study site, this design allows comparative analysis.

Sampling followed purposive and snowball techniques to ensure representation of both formal institutions and community-based actors. Table 1 summarizes the research design and data collection procedures for each site.

Table 1. Summary of Research Design and Data Collection Procedures at Each Study Site

| Aspect                  | Kemutug Lor, Indonesia                                                                                           | Ang Sila, Thailand                                                                              |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fieldwork period        | March–June 2025                                                                                                  | April–May 2025                                                                                  |
| In-depth interviews     | 12 interviews (village head, Pokdarwis chair, BUMDes manager, tourism operators, government officials, tourists) | 8 interviews (Ban Puek CBT Enterprise leaders, community leaders, governmental actors, experts) |
| Focus Group Discussions | 2 FGDs (8–10 participants each, community members and tourism operators)                                         | 1 FGD (8 participants, community members)                                                       |

|                             |                                                                                                            |                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participant characteristics | Mixed gender (78.1% male, 21.9% female); age range 25–60 years; institutional and non-institutional actors | Mixed gender; diverse age groups including elderly cultural ambassadors; institutional and community actors |
| Observation                 | Direct observation of 6 tourism destinations, cultural events, homestay operations                         | Direct observation of heritage sites, weaving activities, eco-tourism activities                            |
| Supplementary data          | Village SDG Index (BPS/Bappenas, 2024); Village regulations; BUMDes financial reports                      | DASTA monitoring data; community enterprise reports; local government statistics                            |

Source: data processed by the author

Analysis of the data was done through four phases: (1) Data reduction using coding and classification, (2) Within-case analysis of each individual site, (3) Cross-case analysis to establish similarities and differences, and (4) Explanatory analysis that relates findings to culture, governance, and sustainability [28], [29]. Triangulation of data sources, member checking, and contextual validation with official statistics were used to ensure rigor.

Indicators of quantitative sustainability for Indonesia's case study (Village SDG scores) have been sourced from the national index of Village SDGs provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of Indonesia and Bappenas, based on data from 2024. The composite indices gauge the achievements of individual SDG targets at the village level, with scores ranging from 0 to 100, using standardized indicators obtained through surveys [30]. Limitations of the research include the concentration on two sites used in case studies, perceptions by stakeholders, and time constraints that do not allow for a longitudinal approach.

## 4 Results

CBT sustainability was seen to have had successful cases in both countries, with each having unique approaches. However, the differences that emerged from the comparison in terms of governance, implementation strategy, and participation were significant.

### 4.1 Political and Managerial Sustainability

In terms of governance, Ang Sila has a system where its governance is centralized due to the involvement of DASTA and other government institutions. The Ang Sila management committee utilizes the 4M concept, i.e., Man, Money, Material, and Management, which enhances efficiency as well as ensures that income is distributed effectively. However, inclusive planning is difficult since only elite members participate in planning. On the other hand, Kemitug Lor emphasizes decentralization whereby Pokdarwis and BUMDes function on the basis of village laws, which include Village Head Decree No. 41/2019 and No. 23/2020. This results in six destinations of tourism receiving good local ownership. The political aspect is captured in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Comparative Political and Managerial Sustainability Dimensions

Source: Primary fieldwork data, 2025

| Aspect           | Thailand (Ang Sila)                                                                      | Indonesia (Kemitug Lor)                                                                                |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Governance model | Centralized coordination via DASTA; formalized 4M principles; multi-stakeholder networks | Decentralized village-level autonomy; Pokdarwis and BUMDes with legal mandates; community full control |
| Decision-making  | Hierarchical, influenced by Buddhist traditions                                          | Consensus-driven, rooted in adat systems                                                               |
| External support | DASTA monitoring, NSTDA partnerships, external market integration                        | Direct governmental assistance, legal recognition via Village Head Decrees                             |

Source: data processed by the author

### 4.2 Economic Sustainability

For Ang Sila, the emphasis on economic sustainability is achieved by way of integration with other markets. Economic activities like oyster farming and weaving are revalued in terms of being alternative incomes that can generate additional tourist dollars through social enterprises like Local Alike. For Kemitug Lor, there have been significant developments in creating employment and income streams. The revenues generated by the village stay within the village due to local institutions. However, structural issues still exist in the form of a 19% unemployment rate and low performance in Village SDGs in terms of economic

equality (SDG 8 = 27.63/100; SDG 10 = 35.89/100). Table 3 provides a comparison.

