

Local Community Characteristics and Resistance to Tourism Empowerment: An Ethnographic Study in Banteran Village, Banyumas

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.909000038>

Received: 13 August 2025; Accepted: 20 August 2025; Published: 27 September 2025

ABSTRACT

Community empowerment in rural tourism development often overlooks local socio-cultural characteristics as determinants of program success. This study examines the characteristics of Banteran Village residents in Banyumas Regency and how these characteristics influence their responses to tourism empowerment programs at Embung Banteran. Employing a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews to explore values, preferences, and behaviors shaping community participation. The findings identify four key characteristics: (1) a strong preference for traditional activities centered on the use of the reservoir, particularly fishing; (2) an individualistic mentality in the use of public spaces; (3) resistance to the commercialization of social spaces; and (4) a high adaptive capacity to external changes with strict selectivity. These characteristics give rise to adaptive resistance, a strategy of accepting change in a limited manner while maintaining control over aspects deemed essential to identity and well-being. The study reveals that the main barrier to empowerment is not a lack of adaptability but rather a misalignment between empowerment models and local values. Theoretically, this research contributes through the concept of adaptive resistance; practically, it underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity, understanding local logic, and designing institutional frameworks that accommodate community strategies in preserving autonomy and ensuring the sustainability of rural development.

Keywords: community characteristics, cultural resistance, tourism empowerment, local wisdom, ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism development in Indonesia has adopted the paradigm of community empowerment as the primary approach, based on the assumption that active involvement of local communities will ensure the sustainability and authenticity of tourism destinations [1]. However, empirical realities indicate that many community empowerment initiatives in tourism have failed despite the application of theoretically proven empowerment models [2]. This phenomenon suggests the existence of fundamental factors that remain insufficiently understood in the existing literature, particularly concerning the socio-cultural characteristics of local communities as the subjects of empowerment.

Banyumas Regency, with its 21 established tourism villages, serves as a natural laboratory for understanding the dynamics of community empowerment in rural tourism contexts [3]. Embung Banteran in Banteran Village, Sumbang District, presents a particularly compelling case in which a promising tourism village initiative experienced a significant decline after an initially positive trajectory. What makes this case unique is that the decline was primarily due to local community responses that did not align with the expectations of the empowerment program.

Previous studies on community empowerment in tourism have tended to adopt a normative perspective, assuming that communities will respond positively to economic opportunities offered by tourism development [4], [5]. Such approaches often overlook the complexity of socio-cultural characteristics that may influence community response patterns to development interventions [6]. Arnstein's [7] model of citizen participation identifies various levels of participation but does not explicitly address how cultural characteristics influence community preferences for certain levels of participation.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand why theoretically sound empowerment programs can fail when implemented in communities with specific characteristics. Resistance to tourism empowerment has become an increasingly common phenomenon in Indonesia, yet it has received limited scholarly attention from the perspective of socio-cultural community characteristics [8]. A failure to understand local characteristics may lead to the misallocation of development resources and even undermine social cohesion.

The novelty of this study lies in its ethnographic approach, which focuses on the characteristics of the local community as the primary unit of analysis contrasting with previous research that has emphasized structural factors such as government policy or the role of investors [9]. This study introduces the concept of "adaptive resistance" to explain how local communities may reject development interventions while maintaining their adaptive capacity to external changes. This concept offers a new perspective in understanding local community agency, which is not always oppositional but may instead take the form of selective adaptation.

The objective of this study is to analyze the socio-cultural characteristics of the Banteran community and how these characteristics influence their responses to tourism empowerment programs at Embung Banteran. Specifically, it aims to: (1) identify the unique characteristics of the Banteran community in terms of values, preferences, and behavioral patterns; (2) examine how these characteristics shape participation in tourism village development; and (3) develop a theoretical understanding of adaptive resistance as a local community strategy for responding to development interventions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Characteristics in Tourism Development

Local community characteristics in the context of tourism development refer to a complex combination of cultural values, social structures, economic patterns, and worldviews that influence how communities respond to and participate in tourism initiatives [10]. Murphy and Murphy [11] emphasize that an in-depth understanding of community characteristics is a fundamental prerequisite for designing effective and sustainable tourism development strategies. In practice, however, many empowerment programs adopt a one size fits all approach without considering the uniqueness of local characteristics.

Prayitno et al. [17], in their study on social capital for sustainable tourism development in Indonesia, identified that community characteristics encompassing levels of trust, social norms, and social networks significantly influence the success of community-based tourism initiatives. Communities with individualistic characteristics tend to exhibit different participation patterns compared to those with strong communal orientations. Understanding these differences is essential to avoid program failures caused by misalignment between program design and the characteristics of the target community.

