

Internalizing Local Wisdom in Tourism Management: A Strategy for Sustainable Tourism in Pangandaran, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of local wisdom into tourism management as a strategic foundation for sustainable tourism development in Pangandaran, Indonesia. As a coastal tourism destination enriched by the cultural intersection of Sundanese and Javanese communities, Pangandaran presents a unique repository of local values that remain underutilized in current tourism practices. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through field observations, literature review, and in-depth interviews with local community members. The findings reveal that the internalization of traditional values—such as the Nampaling festival, Hajat Laut ritual, Sedekah Bumi ceremony, and the cultural norm of Someah ka Semah (hospitality toward guests)—is implemented through community-based planning, coordination, and control mechanisms. These values not only reinforce environmental stewardship and cultural preservation but also enhance social cohesion and local economic benefits. The active participation of local communities ensures the continuity of these traditions while fostering inclusive and sustainable tourism governance. This study concludes that local wisdom, when systematically embedded in tourism management, contributes significantly to sustainable development goals by balancing ecological, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions.

Keywords: local wisdom, tourism management, sustainable tourism, community participation, Pangandaran

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a vital engine of economic growth, socio-cultural exchange, and environmental awareness in many parts of the world. As a multidimensional sector, it intersects with livelihoods, landscapes, and local identities, often producing complex dynamics between global development pressures and community resilience (UNWTO, 2022). In response to growing concerns over environmental degradation and cultural commodification, the paradigm of sustainable tourism has gained widespread recognition. This approach emphasizes balancing three critical pillars: economic viability, cultural integrity, and ecological preservation (Butler, 1999; Wahanisa & Adiyatma, 2021). Increasingly, researchers and practitioners are advocating for tourism models that foreground community participation and cultural values as foundational elements of sustainability (Lane, 2009; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Prawira et al., 2024; Septyandi et al., 2025).

A particularly promising but underexplored component of sustainable tourism is integrating local wisdom—a community's culturally embedded knowledge, traditions, and ethical values passed down across generations (Rohmadi, 2022; Satino et al., 2024). These values often serve practical functions, from ecological protection and conflict resolution to social cohesion and spiritual grounding. In tourism contexts, local wisdom can enhance the authenticity of visitor experiences, strengthen place-based identity, and act as a regulatory framework for managing resources responsibly (Sofyan et al., 2021). Despite its potential, systematic internalization of local wisdom into formal tourism management

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practices remains limited in many developing countries, where economic imperatives often overshadow cultural considerations (Armanda & Prabowo, 2025).

In Indonesia, the tension between tourism growth and cultural preservation is particularly evident in coastal regions such as Pangandaran, a well-known tourist destination in West Java. Pangandaran's distinctive cultural landscape is shaped by the coexistence of Sundanese and Javanese communities, which gives rise to diverse traditions such as Sedekah Bumi (earth thanksgiving), Hajat Laut (sea ritual), Festival Nampaling (grasshopper harvest), and the behavioral ethic of Someah ka Semah (hospitality toward guests) (Putra et al., 2021; Heriyawati et al., 2020). These practices embody symbolic heritage and functional ecological and social knowledge. However, recent shifts toward economic pragmatism in tourism have led to a decline in the preservation and transmission of these values, a process that scholars have termed "the displacement of cultural wisdom by economic wisdom" (Syarif et al., 2023).

Although studies have acknowledged the value of local traditions in tourism branding and community identity (Nawang & Putri, 2023), few have examined how these traditions are embedded in tourism governance frameworks. Furthermore, research on community-based tourism (CBT) has highlighted the importance of inclusive management and stakeholder collaboration (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018), yet empirical investigations on the mechanisms of internalization—how local wisdom becomes operational within tourism planning, decision-making, and regulation—remain scarce, especially in Southeast Asian contexts.