Table 3. Comparative Economic Sustainability Dimensions  
Source: Primary fieldwork data and Village SDG Index (BPS/Bappenas, 2024)

| Aspect               | Thailand (Ang Sila)                                                                   | Indonesia (Kemukut Lor)                                                                |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Economic strategy    | External market integration via social enterprises; CBT as a supplementary occupation | Local ownership via Pokdarwis/BUMDes; income diversification and employment generation |
| Revenue distribution | Distributed via governmental and social enterprise networks                           | Managed through village-level institutions                                             |
| Key challenges       | Equitable benefit distribution across community segments                              | High inequality (SDG 8: 27.63; SDG 10: 35.89); 19% unemployment rate                   |

Source: data processed by the author

### 4.3 Social and Cultural Sustainability

Ang Sila incorporates creative tourism into heritage consumption clusters, thus strengthening cultural identity by reviving their traditional weaving. Building a high level of trust among leaders fosters community bonding, and intergenerational inclusion is demonstrated through the involvement of older generations as guides and young generations as tourists. Kemukut Lor achieves social sustainability at very high levels through methods that instill community pride and educate the culture through homestay services, Calung Banyumasan shows, and ecoprinting crafts. However, issues regarding inclusiveness remain, such as women making up only 21.9% of tourism management and people below 31 years contributing to only 15.7% of involvement. Table 4 contains the comparison.

Table 4. Comparative Social and Cultural Sustainability Dimensions  
Source: Primary fieldwork data, 2025

| Aspect          | Thailand (Ang Sila)                                     | Indonesia (Kemukut Lor)                                |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Social cohesion | High trust in leadership; intergenerational integration | Strong community pride; consensus-driven participation |

|                     |                                                                              |                                                                            |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cultural expression | Creative tourism (weaving, heritage sites); creative resurrection strategies | Preservation and education (homestays, Calung Banyumasan, ecoprint crafts) |
| Inclusivity gaps    | Participation concentrated among elites                                      | Limited female representation (21.9%); restricted youth engagement (15.7%) |

Source: data processed by the author

### 4.4 Environmental Sustainability

The environmental efforts of Ang Sila are focused on conservation with eco-tourism that relies on low-carbon approaches. The tourists are advised to travel using public transport and even to walk. The use of environmentally friendly products like naturally dyed clothes is also promoted. Kemukut Lor, on the other hand, focuses on environmental sustainability through community-based systems. An integrated waste management system with a remarkable 91.68% household involvement can be considered an accomplishment, coupled with tree-planting exercises conducted by Wana Karya Lestari communities. Yet again, issues of infrastructure still persist, as evidenced by the poor Village SDG 6 score of 56.65/100 for access to clean water and sanitation. Table 5 provides a comparison.

Table 5. Comparative Environmental Sustainability Dimensions  
Source: Primary fieldwork data and Village SDG Index (BPS/Bappenas, 2024)

| Aspect                 | Thailand (Ang Sila)                                                           | Indonesia (Kemukut Lor)                                                           |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Environmental priority | Low-carbon tourism concepts: carbon reduction via transport and accommodation | Comprehensive resource management; carrying capacity; integrated waste management |
| Community involvement  | Community participation in the execution of waste management                  | 91.68% household participation; Wana Karya Lestari conservation groups            |
| Key challenges         | External market integration and environmental standardization                 | Infrastructure gaps (SDG 6: 56.65/100); participation inequalities                |

Source: data processed by the author

## 5 Discussion

The results show that the sustainability of CBT is conditional on the fit between the method of implementation and the cultural and institutional context at the local level. While Ang Sila and Kemetug Lor achieve similar levels of sustainability, they do so through completely different processes of governance. The finding runs counter to the universalist perspective on community development by showing that an institution's viability need not follow from conformity to a model but depends on the cultural fit between governance systems and institutions [8], [18].

In relation to governance, Thailand adopts the centralized approach through DASTA that depends on formal managerial commitment and coordination, an approach that is consistent with the cultural practices of Buddhist administration. On the other hand, Indonesia adopts the decentralized approach that derives its legitimacy from local institutional autonomy, where Pokdarwis and BUMDes are recognized by law. Both approaches succeed to the extent to which their governance arrangements harmonize with the cultural values associated with the exercise of authority and collective decision making [19], [20]. It is important to note that the village institutions in Kemetug Lor were sustainable at levels similar to those achieved by DASTA in Thailand, despite the fact that they adopted very different organizational arrangements [19], [23].

