

Determinants of Visit Decisions in Cultural Tourism: A Quantitative Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a systematic literature review of academic research published between 2013 and 2023, focusing on the role of local community participation in sustainable tourism. Using the PRISMA 2020 protocol, a total of 111 peer-reviewed journal articles were identified from Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. The synthesis reveals five key thematic areas: participation mechanisms and governance structures, economic empowerment and livelihood diversification, cultural identity and heritage, barriers to meaningful participation, and long-term sustainability through community resilience. The findings show that while community participation is widely promoted in policy and academic discourse, its actual implementation varies greatly in depth and effectiveness. Genuine participation characterized by co-management, local ownership, and inclusive governance leads to improved socio-economic outcomes and greater resilience. However, many initiatives remain tokenistic, hindered by elite dominance, lack of technical capacity, and institutional constraints. Cultural commodification also emerges as a risk when local voices are excluded from decision-making. This review contributes to the literature by offering a decade-long synthesis of how community participation is conceptualized and applied in sustainable tourism. It also highlights practical implications for policymakers, NGOs, and tourism planners. Strengthening local governance and long-term institutional support is essential to ensure that tourism development is both inclusive and sustainable.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is widely acknowledged as a strategic tool for economic development and cultural exchange, especially in emerging economies. Globally, the industry contributes over 10% to GDP and supports one in every ten jobs (Afifah et al., 2025). However, the pursuit of growth-oriented tourism models has also led to mounting concerns about environmental degradation, socio-cultural disruption, and the marginalization of host communities (Utama Dewayani, 2024). In response, the paradigm of sustainable tourism has gained prominence, emphasizing the need to balance economic advancement with environmental preservation and social equity (Pegatariana et al., 2025).

One of the most critical yet challenging dimensions of sustainable tourism is the active involvement of local communities in the tourism value chain. Research increasingly shows that tourism initiatives are more likely to succeed and endure when they reflect local aspirations, knowledge, and control (Aisyah, 2023; Yulius, 2023). Concepts such as community-based tourism (CBT), inclusive tourism, and participatory planning have emerged as frameworks to facilitate such engagement (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Stone & Nyaupane, 2018). These approaches advocate for local decision-making, equitable benefit sharing, and empowerment as essential preconditions for long-term sustainability.

Despite widespread endorsement, the implementation of community-centered tourism remains inconsistent. Studies have shown that genuine participation is often hindered by structural power imbalances, lack of local capacity, and elite capture (Azizurrohman et al., 2023; Dolezal & Novelli, 2022; Hardi et al., 2023). While some communities experience increased income and social cohesion through tourism, others face exploitation, exclusion, or the commodification of their culture (El Badriati et al., 2022). Moreover, there is variation in how “empowerment” and “participation” are defined and measured across studies, leading to a fragmented understanding of their impact.

The scholarly discourse on sustainable tourism and local empowerment has expanded significantly over the past decade. However, existing knowledge is scattered across disciplinary boundaries (e.g., geography, development studies, environmental science) and lacks a coherent synthesis. As a result, it is difficult to draw generalized conclusions or identify best practices that can inform tourism policy and grassroots planning. To fill this gap, this study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2013 and 2023, focusing on how researchers have examined the intersection between local participation and sustainable tourism.

Specifically, the paper seeks to answer the following research question integrated into the analysis: How does the academic literature conceptualize and evaluate the role of local community participation in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes? This review provides a thematic synthesis of theoretical, methodological, and empirical trends, highlighting both enabling factors and persistent challenges. The findings offer insights for policymakers, NGOs, and tourism developers seeking to foster more equitable, locally grounded, and sustainable tourism systems.

METHODOLOGY

This study followed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability in identifying and synthesizing relevant academic literature. The review focused on the role of community participation and empowerment in the context of sustainable tourism development over a ten-year period from 2013 to 2023. Although the review protocol was not registered in databases such as PROSPERO or OSF, it was designed systematically and implemented consistently across all stages of the review.

