

Crafting Sustainable Destinations: Integrative Models from Desa Wisata Sambirejo, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism development requires integrative strategies that balance environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and socio-economic growth. This study examines Desa Wisata Sambirejo in Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, as a model of rural tourism that combines natural heritage, cultural authenticity, and community-based innovation. Using a qualitative approach with the Modified Delphi method, the research engaged Pentahelix stakeholders—academia, government, business, community, and media—in iterative consensus building to design sustainable strategies tailored to local contexts.

Findings highlight Sambirejo's Unique Selling Points (USPs), including Breksi Cliff geopark, traditional crafts and rituals, and eco-tourism innovations such as waste-to-energy and digital community engagement platforms. Challenges identified include limited human resource capacity, digital access gaps, and risks of cultural commodification. Best practices emerging from the case—community empowerment, renewable energy adoption, and participatory governance—inform a holistic framework for destination competitiveness.

While the study provides a replicable model, its limitations lie in the qualitative scope and context-specific focus, which may restrict generalization. Future research should explore comparative studies across different tourism villages, employ mixed methods to integrate quantitative indicators of sustainability, and assess long-term impacts of Pentahelix collaboration.

This study contributes theoretically to the sustainable tourism literature by integrating the Pentahelix approach into rural destination development and provides practical insights for policymakers and practitioners. Sambirejo illustrates how innovation, inclusivity, and resilience can be mobilized to ensure long-term sustainability and replicability in other tourism villages.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Pentahelix Approach, Modified Delphi, Community-Based Tourism, Desa Wisata Sambirejo

Introduction

Tourism has become a significant driver of economic and social development, particularly in rural areas where cultural heritage and natural landscapes serve as key attractions. However, the challenge of ensuring sustainability while enhancing a destination's competitive advantage remains critical. Desa Wisata Sambirejo, located in Sleman, Yogyakarta, is a prime example of a village with immense potential for sustainable tourism. Known for its rich geological heritage 'Breksi', cultural

traditions, and community-based tourism initiatives, Sambirejo has positioned itself as a unique destination.

This research explores integrative strategies to strengthen village's unique selling points (USPs) while maintaining environmental, social, and economic sustainability. By leveraging community engagement, digital marketing, and experience-based tourism, Sambirejo can enhance its appeal to both domestic and international visitors. The study examines best practices in sustainable tourism management and their applicability to the local context, ensuring that development efforts align with conservation and cultural preservation goals.

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This study employs a qualitative methodology with modified Delphi method, engaging Pentahelix approach which is a collaborative framework that involves five key societal elements; Government, Business, Community, Media, and Education; to drive sustainable development, innovation, and problem-solving. The Delphi technique allows for iterative feedback to refine strategies based on expert insights, ensuring a holistic and practical approach to sustainable tourism development.

In the context of tourism development, the Pentahelix approach ensures that multiple stakeholders contribute their expertise and resources to create well-rounded, inclusive, and sustainable strategies. By integrating these five elements, the Pentahelix approach enhances collaboration and ensures a more sustainable and community-centered tourism development strategy.

Below is the research questions that align with the proposed method:

1. How can integrative strategies be developed to enhance the unique selling points (USPs) of Desa Wisata Sambirejo?
2. What are the key challenges identified by stakeholders in balancing tourism growth with sustainability in Desa Wisata Sambirejo?
3. What best practices in sustainable tourism can be adapted to strengthen Desa Wisata Sambirejo's long-term competitiveness?

Literature Review

a. Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism encompasses all forms of development, management, and tourism activities that must take into account the integrity of the environment, economy, society, and the well-being of natural resources [1,2]. The development of sustainable tourism aims to minimize negative impacts, maximize potential, ensure effective management, and develop tourism so that it can be enjoyed both in the present and in the future [3-5]. The development of sustainable tourism focuses on local communities to provide social, cultural, and economic benefits, as well as to create employment opportunities [6,7].