In the Indonesian context, Zainal et al. [27] analyzed community participation in rural development from a sociological perspective and found that Indonesia's diverse community characteristics require differentiated approaches to empowerment. Agrarian communities have distinct characteristics compared to communities exposed to modern economic activities, which has implications for the types of empowerment strategies that should be implemented.

Cultural Resistance in Tourism Development

Cultural resistance to tourism development is a complex phenomenon that is not always explicitly oppositional but may manifest as selective rejection or partial adaptation to changes brought by tourism [12]. Hu

et al. [28], in their study on community empowerment in cultural heritage sites, found that resistance to tourism development is often rooted in fears of losing cultural identity and control over local resources.

The concept of resistance in the context of tourism development should not be understood solely as opposition to change, but also as a community strategy to maintain autonomy and identity [13]. Reindrawati [24] identified that community resistance to participation in tourism planning in developing countries is often caused by a mismatch between top-down approaches and local preferences and needs.

Scott [29], in his analysis of “weapons of the weak,” explained that community resistance is not always expressed through overt confrontation but can take subtle forms such as non-participation, selective compliance, or everyday resistance. In tourism contexts, resistance may be manifested in various ways, including absence from meetings, reluctance to engage in commercial activities, or a preference for maintaining traditional activity patterns.

Local Wisdom and Community Adaptation

Local wisdom refers to knowledge, values, and practices internalized within a community over generations, serving as a guide for interacting with the environment and responding to change [14]. In tourism contexts, local wisdom can be an asset that enhances destination authenticity, or it can become a barrier if it is not aligned with modern tourism concepts [15].

Sasmitha and Anak Agung [30], in their research on the impact of tourism village development on community empowerment and well-being in Penglipuran Village, found that the success of empowerment efforts depends heavily on the ability to integrate local wisdom with modern tourism concepts. Communities that successfully adapt traditional values to meet tourism demands tend to achieve more sustainable benefits.

Nugraha et al. [31], in their analysis of the role of government and community participation in sustainable tourism development in Tihingan Village, Bali, identified that strong local wisdom can serve as a foundation for sustainable tourism development if managed appropriately. However, when conflicts arise between local wisdom and introduced tourism concepts, communities often prefer to preserve their traditional values.

Adaptive Capacity and Community Resilience

Community adaptive capacity refers to the ability of a community to adjust to external changes while maintaining its identity and core functions [16]. In tourism contexts, adaptive capacity is a key factor determining whether a community can capitalize on tourism opportunities or instead experience disruptive impacts [17].

Adger [12], in his concept of socio-ecological resilience, emphasizes that resilient communities can adapt to changes without losing their fundamental characteristics. In the case of tourism development, resilient communities can integrate tourism activities into their traditional lifestyles or choose to reject tourism if it is perceived as a threat to their identity.

Suyatna et al. [19], in a case study on common resource management in Nglanggeran Village, demonstrated that community adaptive capacity is strongly influenced by social capital, local leadership, and collective decision-making capabilities. Communities with high adaptive capacity tend to be more successful in managing the changes brought about by tourism development

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design to understand the socio-cultural characteristics of the Banteran Village community and their responses to tourism empowerment. The ethnographic approach was chosen for its capacity to reveal meanings and behavioral patterns embedded in daily life that cannot be captured through survey-based methods [20].

The research was conducted in Banteran Village, Sumbang District, Banyumas Regency, with a specific focus

on the Embung Banteran area. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: residents who interact with the reservoir, have direct experience with tourism development, and represent various stakeholders. The informants included traditional users of the reservoir, local vendors, and regular visitors.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted in natural settings around the Embung Banteran. The main themes explored included the history and personal significance of the reservoir, activity preferences, perceptions of tourism-related changes, core values, patterns of social interaction, and adaptation strategies. In addition to interviews, participant observation was conducted to capture behavioral patterns and community interactions.

Data analysis followed an analytical ethnography approach, integrating thick description with theoretical interpretation [21]. The analytical process involved data transcription and coding, identification of behavioral and value patterns, triangulation of findings, interpretation within the theoretical framework, and the development of new conceptual insights. Research validity was ensured through prolonged engagement, member checking, and peer debriefing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fundamental Characteristics of the Banteran Community: Traditional Orientation in Reservoir Utilization

An in-depth analysis of the behavioral patterns and preferences of the Banteran community reveals fundamental characteristics oriented toward the traditional use of the reservoir, particularly fishing activities, which have become an integral part of the community's identity. The local population demonstrates a deep historical attachment to the reservoir, having engaged in fishing there long before the introduction of tourism. This indicates that the reservoir holds profound functional and emotional significance for the local community.