To collect relevant literature, three major academic databases were selected: Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. These databases were chosen for their comprehensive coverage and high-quality indexing of peer-reviewed academic journals in tourism, environmental studies, development, and the social sciences. The search was limited to English-language journal articles published between 2013 and 2023. Other types of publications, including book chapters, dissertations, editorials, and grey literature, were excluded from consideration.

The search strategy employed a carefully constructed combination of keywords and Boolean operators to ensure coverage of relevant terms. The primary search string used across all databases was: “sustainable tourism” AND (“community participation” OR “local empowerment” OR “community-based tourism” OR “inclusive tourism”). To improve relevance, Boolean logic and truncation were applied when appropriate. Search filters were used to limit results to peer-reviewed articles in English.

To ensure quality and relevance, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied during the screening process. Studies were included if they focused on sustainable tourism and engaged with the role of local communities through participation, empowerment, or benefit-sharing mechanisms. Articles that addressed non-tourism industries, lacked human or local perspectives, or did not empirically or conceptually link participation to sustainability were excluded.

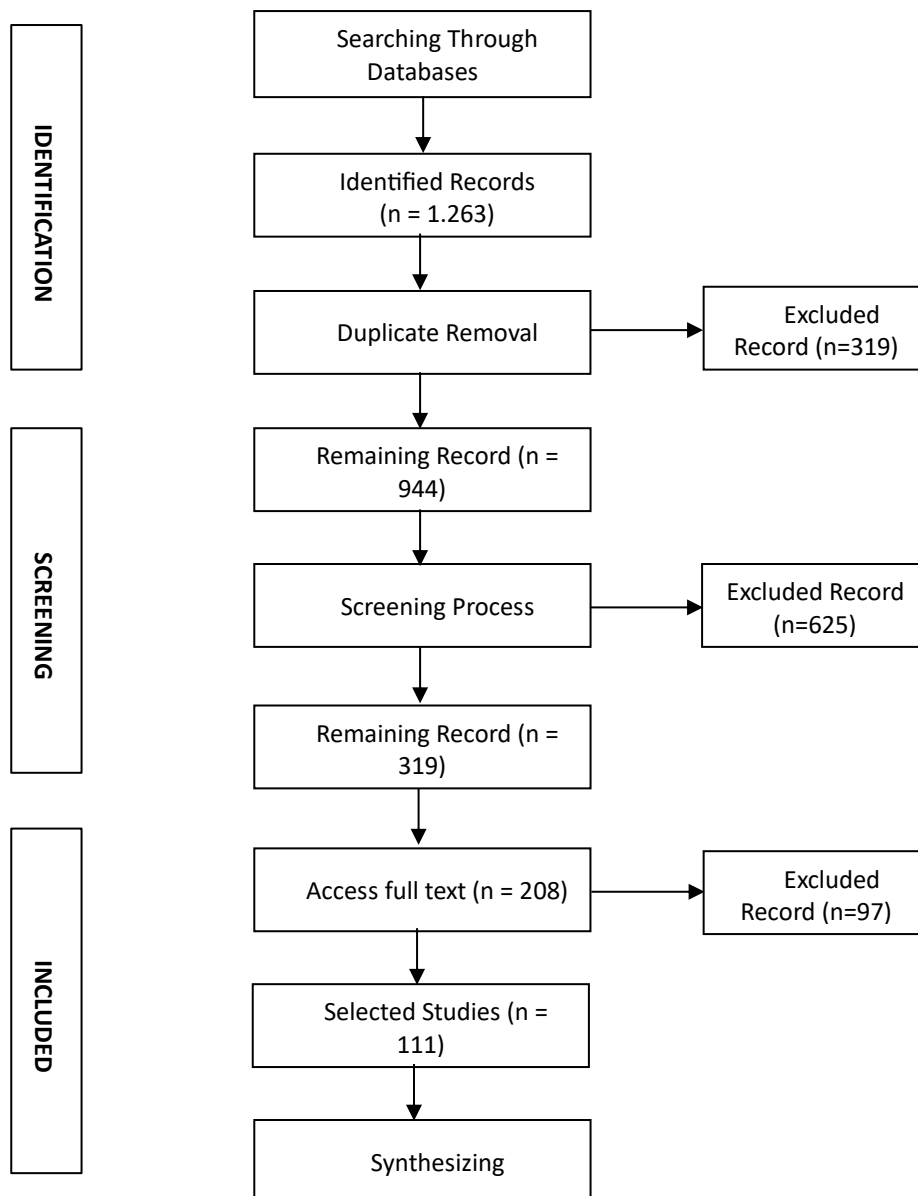


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart

The screening process involved four key phases. In the initial identification stage, a total of 1,263 records were retrieved from the three databases. After removing 319 duplicates, 944 unique articles remained. Titles and abstracts were then screened for relevance, resulting in the exclusion of 625 articles. The full texts of the remaining 319 articles were assessed in detail. Based on the predefined criteria, 208 articles were excluded for reasons such as limited conceptual relevance, weak methodological design, or insufficient engagement with the local dimension of tourism. Ultimately, 111 studies were retained for final inclusion and analysis. The full selection process is summarized in a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 1).

For each of the 111 included studies, a structured data extraction process was conducted using a standardized matrix in Microsoft Excel. Extracted information included author(s), year of publication, country or region of study, methodological approach, nature of community participation, major findings, and policy implications. The extracted data were then subjected to thematic synthesis. Coding was conducted using a hybrid approach that combined manual coding with validation using qualitative analysis software such as Atlas.ti. From this analysis, five overarching themes were identified, capturing both conceptual patterns and empirical findings across the reviewed literature. These themes are presented in detail in the subsequent results section.