This study addresses that gap by examining how local wisdom in Pangandaran is internalized into the management of tourism activities and how this process contributes to the goals of sustainable tourism development. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research explores local narratives, rituals, and values as key inputs in tourism governance. The study argues that internalizing local wisdom is essential for preserving cultural heritage and represents a strategic pathway toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11, which calls for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable communities (UNESCO, 2023). By analyzing the cultural content and managerial structures through which local wisdom is implemented, this paper contributes to broader discourses on decolonizing tourism, promoting indigenous knowledge systems, and designing community-led governance models that align with sustainability imperatives. Pangandaran, in this regard, serves as a compelling case study for understanding the interplay between tradition, tourism, and transformation in rapidly developing regions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local Wisdom as Cultural and Ecological Knowledge

Local wisdom, also known as indigenous knowledge or local genius, is a body of values, practices, and beliefs that emerge from long-standing interactions between human communities and their surrounding environments (Rohmadi, 2022). This knowledge system is often transmitted orally and reflects the collective experiences of a community in managing natural resources, resolving conflict, and maintaining social cohesion (Satino et al., 2024). In Southeast Asian contexts, local wisdom encompasses both tangible and intangible heritage, including rituals, taboos, oral traditions, agricultural systems, and customary laws (Nawang & Putri, 2023). In tourism, these cultural resources offer a competitive advantage and a normative framework for promoting sustainability and authenticity (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018).

In Pangandaran, forms of local wisdom such as Hajat Laut (a sea purification ritual), Sedekah Bumi (earth thanksgiving), and Someah ka Semah (hospitality ethic) embody ecological awareness, spiritual beliefs, and social solidarity. These practices function as informal regulatory systems, contributing to environmental conservation and cultural resilience (Heriyawati et al., 2020; Sofyan et al., 2021). However, the transition to mass tourism has led to commodifying cultural practices, raising concerns about the loss of meaning and authenticity (Syarif et al., 2023). This underscores the need to reframe local wisdom as cultural capital and governance knowledge in tourism development.

Internality and Value Integration in Tourism Governance

Internalization is the process by which external values, norms, or cultural elements become embedded into an individual's or organization's internal belief system, guiding behavior and decision-making (Suawa et al., 2021). In tourism management, internalization involves integrating community-based cultural values into the formal planning, organizing, controlling, and coordinating activities that govern tourism operations. This process is often mediated through socialization, community participation, and institutional frameworks (Novitri & Dharma, 2023). From a management perspective, this aligns with the five pillars of strategic governance: planning, organizing, leading, controlling, and evaluating (Fayol, as adapted by Makal et al., 2021). When internalized through these mechanisms, local values can shift tourism from an extractive industry to a

participatory and ethical one. However, the success of such internalization efforts often hinges on multi-stakeholder collaboration and the recognition of local communities as custodians of cultural knowledge (Armanda & Prabowo, 2025).

Sustainable Tourism and the Role of Community-Based Approaches

Sustainable tourism has been widely conceptualized as a model that balances economic development with preserving cultural and ecological systems (Butler, 1999; UNWTO, 2022). In practical terms, this involves reducing the negative impacts of tourism while enhancing its benefits for host communities and environments (Rosadi et al., 2022). Scholars have increasingly called for tourism models that are environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and culturally grounded (Lane, 2009). One of the most prominent frameworks that addresses these concerns is Community-Based Tourism (CBT). CBT advocates for the full involvement of local communities in planning, managing, and benefiting from tourism (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). This model recognizes communities as not passive hosts but active agents with valuable knowledge and governance capacities. In the Indonesian context, CBT has been promoted to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 on inclusive and sustainable human settlements (UNESCO, 2023).

Nevertheless, successful CBT implementation often faces barriers such as limited institutional support, inconsistent participation, and a lack of integration between traditional values and modern tourism systems (Syarif et al., 2023). Integrating local wisdom into CBT frameworks offers a promising solution. When traditional practices and values are institutionalized within CBT structures, tourism becomes both a tool for development and a medium for cultural revitalization (Hulu, 2018). This integrated approach remains underexplored in empirical studies, especially in dynamic tourism destinations like Pangandaran, where cultural complexity and ecological vulnerability intersect.

Positioning This Study

While existing research has acknowledged the importance of local wisdom in tourism (Sofyan et al., 2021; Heriyawati et al., 2020), few have systematically analysed how such values are operationalized within tourism governance structures. This study contributes to the literature by offering an empirical examination of the internalization process—tracing how cultural values are embedded into planning, organizing, and controlling mechanisms of tourism in Pangandaran. Moreover, by framing this investigation within both sustainability theory and community-based tourism models, the study addresses a critical gap in Southeast Asian tourism research: the lack of integrative models that connect local cultural capital with institutional tourism governance. It describes Pangandaran's practices and a conceptual framework for sustainable tourism governance rooted in indigenous knowledge systems.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how local wisdom is internalized within tourism management practices in Pangandaran, Indonesia. Qualitative methods were chosen to capture the depth and richness of cultural expressions, meanings, and values embedded in community practices related to tourism (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A descriptive approach allowed for detailed documentation of natural phenomena, aligning with the study's aim to understand real-life community participation processes and cultural integration.