Sustainable tourism development seeks to balance economic and social objectives with environmentally responsible management while preserving ecological integrity and cultural authenticity. By emphasizing responsible resource management, it aims to minimize environmental impact and promote social and economic inclusion without compromising future opportunities [8-10]. Sustainable tourism development requires a balance between economic prosperity and environmental conservation, ensuring long-term economic viability, ecological integrity, and cultural authenticity. It should adhere to principles of equity, sustainability, and community engagement, relying on local governance to distribute economic benefits fairly and enhance overall well-being through responsible tourism management [11,12].

The implementation of sustainable tourism development principles is hindered by significant challenges, including low awareness and motivation among industry stakeholders, high additional costs, climate constraints, and inadequate government support. Moreover, the vague interpretation of "sustainability,"

societal resistance to consumption restrictions in tourism, and escalating climate, economic, and political instability further obstruct efforts toward sustainability. The lack of effective marketing and communication strategies exacerbates these challenges, underscoring the urgent need for stronger awareness, education, and policy enforcement to ensure the successful integration of sustainable tourism practices [13-15].

b. Unique Selling Points (USPs)

Sustainable tourism focuses on minimizing environmental impact, preserving cultural heritage, and maximizing economic benefits for local communities [16]. The concept of Unique Selling Points (USPs) in tourism highlights the distinctive features that set a destination apart, such as cultural authenticity, natural attractions, and immersive experiences [17]. Integrating sustainable strategies with USPs strengthens a destination's competitiveness while ensuring long-term viability.

Unique Selling Points (USP) are developed as a differentiation strategy that highlights the superiority of a product compared to similar products in the market. In the context of tourism, USP can take the form of key attractions, unique travel experiences, or a combination of special offerings that distinguish a destination and make it more appealing than others [18,19].

In practice, many destinations offer similar products, making USP crucial for destinations to stand out, attract tourists, and establish a strong brand identity [20]. USP is also an integral part of marketing strategy, serving to highlight the unique attractions and experiences offered. Effective communication of USP can be achieved through branding strategies that specifically address market needs, as the effectiveness of USP depends on the extent to which it resonates with tourists [18,21]. In the competitive landscape of tourism village development in Yogyakarta, Sambirejo Tourism Village must effectively communicate its added value so that tourists recognize its unique advantages. This approach can enhance the village's attractiveness, strengthen its market position, and support sustainable tourism growth.

USP consists of several key elements: uniqueness, benefits for tourists, competitive advantage, and clear communication, each playing a role in shaping the appeal and added value of a destination [22,23]. Uniqueness differentiates a destination from competitors, while tourist benefits ensure that the value offered aligns with visitor needs and expectations. Competitive advantage functions as a differentiation strategy to strengthen a destination's market position, whereas clear communication ensures that the USP message reaches potential tourists effectively. These four elements must be integrated into the destination's marketing strategy to create a strong image, enhance its appeal, and foster sustainable tourism development.

c. Integrative Strategies in Sustainable Tourism

Research suggests that an integrative approach, incorporating community engagement, digital marketing, and experience-based tourism, is essential for sustainable tourism development [24]. Community participation ensures that local knowledge and traditions are preserved, while digital marketing enhances visibility and accessibility for a broader audience [25]. Experience-based tourism, which prioritizes authentic and

interactive visitor experiences, further differentiates a destination [26].

Method

The Modified Delphi Method

The Delphi method is widely used in tourism studies to achieve expert consensus on strategic planning and policy-making [27]. It usually involves multiple rounds of feedback from selected experts, refining strategies based on iterative insights. Studies indicate that the Delphi method is effective in addressing complex issues such as sustainable tourism development, as it integrates diverse perspectives into practical solutions [28]. In this study, the modified Delphi method was applied both online and offline as researchers and respondents were more flexible to express the opinion.