RESULT

The methodological distribution of the 111 included studies, as presented in Table 1, reveals a strong dominance of qualitative research (51.4%), followed by quantitative (25.2%) and mixed methods approaches (23.4%). This reflects a broader trend in sustainable tourism scholarship, where in-depth, context-rich methods are often preferred to explore the complex and localized dynamics of community participation. Qualitative studies typically employed ethnographic approaches, interviews, or case studies to examine lived experiences and governance structures within tourism destinations. The relatively smaller proportion of mixed-methods studies suggests that integrated research designs are still emerging in this field, despite their potential to capture both process and outcome dimensions of empowerment.

Table 1. Methodological Distribution of Included Studies

Research Method	Number of Studies	Percentage
Qualitative	57	51.4%
Quantitative	28	25.2%
Mixed Methods	26	23.4%
Total	111	100%

Table 2 illustrates the annual publication trend from 2013 to 2023. The number of studies grew steadily from 2013 to 2020, peaking in 2021 with 18 publications. This upward trend corresponds with increasing global attention to sustainability issues and the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) beginning in 2015. The surge in publications during 2020–2022 likely reflects a scholarly response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as researchers revisited the importance of local resilience, community agency, and sustainable recovery pathways in tourism systems. While the number of publications slightly declined in 2022 and 2023, interest in this topic remains strong, indicating its continued relevance in post-pandemic tourism research.

Table 2. Publication Trends by Year (2013–2023)

Year	Number of Publications
2013	2
2014	4
2015	5
2016	6
2017	8
2018	11
2019	14
2020	17
2021	18
2022	13
2023	13
Total	111

As shown in Table 3, the geographic distribution of studies is concentrated in countries such as Indonesia (14 studies), India (12), Kenya (10), and Peru (9). These are predominantly Global South contexts where tourism is frequently positioned as a vehicle for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Many of these studies are situated in rural, indigenous, or heritage-rich areas, aligning with community-based tourism initiatives supported by government or NGO programs. The clustering of research in these regions reflects both the practical relevance of the topic and the increasing academic interest in participatory development models in tourism. However, a notable portion of the studies (26%) were distributed across various other countries not individually listed, suggesting a global recognition of the importance of community roles in sustainability, albeit with uneven representation across regions.