Study Area and Context

Pangandaran is a coastal tourism region in West Java, Indonesia, known for its rich ecological landscape and diverse cultural heritage, particularly the coexistence of Sundanese and Javanese traditions. The study focused on several villages within Pangandaran Regency where community-based tourism practices are prominent and traditional rituals are still actively performed.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three primary methods: 1) Non-participant observation – Researchers observed local tourism-related events such as Sedekah Bumi and Hajat Laut without direct involvement, documenting social interactions, spatial arrangements, and symbolic practices; 2) In-depth semi-structured interviews – Interviews were conducted with three key local informants who have lived in Pangandaran for decades and are actively involved in organizing cultural festivals. These included a traditional community leader (tokoh adat), a local tourism manager, and a village elder; and 3) Document and literature analysis –

Secondary sources such as local government regulations, cultural documentation, media coverage, and relevant academic studies were examined to triangulate findings.

Sampling Strategy

This study used purposive sampling, selecting informants with deep knowledge of cultural practices and who were actively involved in local tourism management. Criteria for inclusion included: 1) having lived in the area for over 15 years; 2) participation in at least two major cultural festivals; and 3) involvement in tourism-related decision-making processes. While the sample was limited to three primary informants, their roles as cultural custodians provided rich, contextually embedded insights, suitable for qualitative depth rather than statistical generalization.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, following the steps proposed by (Braun and Clarke, 2006): 1) familiarization with data; 2) generation of initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. Manual coding was applied to interview transcripts and observation notes. Emerging themes included: cultural internalization mechanisms, community-based governance, ritual-tourism linkage, and perceived threats to cultural sustainability. To enhance credibility, the study employed triangulation across data sources (interviews, observations, documents), member checking with informants, and peer debriefing among the research team.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained verbally from all participants before interviews. Anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms. The study followed ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, per university research ethics guidelines..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms and Functions of Local Wisdom in Pangandaran

The findings revealed that local wisdom in Pangandaran is a cultural asset and a practical framework for managing human–nature relations. Traditional practices such as Hajat Laut (a sea thanksgiving ritual), Sedekah Bumi (earth offering), and Festival Nampaling (grasshopper harvest festival) illustrate a complex blend of spiritual, ecological, and communal values. These practices serve dual purposes: as expressions of cultural identity and mechanisms for ecological balance and social order. The Hajat Laut, for example, involves offering animal parts to the ocean to honor sea spirits. While spiritual, this ritual is also an ecological regulation mechanism that subtly controls fishing intensity through seasonal timing. Similarly, Sedekah Bumi reinforces agricultural cycles and social solidarity by emphasizing gratitude and the collective sharing of harvests. In addition, the ethic of Someah ka Semah—translated as "hospitality to guests"—manifests as everyday social behavior, guiding local interactions with tourists. This cultural norm is a social value system that supports responsible tourism, improves guest satisfaction, and strengthens community reputation as a welcoming destination (Putra et al., 2021).

Internalization Mechanisms: Embedding Culture into Governance

The process of integrating these values into tourism management occurs through both formalized systems and informal traditions. Interviews and observations revealed that community members, particularly elders and cultural leaders, play a central role in organizing and executing tourism events rooted in local traditions. Festival planning is typically based on the lunar calendar or agricultural cycles and follows inherited sequences of rituals and responsibilities.

This internalization process aligns with classical strategic management functions—planning, organizing, leading, and controlling—as described by Fayol (Suawa et al., 2021). However, in Pangandaran, these functions are deeply infused with customary law and oral knowledge transmission, rather than formal documentation. For example: 1) Planning is coordinated through informal village meetings; 2) Organizing involves collective labor divisions, such as who will prepare offerings or host guests; 3) Leading is often the role of traditional figures (tokoh adat or dukun kampung); and 4) Controlling is embedded in community norms, taboos, and expectations.