These characteristics reflect the Banteran community's worldview, in which the reservoir is regarded as a commons that must remain accessible for subsistence needs and personal recreation, rather than as an economic commodity to be commercialized [19]. Fishing is perceived as an inalienable traditional right, and the community considers itself better served when the reservoir can be used for such activities without commercial restrictions.

This traditional orientation is also reflected in the activities chosen by regular visitors, who use the reservoir for simple purposes such as evening walks and exercise, motivated primarily by accessibility and affordability. This usage pattern suggests that the community views the reservoir as a public space for health and light recreation rather than as a tourism destination offering complex, commercialized experiences.

Regular users of the reservoir demonstrate consistency in maintaining fishing as a sustainable tradition with intrinsic value. Even during the active tourism program, they continued to focus on traditional activities, indicating resistance to the diversification of activities promoted by tourism development.

These fundamental characteristics align with the concept of local wisdom as articulated by Nugraha et al. [31], in which communities possess internalized systems of knowledge and values governing appropriate interaction with their environment. In Banteran's case, such local wisdom manifests in a preference for activities that maintain a direct and personal relationship with the reservoir—preferences that contrast with tourism concepts, which tend to alienate visitors from the environment through various artificial facilities.

Individualistic Mentality and Preference for Personal Autonomy

A second prominent characteristic of the Banteran community is an individualistic mentality emphasizing personal autonomy in choosing activities and modes of participation in community life. This is evident from the minimal involvement in collective activities related to tourism development. The community tends to participate selectively, without binding commitments to communal initiatives, engaging sporadically and in line with personal schedules.

This individualistic mentality differs from assumptions in the community empowerment literature, which often expects active and sustained collective participation [5]. In Banteran, residents tend to preserve their autonomy in deciding when, how, and to what extent they engage in joint activities. Perceived benefits arise when they can return to independent activities without interference from commercial management systems.

Socialization patterns also reflect this individualistic preference, with residents favoring small, informal gatherings over organized programs sponsored by tourism managers. This behavior indicates a preference for controlled, self-selected social interactions rather than participation within externally imposed frameworks.

This individualistic mentality can be interpreted as a form of local agency aimed at maintaining control over personal experiences in public spaces [13]. In the context of tourism empowerment, such a mentality can pose challenges, as empowerment programs often expect intensive collective participation and long-term commitment to a shared vision for destination development.

From another perspective, however, this individualistic mentality may be seen as a healthy form of resistance to the homogenization and standardization often brought by tourism development [12]. The Banteran community demonstrates the capacity to selectively adopt aspects of tourism development that align with their preferences while rejecting those that infringe on their personal autonomy.

Resistance to the Commercialization and Commodification of Social Space

The most significant finding of this study is the community's clear resistance to the commercialization and commodification of social space introduced by tourism development. This resistance is neither explicit nor confrontational; rather, it manifests as selective non-participation and a preference for maintaining non-commercial spatial usage. Residents express discomfort with transforming the reservoir into a commercial space and do not perceive benefits when it is managed as a paid tourist attraction.

Such resistance is also evident in public criticism of the entrance fee system applied during the tourism management period. Traditional users perceive paying for access to public space as inappropriate and contrary to the commons concept they uphold. The low visitor turnout is linked to a lack of compelling attractions and the high cost of access, which is deemed disproportionate to the facilities provided.

The community maintains a consistent preference for affordable access, valuing ease of entry at minimal cost. This suggests that while they do not wholly reject the idea of payment, they hold a clear expectation that public space should remain affordable and free from excessive commercialization.

Local vendors offer an interesting perspective on the economic impact of commercialization. While in theory they should benefit from increased tourist visits, in practice, commercialization does not automatically yield equitable economic benefits. Unstable sales and brief peak periods reveal that commercialization can foster unrealistic expectations about tourism's economic potential.

This resistance to the commodification of social space aligns with Scott's [29] critique of how communities employ "everyday resistance" to reject changes perceived as threatening their way of life. In Banteran's case, resistance manifests as a preference for using the space according to its traditional functions, rejecting overly commercialized activities, and maintaining democratic access to public resources.

High Adaptive Capacity with Strict Selectivity

The most intriguing characteristic of the Banteran community is its combination of high adaptive capacity with strict selectivity in choosing which changes to adopt. This is evident in the community's ability to quickly adjust to post-tourism decline without significant disruption to daily life. After tourism management ceased, residents resumed traditional activities and even organized new events, such as fishing competitions, that aligned with local preferences.