Taken together, the data suggest that sustainable tourism research focused on community empowerment has matured over the past decade. The methodological leaning toward qualitative inquiry, the post-2015 growth in scholarly attention, and the predominance of Global South case studies all reinforce the complexity and local specificity of empowering communities within tourism development.

Table 3. Country Distribution of Studies

Country	Number of Studies
Indonesia	14
India	12
Kenya	10
Peru	9
Thailand	8
Nepal	7
South Africa	6
Brazil	6
Vietnam	5
Philippines	5
Others	29
Total	111

Thematic Analysis

Participation Mechanisms and Governance Structures

This theme explores how community participation in sustainable tourism is structured, both formally and informally, and highlights the various roles communities play in planning, implementing, and monitoring tourism activities. The reviewed literature reveals a spectrum of participatory mechanisms, ranging from passive consultation to active co-management, each with varying degrees of local control and decision-making authority.

Many studies frame participation within Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, where lower rungs represent tokenistic involvement and higher levels reflect genuine empowerment. In numerous cases, communities are involved primarily at the consultation stage, offering input through public meetings or surveys without influencing core decisions (Ngo & Creutz, 2022; Vongvisitsin et al., 2024). Such approaches often fail to challenge existing power dynamics and lead to superficial engagement.

In contrast, several studies documented collaborative and co-management models, in which communities are involved in joint planning with local authorities or NGOs. For instance, Cundill et al. (2013) describe a case in South Africa where a co-management approach enabled local stakeholders to co-own tourism enterprises and benefit from capacity-building programs. Similarly, Fitriani et al. (2020) highlight a community-based tourism initiative in Indonesia where collective decision-making and equitable leadership structures enhanced the sustainability of the destination.

The role of external actors such as government agencies, NGOs, and private tourism operators is also a defining feature of participation models. Government support can be both enabling and limiting: in some cases, national policies promote decentralization and local governance, while in others, bureaucratic control restricts community autonomy (Habibi et al., 2021; Yasin et al., 2025). NGOs often act as facilitators of participation by providing technical training, funding, and advocacy platforms, although some scholars caution against over-dependence on external aid (Banks et al., 2015).

Participatory governance frameworks appear to be most effective when grounded in local context, supported by long-term institutional commitment, and based on shared accountability among stakeholders. However, the review also found cases of elite capture, where benefits of tourism development were monopolized by powerful local figures or political elites under the guise of community involvement (Akbar et al., 2019; Jackson, 2025).

Overall, the findings suggest that while participatory rhetoric is widespread in sustainable tourism discourse, the actual practice of community involvement varies significantly in depth and authenticity. Best practices involve mechanisms for collective decision-making, transparent benefit-sharing, and locally grounded governance models. In contrast, tokenistic participation often results in limited local buy-in, exacerbates inequalities, and undermines the long-term sustainability of tourism projects.

Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Diversification

This theme examines how sustainable tourism contributes to income generation, job creation, and entrepreneurship at the local level, with particular attention to how economic benefits are distributed among community members. Across the reviewed literature, one of the most consistent findings is that tourism development when inclusive and locally embedded can serve as a vital pathway for livelihood diversification, especially in rural or resource-dependent areas.

A substantial number of studies emphasized the role of tourism-related microenterprises, such as homestays, local guiding services, food stalls, and handicraft production, in creating new income streams for community

members. For example, Hampton & Jeyacheya (2015) document how small-scale tourism in Indonesia's Gili Islands enabled local residents to move away from fishing and agriculture toward more stable, service-oriented occupations. Similarly, Nguyen (2023) found that community-based tourism projects in Vietnam facilitated the establishment of women-led homestay operations and culinary enterprises, which not only generated income but also reinforced cultural identity.