This system is highly participatory, reflecting the ideals of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), where cultural autonomy and collective agency are prioritized (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). However, the absence

of formal institutional support and written policies poses risks to continuity, particularly as younger generations become less involved.

Contributions to Sustainable Tourism Development

Local wisdom contributes to sustainable tourism by supporting all three key dimensions: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. Environmental Dimension: Rituals such as Hajat Laut promote respect for marine ecosystems and seasonal fishing. The taboo against wearing green clothes at sea—rooted in mystical beliefs—ironically serves a life-saving function, as green clothing is difficult to detect in ocean water. Socio-cultural Dimension: Festivals create spaces for cultural transmission, community cohesion, and intergenerational bonding. They also foster pride and identity in the face of globalizing pressures. These functions are central to cultural sustainability. Economic Dimension: Traditional events attract visitors, increase tourism revenue, and create local employment opportunities. For example, the Festival Nampaling supports local vendors and provides a unique tourist experience that blends nature, tradition, and community interaction. To synthesize these functions, the table below presents how each tradition aligns with sustainability dimensions:

Table 1. Alignment of Local Traditions with Sustainability Dimensions

Local Tradition	Environmental Sustainability	Socio-cultural Sustainability	Economic Sustainability
<i>Hajat Laut</i>	Encourages seasonal fishing	Ritual-based cultural pride	Attracts cultural tourists
<i>Sedekah Bumi</i>	Promotes land respect	Strengthens local identity	Draws local visitors
<i>Festival Nampaling</i>	Sustainable pest control	Celebrates communal labor	Boosts local income
<i>Someah ka Semah</i>	Encourages respectful travel	Enhances guest experience	Increases repeat visits

Source: Research data, 2025

Emerging Tensions and the Risk of Cultural Commodification

While internalizing local wisdom brings clear benefits, the findings also reveal emerging tensions. Some community members expressed concern that traditional rituals are increasingly being commodified or altered to suit tourist preferences. One informant remarked, *"Sometimes the meaning of the ritual gets lost. It becomes more like a show than a ceremony."* This reflects a broader dilemma in sustainable tourism: the risk that economic imperatives undermine cultural authenticity (Syarif et al., 2023). While increased tourism brings income, it can also lead to superficial representations of deeply held traditions. To mitigate this, there is an urgent need for: 1) Policy frameworks that formalize the community's authority in ritual preservation; 2) Capacity-building programs for youth to carry forward traditions; 3) Tourism guidelines that respect cultural integrity and avoid exploitative practices. This aligns with UNESCO's (2023) call for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in development contexts and UNWTO's (2022) emphasis on inclusive, community-led tourism planning.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that local wisdom plays in preserving cultural identity and shaping inclusive and sustainable tourism governance in Pangandaran. Contrary to approaches that treat culture as an ancillary or decorative aspect of tourism development, this study illustrates how deeply embedded local knowledge can function as a governance mechanism, guiding practices, shaping attitudes, and regulating behavior within communities and tourism systems. The various traditions observed—Hajat Laut, Sedekah Bumi, Festival Nampaling, and the behavioral ethic of Someah ka Semah—demonstrate the multifunctionality of local wisdom. These practices serve ecological functions (e.g., aligning agricultural or fishing activities with natural cycles), socio-cultural functions (e.g., reinforcing community cohesion), and economic functions (e.g., drawing visitors and supporting local livelihoods). Such integrative potential reflects what (Smith, 2006) describes as "cultural sustainability", where heritage is not static but adaptive, and actively co-produced through local agency. These findings resonate with the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) framework, which positions local communities as custodians and beneficiaries of tourism development (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). However, this study goes beyond CBT by emphasizing internalization—the process through which cultural values are expressed and consciously embedded into tourism activity's management structures and operational decisions. This extends the existing literature by providing a governance-focused perspective, where cultural values are treated as strategic, not merely symbolic.

Interestingly, how communities organize tourism-related rituals in Pangandaran reflects a form of vernacular management—a decentralized, informal system where traditional leaders assume roles analogous to formal managerial functions: planning, coordination, supervision, and accountability. This aligns with

earlier propositions by (Hall , 2000), who argued that sustainable tourism governance must accommodate formal and informal institutions.