This adaptive capacity demonstrates high community resilience, as described by Adger [12], wherein a community can maintain its core functions despite external pressures from tourism development and decline.

Notably, this adaptation is neither reactive nor passive but proactive, with residents initiating new activities consistent with their traditions.

Selectivity in adaptation is apparent in the way the community adopts certain aspects of tourism infrastructure while rejecting the accompanying commercial logic. The reservoir remains a public space, with some physical facilities still in use, but commercialization has been replaced with traditional modes of utilization.

Regular visitors display similar adaptation patterns, continuing to use the reservoir for recreation but in ways and frequencies that match personal preferences. They appreciate infrastructure improvements while maintaining simplicity in how the space is used.

The most consistent users demonstrate sophisticated adaptation by continuing traditional activities while critically observing and evaluating changes. Their ability to provide a comprehensive analysis of tourism management failures while maintaining consistent use of the reservoir reflects high reflective capacity and a willingness to learn from experience.

This adaptive capacity with strict selectivity can be understood as a form of “adaptive resistance,” wherein the community does not entirely reject change but selectively adopts it based on alignment with local values and preferences. This differs from passive resistance, which implies total rejection, and from full adaptation, which assumes unfiltered acceptance of external interventions.

Implications of Community Characteristics for the Failure of Tourism Empowerment

An integrative analysis of the Banteran community’s characteristics indicates that the failure of tourism empowerment cannot be reduced merely to community rejection, but rather to a fundamental misalignment between the empowerment model introduced by external actors and the local values, orientations, and socio-cultural practices. Four key features—traditional orientations toward space, individualistic mentalities, resistance to commercialization, and adaptive resistance patterns—collectively shaped a context in which residents systematically resisted full engagement in externally imposed tourism schemes.

This mismatch becomes more evident when examined from an institutional perspective. The community holds strong expectations regarding transparency, accountability, and benefit distribution, rooted in local norms of ownership and resource governance. However, the governance mechanisms introduced by investors and tourism managers failed to provide meaningful participatory spaces for the community in decision-making. As a result, residents who had invested in the development of the embung felt disappointed and marginalized, as their expectations of consensus-based management were not fulfilled.

Furthermore, local economic actors—vendors, service providers, and farmers directly affected by fluctuating tourist visits—displayed pragmatic yet detached adaptation to tourism. While they took advantage of opportunities when available, they did not develop long-term commitments to tourism as a sustainable livelihood strategy. This tendency was exacerbated by the instability of the tourism market, where periods of low visitor numbers outweighed peaks, reinforcing the perception of tourism as an unreliable, supplementary income source.

The community’s emphasis on personal autonomy also contradicts the principles of collaborative governance, which underpin most tourism empowerment programs. Instead of participating actively in collective decision-making forums, residents preferred selective, temporary, and non-binding forms of involvement aligned with personal agendas [5]. This preference highlights a conceptual gap between empowerment models that assume intensive participation and local social realities that prioritize individual flexibility.

Moreover, the Banteran community’s resistance to commercialization challenges the core assumptions of tourism empowerment policies, which are typically grounded in liberal economic logic. While such policies assume that economic opportunities will naturally encourage communities to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, Banteran residents valued non-economic aspects such as equitable access, preservation of traditional spaces, and the quality of personal experiences over financial profit [4]. This divergence in economic logic demonstrates that empowerment initiatives emphasizing commodification without cultural sensitivity only deepen the value

misalignment between state/investors and local communities.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the failure of tourism empowerment in Banteran arises not only from community-level incompatibilities but also from institutional and policy failures to address local value systems. Future efforts must therefore consider how institutional adaptations—such as more inclusive participatory mechanisms, transparent governance practices, and policies attuned to alternative economic logics—can reconcile cultural differences and prevent further resistance in community-based tourism development.

Adaptive Resistance as a Community Strategy in Responding to External Interventions

This study's findings develop the concept of "adaptive resistance" as a community strategy that enables them to preserve identity and autonomy while accommodating certain aspects of external change deemed beneficial. This concept differs from classical models of resistance, which tend to be oppositional, as well as from models of adaptation that assume full acceptance of change.

Adaptive resistance is manifested in the Banteran community's ability to separate physical infrastructure from the socio-economic systems that accompany it. They accept and utilize the improvements in embung infrastructure resulting from tourism investment, yet they refuse to adopt the logic of commercialization and governance systems promoted by tourism managers. The community values the physical improvements of the embung more highly than its previous condition, but they continue to use the site in ways that align with traditional preferences.

This adaptive resistance strategy is also reflected in the community's capacity to create alternative activities aligned with their characteristics when the commercial tourism system fails. The organization of fishing competitions after tourism management ceased demonstrates community initiative in generating socially beneficial activities without adopting the rejected commercial framework.