Results

Expert Insights on Desa Wisata Sambirejo's USPs (Unique Selling Points)

Through the Delphi method, experts identified the following key USPs of Desa Wisata Sambirejo:

1. Geological Heritage: The presence of unique rock formations and natural landscapes.

Sambirejo Tourism Village in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, exemplifies a successful model of rural tourism development that integrates natural, cultural, and educational elements. The transformation of the area began with the revitalization of the former Breksi Cliff mining site, which was repurposed into a community-managed tourism destination through initiatives led by the local village government. This initial development marked a turning point for the village's tourism trajectory. Over time, Sambirejo has evolved into a multi-attraction destination, encompassing significant cultural and archaeological sites such as Ijo Temple, Watu Payung, Watu Papal, Borong Temple, Tinjon Temple, Gupolo Statue, Dawangsari Temple Site, Miri Temple, and Ganesha Sumberwatu. These sites collectively contribute to the village's cultural landscape and heritage value. Furthermore, the incorporation of geotourism elements, including a geopark and several geosites, not only reinforces the village's environmental and educational appeal but also aligns with sustainable tourism principles by promoting geological awareness and conservation. Sambirejo's integrated approach to tourism—balancing natural resource utilization, heritage preservation, and community empowerment—demonstrates its potential as a replicable model for destination development in other rural contexts (Interview Result with Kholiq Widiyanto, Tourism Village Management).

2. Cultural and Historical Significance: Traditional Javanese crafts, music, and rituals.

As part of its efforts to preserve cultural heritage and local wisdom, Sambirejo Tourism Village places strong emphasis on the revitalization and conservation of traditional Javanese games such as benthik, and loncat tali. These games, regarded as intangible cultural heritage, are being reintroduced as components of experiential tourism packages aimed at engaging visitors in interactive cultural learning. In addition to these efforts, the village is actively promoting the development of traditional arts and local cultural expressions, including gamelan music and classical dance performances, which serve as vital markers of Javanese identity. The promotion of local batik artistry further complements this cultural revitalization, with

offerings such as Batik Dewi Sambi, batik tulis, jumputan, and ecoprint, each reflecting unique patterns and techniques rooted in the region's artistic heritage.

Traditional performing arts are also embedded into the tourism experience, most notably through jathilan performances, which continue to attract the interest of both domestic and international tourists. The local village administration plays an active role in organizing annual cultural events held at various locations throughout the area. These include traditional rituals and celebrations such as gunungan, nyadran, and bedah bumi, all of which are deeply embedded in local customs and communal practices. Through the integration of these cultural activities into the tourism framework, Sambirejo Tourism Village aspires to offer immersive encounters with Javanese culture, while simultaneously ensuring its preservation for future generations (Based on interviews with Kholiq and Firdha)

3. Community-Based Tourism Initiatives: Active involvement of local residents in guiding and homestay services.

Through direct involvement in various aspects of tourism—including guiding services, homestay management, and cultural event organization—Sambirejo has embraced a model of community-based tourism that is both participatory and economically inclusive. This approach is expected to ensure the sustainability of tourism development while delivering tangible benefits to the local population.

Community empowerment through community-based tourism (CBT) plays a crucial role in the sustainable development of tourism at the local level. Sambirejo Tourism Village serves as a prominent example of this approach, actively working to enhance the well-being of its residents by creating economic opportunities within the tourism sector. One such initiative is the development of a jeep tourism area, which provides local residents with a platform to generate income and improve their livelihoods. Community involvement is also evident in the management of Candari Resto, a restaurant situated within the Sambirejo tourism area, where local residents are employed and directly involved in daily operations. Importantly, revenue generated from services such as parking is fully returned to the community, thereby reinforcing the principle of inclusive local benefit (Based on interviews with Ms. Intan, Candari Heaven Resto).

In addition, community members with artistic skills, such as traditional dancers, are actively engaged in tourism events like Ramayana Night, where performances are delivered by local talent. This not only supports cultural preservation but also creates opportunities for cultural entrepreneurship. The commitment of the local community to tourism development is further reflected in their participation at key attractions such as Breksi Cliff, where over 500 individuals are currently employed—95% of whom are residents of Sambirejo Village (Based on interviews with Mr. Kholiq and Mr. Firdha)

4. Eco-Tourism Potential: Opportunities for environmentally responsible travel activities.

Sambirejo Tourism Village demonstrates significant potential in advancing eco-tourism through a range of environmentally sustainable initiatives. One notable example occurred at the end of 2024, when the Breksi Cliff tourism area hosted a

groundbreaking concert titled “Get Plastic.” This event was recognized as the world’s first concert powered entirely by energy derived from plastic waste. The collected plastic waste was processed into solar energy, which was then used to power the concert’s sound system and other equipment.