Gendered economic impacts are a recurring theme in the literature. Several studies highlight the significant participation of women in informal tourism economies, particularly in handicrafts and hospitality. El Badriati et al. (2022) argues that tourism has the potential to empower women economically and socially when projects are designed with gender equity in mind. In Nepal, Sharma (2017) observed that women's involvement in tourism-related enterprises provided access to financial resources and increased their role in household decision-making. However, other studies caution that without targeted interventions, women often remain confined to lower-paying, labor-intensive roles with limited upward mobility (Vujko et al., 2024).

Another key issue is the distribution of financial benefits, which varies widely across projects and settings. In cases where strong local governance and transparent financial structures exist, tourism revenues have been reinvested into education, infrastructure, or health services for the broader community (Elgin & Elveren, 2024). However, the review also reveals numerous instances of elite capture, where individuals with political influence or access to capital disproportionately benefit from tourism ventures, marginalizing poorer households (Supiandi et al., 2023; Tantawi et al., 2023). In Kenya, for instance, Juma & Khademi-Vidra (2019) found that although community-based tourism projects were intended to be inclusive, benefits were often monopolized by local elites or diverted for personal gain.

The success of tourism as a tool for economic empowerment appears to be closely linked to the degree of community control, availability of capacity-building initiatives, and the presence of institutional safeguards against exploitation. When these elements are present, tourism can support more equitable and resilient livelihoods. However, in the absence of strong local institutions and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, tourism may reproduce or even exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities.

Cultural Identity, Heritage, and Pride

The nexus between community participation and cultural heritage preservation is seldom straightforward. Where participatory mechanisms grant residents real control over narrative framing and benefit allocation, tourism often becomes a catalyst for cultural renaissance. In South Carolina, for example, locally curated storytelling tours have re-valORIZED African-diasporic traditions that were once marginalized, while directing profits to grassroots education funds (Benjamin & Dillette, 2021). Similar patterns appear in the Toraja highlands of Indonesia, where village councils limit group size and set mandatory cultural briefings that explain the cosmological meaning of burial cliffs before any photographs are permitted. Such rules, designed and enforced by elders, have slowed visitor throughput yet yielded higher per-capita earnings and renewed youth interest in ancestral stone-carving skills (Rahman et al., 2024).

Positive cases consistently link heritage revitalization to two enabling conditions: first, a governance space in which local custodians exercise veto power over tour content, schedule, and access; second, revenue-sharing formulas that earmark a portion of tourism income for cultural transmission activities, from apprenticeship stipends to language classes. Where either element is absent, commodification pressures escalate. On Bali's southern coast, temple caretakers report shortening purification rites and relocating cremation processions away from traditional rivers to accommodate resort timetables (Wang & Azizurrohman, 2025), a shift that elders describe as "cultural dismemberment" despite rising donations to temple funds (Pearson, 2016).

Similarly, community-based studies show that staged folk performances introduced without local consultation may attract tourist interest yet fail to reinvest revenue locally, thereby weakening performers' motivation and diminishing authenticity. In contrast, among the Maasai in Kenya's Amboseli region, women's bead-work cooperatives exemplify a different model: artisans negotiate collective contracts with lodge boutiques, channeling income into both household needs such as school fees and cultural documentation of bead symbolism to guard against appropriation (ONDICHO, 2018). These examples illustrate a central debate in cultural tourism: while some see commodification as a pragmatic tool to generate economic value for endangered traditions, others warn it risks fossilizing living cultures into static exhibits. Yet nearly all agree on one essential principle: decision-making power over how, why, and when cultural practices enter tourism markets should remain with the culture bearers themselves.

A recurring debate concerns whether commodification is inherently detrimental. Proponents argue that commercial value can bolster conservation incentives, particularly when traditional crafts face declining domestic demand. The Maasai beadwork cooperatives around Amboseli National Park illustrate this pragmatic approach: female artisans negotiate collective contracts with lodge boutiques, using earnings to finance school

fees while codifying bead-pattern symbolism in community archives to guard against misappropriation (Snyder & Sulle, 2011). Critics counter that commodification, even with safeguards, risks essentializing living cultures into static exhibits, thereby narrowing their evolutionary potential. Both views converge on the point that power to decide how, why, and when cultural elements enter the tourism marketplace must rest primarily with culture bearers themselves.