The most consistent users exhibit a sophisticated form of adaptive resistance by continuing to use the embung facilities while simultaneously developing constructive critiques of the failed management model. Their ability to identify weaknesses in tourism governance while maintaining consistent use of the embung for activities deemed valuable reflects a high degree of selective engagement.

The concept of adaptive resistance thus offers a new perspective for understanding local agency, which does not always fit neatly into the binary categorization of acceptance versus rejection of development. Communities can develop strategies that enable them to benefit from external interventions while retaining control over aspects considered fundamental to their identity and well-being.

Moreover, the long-term implications of adaptive resistance indicate that tourism development in Banteran is likely to face unstable patterns of interaction, in which the community only accepts aspects compatible with local values while continuously rejecting components perceived as threatening cultural identity. This pattern risks creating stagnation in tourism development, as the sustainability of programs depends heavily on the community's willingness to engage fully—something that remains limited. Left unaddressed, adaptive resistance may foster a cycle of partial adoption that causes development initiatives to lose long-term momentum.

Therefore, institutional adaptation becomes crucial to reconcile these cultural misalignments. First, governance models need to shift from top-down management toward mechanisms that are more inclusive and rooted in local consensus. Second, transparency and accountability in benefit distribution must be strengthened to restore community trust. Third, empowerment programs must accommodate the alternative economic logics held by the community, where social value, equitable access, and quality of experience matter more than financial gain alone. In doing so, future tourism development can move toward forms that are socially and culturally sustainable, not merely economically driven.

Lessons for Designing Culturally Sensitive Empowerment Programs

The findings of this study carry significant implications for designing community empowerment programs that

are more culturally sensitive and responsive to local characteristics. The failure of the Banteran reservoir program underscores the need for a more nuanced approach in understanding and accommodating diversity in community traits, particularly in rural tourism development contexts.

First, empowerment programs must develop a deep understanding of the local logic and value systems governing community life before designing interventions. In Banteran's case, recognizing the reservoir's meaning as a commons and the preference for non-commercial activities should have been the starting point for developing tourism concepts aligned with local characteristics [31].

Second, participation models should be adapted to the preferences and capacities of local communities rather than adopting universal templates that assume homogeneity. For communities with an individualistic mentality, such as Banteran, models that allow flexible engagement and respect personal autonomy may prove more effective than those demanding intensive collective commitment [7].

Third, the concept of economic empowerment should be broadened to accommodate diverse economic logics not only focusing on maximizing financial returns, but also on enhancing quality of life and preserving values important to the community. In Banteran's case, successful empowerment might enable residents to retain access to the reservoir while gaining additional benefits that do not disrupt traditional life patterns.

Finally, the institutional design of empowerment programs should recognize adaptive resistance as a legitimate community strategy for responding to change. Rather than viewing selective participation as a program failure, a more productive approach is to design initiatives that allow residents to engage on their own terms while still deriving benefits from the program.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies the distinctive socio-cultural characteristics of Banteran Village, including a traditional orientation in the use of the reservoir, an individualistic mentality prioritizing personal autonomy, resistance to the commercialization of social spaces, and high adaptive capacity with strict selectivity in embracing change. These traits generate systematic resistance to the tourism empowerment model implemented at Banteran Reservoir.

The failure of the empowerment initiative was not due to the community's inability to adapt, but to a fundamental incompatibility between local characteristics and the underlying assumptions of the adopted model. The community's "adaptive resistance" strategy reflects a selective approach to change, enabling them to maintain control over elements essential to their identity and well-being.

The concept of adaptive resistance developed in this research offers theoretical insight into local agency that transcends the binary of acceptance versus rejection of development. Practically, it underscores the need for culturally sensitive, locally responsive empowerment approaches that align with community logic, accommodate diverse economic orientations, and legitimize adaptive resistance as a valid strategy. Ultimately, the success of rural tourism empowerment depends less on technical program quality or resources and more on the alignment between program design and the socio-cultural fabric of the target community.

While this study has advanced the concept of adaptive resistance in the context of community responses to tourism development, several limitations warrant attention. The analysis primarily approached the community as a collective actor, yet future research should further explore intra-community differences, such as age, gender, and livelihood to avoid representing local society as monolithic. Incorporating participatory action research (PAR) elements could also provide a more inclusive platform for local voices to co-design tourism initiatives, ensuring that development aligns with authentic community needs. Finally, operationalizing adaptive resistance into a practical model or checklist for practitioners would bridge the gap between theory and application, enabling planners to identify early indicators of cultural misalignment and to adjust interventions accordingly.

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