Supporting this initiative, Sambirejo Tourism Village operates the Go Green Waste Bank, which collaborates with the Get Plastic organization to convert waste into solar energy. This partnership not only addresses the issue of plastic pollution but also illustrates how community-driven efforts can contribute to energy innovation and sustainability.

In addition to waste-to-energy programs, Sambirejo has also embraced digital innovation to further environmental stewardship through the Simpel Desa (Simple Village) application. This mobile-based platform enables residents to report environmental issues such as fallen trees, damaged roads, and unmanaged waste. Although adoption of the application remains limited, particularly in mountainous areas with weak signal coverage, the initiative reflects a growing effort to enhance civic engagement and environmental accountability among the local population. Collectively, these efforts position Sambirejo Tourism Village as a progressive model of eco-tourism that integrates technological innovation, community participation, and environmental sustainability (Based on an interview with Mr. Andreas, Antara News, 11 February 2025).

5. Sustainable Tourism Development

The first and foremost priority has been identified as the enhancement of human resource capacity within the local community. It has been observed that not all residents possess adequate understanding or skills in properly managing a tourism village. This has often resulted in uncertainty regarding the appropriate starting points for development. Therefore, the preparedness and competency of local human resources have been recognized as foundational elements in initiating sustainable tourism practices.

Sustainability has been understood as encompassing environmental, cultural, and economic dimensions. From an environmental perspective, the presence of tourism is expected to contribute positively to the preservation and maintenance of natural surroundings. Areas that were previously neglected are anticipated to become better maintained through the development of tourism-related infrastructure and supporting facilities. Consequently, environmental sustainability is promoted as part of tourism growth.

In terms of cultural sustainability, tourism has been acknowledged for its potential to revive and preserve local traditions and practices. Cultural elements, which may have been previously undervalued or poorly maintained, are now being revitalized as they are transformed into attractions and performances for visitors. Artistic spaces such as traditional dance studios (*sanggar*) have been reactivated, and cultural identity has been increasingly emphasized within tourism offerings.

Economic sustainability is likewise expected to be achieved through tourism, as the economic activities generated are anticipated to provide additional income streams for the

surrounding community. As a result, tourism is projected to enhance the economic welfare of local residents, contributing to overall prosperity.

This understanding of sustainability has been linked to the broader vision of integrated community development. In the context of Yogyakarta, the concept of *Desa Mandiri Budaya* (Culturally Independent Village) has been introduced, which is structured around four key pillars: (1) cultural preservation (*desa budaya*), (2) tourism development (*desa wisata*), (3) women’s empowerment (*desa prima*), and (4) entrepreneurial support for MSMEs (*desa prener*). These four pillars have been regarded as mutually reinforcing elements that collectively support the long-term sustainability of the village, encompassing cultural, economic, and social dimensions.

Furthermore, a more advanced concept-resilient villages-has been proposed, wherein the focus is not only on sustainability but also on the capacity for innovation, adaptation, and resilience in the face of emerging challenges. Innovation has been emphasized as a necessary strategy to ensure that village communities can continuously evolve and remain responsive to dynamic socio-economic and environmental conditions.

Conclusion

This study explored the strategic development of *Desa Wisata Sambirejo* by addressing three core research questions related to integrative strategy, sustainability challenges, and best practices in tourism development with Modified Delphi method.