Concerning economic sustainability, both examples show how CBT can generate significant economic gains at a local level. Thailand's focus on international markets creates opportunities for the integration of livelihood activities through social enterprises in international tourism systems and hence increases the diversity of incomes earned. The focus of Kemetug Lor is on community involvement, thus leaving decisions related to development to be made by the local people themselves. Yet there are issues related to the equal distribution of benefits, especially since Kemetug Lor demonstrates low ratings for SDG 8 (equal economic growth), scoring only 27.63 out of 100 and suffering from high levels of unemployment amounting to 19%. These issues have long been recognized in relation to problems associated with the implementation of community-based tourism [31], [32], [33], [35]. Hence, achieving economic sustainability through inclusiveness requires appropriate redistribution policy initiatives [17], [24], [25].

Concerning the social and cultural dimensions, the results suggest that cultural fit and community ownership have more significant impacts on the success of community-based tourism (CBT) than the

standardized framework of participation. Social sustainability was highly attained by Kemetug Lor using consensus-based decision-making rooted in their adat, while Thailand obtained equally high levels relying on hierarchical systems guided by Buddhist values [19], [20], [36]. However, both scenarios face identical challenges with regard to gender and intergenerational participation, as seen in Kemetug Lor's low proportion of women (21.9%) and leadership among middle-aged individuals. The best way to preserve culture is by ensuring communities take charge of representing their own cultures; Kemetug Lor's experiential activities, such as Calung performance, homestay, and crafting classes, and Thailand's creative tourism at historical sites were highly culturally sustainable due to emphasizing community ownership over outsiders' interpretations [2], [7], [9], [38].

The results of environmental sustainability show that community-based conservation may lead to significant ecological safety under proper institutional arrangements [7], [9]. The high household participation rate of 91.68% in waste management and proactive conservation measures implemented through the Wana Karya Lestari community demonstrates the effectiveness of locally managed environmental conservation. The Thai initiative of low-carbon tourism is an example of environmentalism at an institutional level. Both cases show that the success of environmental sustainability will require ensuring an understanding of ecological interdependency among communities. However, the relatively low SDG 6 score of 56.65/100 in Kemetug Lor demonstrates that community conservation also requires additional infrastructure development [24], [25], [27], [37].

Comparative Institutional Analysis reveals that sustainable CBT can be successfully ensured regardless of organizational structure, on condition that the latter ensures effective community control and maintains professional standards of management and connection with the outside world. The key idea is the idea of fitting institutional and cultural aspects rather than institutional homogenization [18], [22], [34]. The success of the model in the Kemetug Lor village and the model in Thailand is explained by community involvement and the provision of necessary technical assistance; therefore, different organizational structures do not hinder the success of the project if it relies upon the same set of values.

## 6 Conclusion

Cross-cultural analysis from this research reveals that the sustainability of Community-Based Tourism

(CBT) in Southeast Asia requires congruency of implementation approach and cultural-institutional context. The DASTA-based, centrally administered process in Ang Sila and the locally governed one in Kemutug Lor lead to similar sustainability achievements in all five dimensions of Suansri's model when their institutional framework matches the dominant culture. Findings of this research provide an argument against the universality of approaches and emphasize the significance of cultural congruence in the context of SDG 11. This research is the first attempt at comparing CBT sustainability and SDG 11 through a cross-cultural perspective in Southeast Asian governance settings.

Despite these successes, several challenges still persist. The equitable sharing of benefits and demographic inclusion will need specific policies, such as redistribution programs and institutional frameworks that eliminate structural obstacles for marginalized groups. Although environmental protection within communities can be highly efficient, it needs sufficient infrastructural development. For policy implications, we would like to suggest that any program aimed at developing the model of CBT should include an assessment of its cultural governance before choosing any particular institutional framework. As for research implications, we recommend conducting longitudinal studies that will examine CBT models over time in different Southeast Asian communities. We also suggest using mixed methods to study CBT success by comparing quantitative sustainability indices with qualitative data on community experience. It will also be interesting to generalize our findings by examining other ASEAN countries and thus see whether institutional-culture fit is a reliable predictor of CBT success in various cases.

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### **Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)**

- Muhammad Yamin (first author), formulated the research idea, developed the theoretical framework, supervised all stages of the work, contributed to data analysis, and led the writing of the final manuscript.
- Slamet Rosyadi (corresponding), contributed to the research design, data analysis, and participated in the interpretation of theoretical results.
- Shadu Satwika Wijaya conducted data collection, and assisted in data analysis.
- Wahyuningrat participated in the literature review and analyzed results using the five-dimensional sustainability model.
- Agus Ganjar Runtiko developed the Political and Managerial Sustainability and Environmental Sustainability Dimensions Comparison.
- Isran Kamal contributed to editing and drafting the methodological section and the results.
- Fauzi Faisal Akbar organized data and prepared tables and figures.
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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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