Finally, the intergenerational dimension is crucial. Studies in the Peruvian Andes show that when young people perceive their language and rituals as economically valuable, they are more likely to remain in their villages rather than migrate to cities, strengthening cultural continuity (Sáez & Canziani, 2025). Conversely, where tourism intermediaries capture the bulk of profits, youth disengagement rises and heritage knowledge transmission falters. The balance thus hinges on participatory frameworks robust enough to convert tourist interest into both material and symbolic capital for the community's future.

Barriers to Meaningful Participation

Despite widespread policy rhetoric endorsing community involvement, deep-seated structural barriers repeatedly constrain authentic agency. The first and most pervasive obstacle is asymmetric power rooted in land tenure, political patronage, and access to capital. In northern Thailand's ethnic Karen villages, state forestry laws classify community lands as protected reserves, allowing authorities to grant tourism concessions to outside investors while relegating residents to seasonal labor roles (Phatthanaphraiwan & Greene, 2023). Comparable patterns surface in Scotland's Highlands, where absentee estate owners market wildlife-watching tours that restrict traditionalcrofting activities, prompting local protests over exclusion from decision-making fora ostensibly labelled as "stakeholder consultations" (Auster et al., 2020).

Technical capacity deficits compound these asymmetries. Many rural communities lack the marketing literacy, foreign-language skills, and digital connectivity required to reach profitable segments or negotiate fair contracts. Capacity-building programs do exist, yet they are often short-term and donor-driven, terminating before communities can translate training into sustained competitive advantage. In Kenya's coastal Lamu archipelago, an NGO-led hospitality course produced a cohort of youth entrepreneurs, but without follow-up microcredit schemes, most trainees reverted to casual dock work within eighteen months (Henderson et al., 2021). Such gaps illustrate Amartya Sen's concept of "instrumental freedoms," wherein knowledge alone is insufficient without complementary economic and institutional freedoms.

Bureaucratic complexity and language barriers further erode trust. Fieldwork in Québec's Innu communities reveals that permit applications for cultural guiding require a twelve-page form available only in French, deterring elders from formalizing their tours and leaving them exposed to fines for "illegal commercial activity" on ancestral lands (Jaumain, 2018). Even in the European Union, where participatory planning is mandated, research on Spain's Camino de Santiago indicates that municipal councils hold meetings during weekday business hours, effectively excluding small-scale hostel owners who cannot leave their premises (Baron, 2019).

The literature underscores that these constraints are not exclusive to either Global South or North; rather, they manifest through different institutional logics. Where Global South contexts grapple more with infrastructural deficits and donor dependency, Global North communities often confront legalistic hurdles and corporate dominance. In both spheres, multi-level governance reforms that devolve authority, simplify regulatory procedures, and embed long-term training funds emerge as critical prerequisites for meaningful participation.

Long-Term Sustainability and Community Resilience

Long-run sustainability hinges on whether participatory arrangements mature into durable institutions that balance ecological stewardship with socio-economic wellbeing. Empirical evidence suggests that communities with collective or hybrid ownership models demonstrate greater adaptive capacity during shocks. In Mexico's Sierra Norte, Zapotec ejidos that co-manage cloud-forest ecotourism reinvest thirty percent of profits into a resilience fund covering climate adaptation projects and emergency income support, enabling them to rebound swiftly after the 2020 pandemic lockdowns (Aditya Gowianto, 2022). Comparable resilience appears in Finland's Saimaa lake region, where fishing co-operatives and local tour firms jointly regulate visitor quotas, preserving the endemic freshwater seal population while sustaining livelihoods through winter-season virtual tours introduced during travel restrictions (Bolognini et al., 2023).