First, in response to the question of how integrative strategies can be developed to enhance the unique selling points (USPs) of Sambirejo, it was found that the village has successfully leveraged its natural and cultural assets—such as the transformation of Breksi Cliff, traditional Javanese performances, and batik craftsmanship—through a holistic community-based tourism model. The integration of environmental education (via geoparks), cultural revival (through annual rituals and art performances), and economic inclusion (such as jeep tourism and community-managed restaurants) represents a distinctive and replicable model of rural tourism development. These USPs have been enhanced not only through place-making but also through branding initiatives that embed authenticity and sustainability into the destination identity.

Second, the study revealed several key challenges in balancing tourism growth with sustainability, as identified by local stakeholders. These include limited human resource capacity in tourism management, uneven digital access (especially in highland areas), environmental strain due to increased visitation, and the ongoing need for cultural safeguarding in the face of commercialization. Such challenges underline the importance of capacity-building programs, improved infrastructure, and participatory planning mechanisms to ensure that tourism growth does not compromise ecological and socio-cultural integrity.

Third, several best practices in sustainable tourism have emerged from the Sambirejo case that may strengthen its long-term competitiveness. These include the integration of renewable energy through plastic-to-solar innovation (Get Plastic), the adoption of civic-tech platforms for environmental

monitoring, and the structured involvement of community groups—especially women and youth—in tourism value chains. Furthermore, the alignment with the Desa Mandiri Budaya framework reflects a scalable model that incorporates cultural preservation, entrepreneurship, and gender inclusion as pillars of sustainability.

Overall, Sambirejo's progress illustrates that sustainable competitiveness in rural tourism can be achieved through integrative, community-led, and innovation-driven approaches. Future strategies should continue to build upon these foundations while adapting to emerging socio-economic and environmental dynamics.

Recommendation

To ensure the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of Desa Wisata Sambirejo, several strategic recommendations are proposed based on the findings of this study. First, capacity building remains a critical foundation for successful community-based tourism. Continuous education and technical training should be prioritized to strengthen the capabilities of local residents, particularly in the areas of tourism management, hospitality services, and digital literacy. Establishing partnerships with academic institutions, vocational training centers, and tourism professionals can facilitate structured knowledge transfer and skill enhancement. Such efforts will empower local stakeholders to manage tourism initiatives more effectively and adaptively.

Second, the integration of technology should be further scaled to support both environmental and governance functions. The Sempel Desa application, designed to facilitate community reporting on environmental issues, represents an important step toward participatory governance. However, its usage should be expanded through improved digital infrastructure, particularly in geographically disadvantaged areas where internet access remains limited. Enhanced technological adoption will support real-time environmental monitoring, efficient communication between authorities and residents, and broader civic engagement in sustainable development processes.

Third, diversification of sustainable tourism products is essential for expanding the economic benefits of tourism across different sectors of the community. Sambirejo can further develop thematic tourism packages that integrate eco-tourism, agro-tourism, and cultural heritage experiences. By offering varied and immersive activities, the village can increase visitor stay duration, attract new market segments, and provide alternative income opportunities for farmers, artisans, and performers, thus strengthening the overall tourism value chain.

Fourth, there is a pressing need to establish systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the environmental impacts of tourism activities. Collaboration with environmental NGOs, universities, and governmental agencies can support the implementation of evidence-based planning and impact assessments. Such mechanisms will ensure that tourism development aligns with ecological conservation goals, mitigating the risks of resource depletion, pollution, and habitat disruption.

Fifth, enhancing market access for local products is crucial for increasing the economic returns of tourism for small producers. Traditional crafts such as batik tulis, ecoprint, and local culinary specialties should be promoted through digital marketplaces, social media campaigns, and creative product branding. Efforts to improve packaging, storytelling, and certification can further add value to these products, allowing them to reach broader national and international markets and improving the livelihoods of local artisans and entrepreneurs.

Finally, youth participation must be actively encouraged as a driver of innovation and long-term sustainability. Programs that engage young people in digital tourism promotion, event organization, and creative industries will not only foster intergenerational continuity but also inject fresh perspectives into village development. Involving youth in decision-making and capacity-building initiatives ensures that Sambirejo continues to evolve in response to changing tourism trends and socio-environmental challenges.

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