However, while the internalization of local wisdom offers a compelling model for sustainability, it is not without risk. The study highlights growing concerns about cultural commodification, wherein rituals are transformed into tourist spectacles, stripped of their original meaning. As McKercher and du Cros (2002) echoed, such processes may dilute the authenticity of cultural expressions and erode community ownership. In Pangandaran, the encroachment of external event organizers and the adaptation of rituals to suit tourist expectations risk disempowering local actors and reshaping traditions for economic utility rather than cultural integrity. This tension reveals a paradox: the very success of culture-based tourism can undermine the foundations it depends on. To resolve this, local wisdom must be protected not only through performance but also through policy. Formal recognition of cultural custodianship, guidelines for ethical cultural tourism, and capacity-building programs for youth are all necessary to safeguard continuity.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to debates on postcolonial tourism, where indigenous knowledge systems are not merely preserved but actively shape decision-making (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). It also supports calls to decenter Western-centric tourism models by demonstrating how local epistemologies can inform governance, planning, and sustainability. In practical terms, the findings suggest that internalizing local wisdom into tourism governance can enhance destination resilience, increase community trust, and improve tourist satisfaction—particularly among travelers seeking authenticity and ethical engagement. This model aligns closely with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which promotes inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable settlements, and SDG 8 on decent work and inclusive economic growth.

Despite these contributions, the model's replication elsewhere must be approached with cultural sensitivity. Local wisdom is inherently place-based and relational; it cannot be reduced to transferable "best practices." Future research should thus examine how such processes unfold in different socio-cultural contexts, particularly in urban or hybrid destinations where traditions may not be as visible.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that local wisdom in Pangandaran is not merely a cultural artifact, but a dynamic system of knowledge and practice that can be internalized into tourism management to foster sustainable development. Through in-depth observation and interviews, the research revealed how rituals such as Hajat Laut, Sedekah Bumi, Festival Nampaling, and Someah ka Semah's cultural ethic contribute simultaneously to environmental stewardship, socio-cultural cohesion, and economic resilience. As observed in Pangandaran, the internalization process is largely community-driven, relying on residents' collective agency, oral tradition, and participatory governance structures. These internal mechanisms—rooted in indigenous epistemologies—mirror classical management functions, yet are distinctively shaped by cultural norms and ecological understanding. As such, the findings provide a unique perspective on how local values can be institutionalized within tourism governance to enhance sustainability outcomes.

However, the study also identified critical challenges, particularly the risk of cultural commodification under increasing tourism pressure. Without adequate protection, there is a danger that sacred rituals will be transformed into superficial performances, thereby weakening their meaning and diminishing community ownership. Thus, while local wisdom offers a promising foundation for sustainable tourism, its integration must be handled with care, respect, and policy support. Ultimately, this study positions Pangandaran as a living example of how local knowledge systems can be operationalized to promote sustainability, social inclusion, and cultural vitality in tourism development. It contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for decolonized, community-led approaches to tourism governance and offers valuable insights for scholars and practitioners.

Recommendations

To strengthen the role of local wisdom in sustainable tourism governance, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutional Recognition and Protection:** Local wisdom should be formally recognized in tourism planning documents and regional policies. Cultural rituals and values must be protected under local heritage laws to prevent misuse or commodification.
2. **Capacity Building for Intergenerational Transfer:** Initiatives such as youth workshops, intergenerational learning programs, and cultural apprenticeships should be implemented to ensure the transmission of traditional knowledge to future generations.

3. Ethical Guidelines for Cultural Tourism: Ethical frameworks should be developed for tourism operators, ensuring that traditional rituals are conducted authentically and with community consent. Commercial tourism activities must not override the spiritual and communal significance of rituals.
4. Community-Based Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish local committees or task forces composed of elders, youth, and tourism stakeholders to monitor the implementation of tourism activities and ensure alignment with cultural norms.
5. Integration into National Sustainable Tourism Agendas: The Pangandaran model can inform broader sustainable tourism strategies at the national level. Government agencies and tourism ministries should support replicating this community-led approach in other culturally rich destinations.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies should explore the internalization of local wisdom in different tourism contexts—such as urban, mountainous, or multi-ethnic settings—to test the applicability of this governance model. Comparative research across regions or countries would also help identify universal principles and place-based variations in the integration of culture into tourism systems.

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