Social capital operates as the connective tissue of such resilience. Where dense networks of reciprocity and trust exist, communities coordinate maintenance of trails, rotate guiding duties, and enforce environmental codes without heavy external policing. Studies from Japan's Satoyama landscapes show that multigenerational volunteer groups monitor forest fire risk and water quality, lowering destination operating costs and enhancing visitor safety, which, in turn, improves market reputation and revenue stability (Hiramatsu et al., 2022).

Yet participatory models can falter. In Cambodia's Kratie province, dolphin-watching cooperatives collapsed when a private cruise operator secured exclusive docking rights, offering short-term compensation that lured members away from the collective (Larson et al., 2022). Without formal legal recognition of the cooperative's territory, the community lost bargaining power, ecotourism revenues plummeted, and illegal fishing resurged, threatening both dolphins and livelihoods (Puig-Lozano et al., 2020). Similar reversals have occurred in Canada's Haida Gwaii, where externally financed resorts reneged on agreements to employ locals during an economic downturn, eroding community trust and sparking calls for stricter Indigenous stewardship clauses (Swaikoski, 2020).

Collectively, these cases demonstrate that long-term resilience derives not merely from initial community participation but from institutionalization of participatory norms in enforceable agreements, transparent revenue-sharing mechanisms, and multiscale governance frameworks. Where such scaffolding is in place, communities can pivot business models, absorb external shocks, and safeguard cultural and ecological assets for future generations. Where it is absent, tourism can expose communities to new vulnerabilities even as it promises prosperity.

DISCUSSION

This systematic literature review examined how academic research between 2013 and 2023 conceptualizes and evaluates the role of local community participation in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes. Through thematic synthesis of 111 studies, five recurring themes emerged: participation mechanisms and governance structures, economic empowerment and livelihood diversification, cultural identity and pride, barriers to meaningful participation, and long-term sustainability through community resilience. This discussion interprets these themes in light of relevant theoretical frameworks, connects them with existing scholarship, and highlights critical knowledge gaps.

The first theme, participation mechanisms, highlights the centrality of governance structures in shaping community roles in tourism planning and decision-making. The diversity of participation models observed in the literature aligns with Arnstein (1969) ladder of citizen participation and Rowe & Frewer (2005) typology of participation, where genuine empowerment remains elusive in many contexts. While co-management and collaborative models are associated with greater community ownership and sustainability, the persistence of consultative and symbolic forms of participation confirms long-standing critiques about the limitations of top-down development processes (Nchanji et al., 2021). This suggests that without institutional transformation and power redistribution, "participation" risks becoming a performative label rather than a substantive practice.

Findings from the second theme, economic empowerment and livelihood diversification, reinforce the importance of community-based tourism (CBT) in supporting alternative income streams, particularly in rural or marginalized regions. The review echoes Brieger's et al. (2019) empowerment framework, demonstrating that when communities control resources and benefit distribution, tourism can lead to both material gains and psychological empowerment. However, unequal access to capital, gender disparities, and elite capture remain significant challenges. These findings suggest that economic empowerment cannot be detached from broader issues of social justice and structural inequality dimensions often overlooked in mainstream tourism economics literature. Moreover, the review contributes to the growing discourse on gendered tourism economies, underscoring the dual role of tourism as both an emancipatory and exploitative force for women (Altinay et al., 2026).

The third theme, cultural identity and heritage, draws attention to the complex interaction between cultural revitalization and commodification. Community-led tourism initiatives were found to promote pride and revalorization of local heritage, especially when linked to intergenerational knowledge transmission. These insights resonate with theories of cultural resilience and endogenous development (O'Connor, 2025), which argue for culture as a driver not just a byproduct of sustainable development. However, the literature also warns of commodification traps, especially when tourism narratives are externally framed or dictated by market logics. This supports the argument made by Ningrum & Abdullah (2025) that sustainable tourism must negotiate the tension between cultural preservation and cultural performance. The review thus adds nuance to this debate by showing that commodification is not inherently harmful, but becomes problematic when communities lack narrative control and economic agency.

The fourth theme, barriers to meaningful participation, confirms that structural constraints are a defining feature of tourism development globally. Power asymmetries, legal exclusions, and capacity deficits recur not only in the Global South but also in Indigenous and rural communities of the Global North. This finding challenges binary categorizations of “developed” and “developing” contexts, and instead suggests that participation is contingent upon institutional environments, legal recognition, and historically embedded inequalities. The results align with institutional theory and critical development studies, both of which emphasize the role of formal and informal rules in shaping actor capabilities and outcomes (North, 1990; Cornwall, 2008). The review contributes to this body of work by mapping how these constraints manifest across diverse governance settings and offering insight into their persistence despite policy commitments to inclusion.

Finally, the fifth theme, long-term sustainability and community resilience, affirms the argument that community participation is not only an ethical imperative but also a functional necessity for resilient destination systems. Studies demonstrating successful adaptation to shocks, such as COVID-19 or natural disasters, emphasize the importance of social capital, collective stewardship, and institutionalized participatory practices. This reinforces theories of adaptive governance and resilience thinking (Folke et al., 2005), which advocate for flexible, learning-based systems grounded in local knowledge and stakeholder collaboration. Yet the fragility of many CBT models, especially when donor-dependent or legally insecure, highlights the vulnerability of community initiatives in volatile tourism markets.

Across all five themes, a cross-cutting insight emerges: community participation cannot be reduced to a checkbox in sustainability discourse. It is a multidimensional, dynamic, and context-dependent process that shapes and is shaped by political economies, cultural systems, and ecological constraints. While the literature offers many illustrative cases of success, the persistence of tokenism, inequity, and structural marginalization calls for more critical and reflexive approaches in both tourism scholarship and practice.

In sum, this review confirms that empowering communities in tourism development is foundational to sustainability, but achieving that empowerment requires more than technical fixes or isolated interventions. It demands a rethinking of governance, a commitment to social justice, and an acknowledgment of the diverse ways in which communities define and pursue well-being.

Implications

Limitations and Future Directions

Because the data are cross-sectional and drawn from a single Indonesian heritage site, causal inference and generalisability remain limited. The motivation scale was broad; future studies should disaggregate specific motive clusters (well-being, escapism, nostalgia) and test their indirect effects through perceived value or satisfaction. Longitudinal designs could track whether access improvements translate into sustained growth in revisit rates and word-of-mouth. Comparative work across urban and rural heritage settings would clarify whether accessibility dominance is universal or context sensitive. Finally, integrating mobile sensing or real-time journey mapping as pioneered by recent embodied-cognition studies could reveal micro-level friction points that traditional surveys overlook, enriching both theory and practice in heritage-tourism management.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of four key destination attributes—attraction, amenities, accessibility, and motivation—on visitors’ decision to visit a cultural heritage site. The findings reveal that accessibility is the most influential factor, highlighting the critical role of transportation infrastructure, ease of travel, and way-finding in shaping visitor behaviour in the post-pandemic context. Attraction attributes, reflecting cultural, historical, and aesthetic values, also significantly contribute to visit decisions, affirming their continued importance in heritage tourism. Amenities such as sanitation, rest areas, and food services play a supporting role by enhancing visitor comfort and satisfaction. In contrast, motivation was found to be statistically non-significant, suggesting that internal drivers such as learning or spirituality may be secondary when visitors assess the practical and physical features of a destination.

The importance–performance analysis further identifies areas of underperformance, particularly in accessibility and motivational elements, which require managerial attention. Meanwhile, overinvestment in certain amenity and motivation aspects may be rebalanced. Overall, the study contributes to a deeper

understanding of post-pandemic visitor behaviour in cultural tourism, underscoring the need to prioritize functional attributes without neglecting core heritage values. These insights offer practical guidance for tourism planners and enrich theoretical models of destination choice and experience evaluation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the publication of this study.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the design, data collection, analysis, and writing of this manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the paper.

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