

Developing Rural Tourism Resources Management Strategies in Achieving SDGs and Economic Independence - A Case Study of Bukit Tengah

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Abstract

Poor coordination among stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and private sectors, results in fragmented efforts and inefficiencies in rural tourism development. This study explores the potential of rural tourism development in 3 pristine villages in Bukit Tengah. It proposes a comprehensive approach to formulating management strategies for rural tourism resources, aiming to align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while fostering economic self-reliance. Utilising a mixed-method methodology, the data were analysed using weighted score methods, thematic analysis as well as mediation analysis. Based on the findings from resource assessment and interviews, a holistic planning framework for rural management strategies emerges, integrating principles of sustainability, local empowerment, and economic viability. This framework offers a systematic guide for policymakers, local authorities, and community stakeholders to effectively manage rural tourism resources towards achieving SDGs and fostering economic independence. By synthesising diverse perspectives and empirical evidence, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of rural tourism management and provides practical insights for implementing sustainable development initiatives in rural contexts. The proposed planning framework serves as a roadmap for stakeholders to navigate rural tourism management, fostering inclusive growth, environmental stewardship, and socio-economic resilience.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Tourism Management Strategies, Rural Poverty Eradication, Sustainable Development Goals, Economic Independence.

1.0 Introduction

Rural tourism is a promising opportunity to improve living standards in three villages in Bukit Tengah, Penang – Kampung Kuala Juru, Kampung Sekolah Juru, and Kampung Sungai Semilang. Drawing from successful case studies, rural tourism can empower communities, fostering initiative, independence, and sustainability (Wang et al., 2013). These villages have resources like Bukit Juru, river streams, mangroves, village settings, farm animals, and indigenous plants, suitable for activities such as agritourism, sports tourism, heritage tourism, and ecotourism. Despite their rich tourism resources, the three villages in the study lack readiness to meet tourist demands, potentially lowering visit intentions.

The research aims to propose rural tourism development strategies aligned with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It targets SDG 1 by creating tourism-related jobs to alleviate poverty, SDG 4 by fostering education and skill development for locals, SDG 8 by promoting inclusive economic growth, SDG 11 by improving socio-economic conditions for B40 households, and SDG 9 by fostering sustainable communities (Streimikiene et al., 2020).

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2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Rural Tourism Resources

Tourism development is seen as a powerful tool to boost gains and foster community development in rural areas, aiming to alleviate poverty, preserve the environment, and promote sustainability. It should be based on the sustainable use of rural tourism resources, protecting rural culture and the natural environment (Wang et al., 2013). Tourism resources, developed into products to fulfil leisure desires, bring economic benefits to rural areas. They gain value through additional components like facilities, services, and experiences (Rosalina et al., 2023).

2.2 Achieving Sustainable Development Goals through Rural Tourism Development

2.2.1 Rural Tourism as a Driver of Sustainable Development

Rural tourism is increasingly recognised as a driver of sustainable development, shifting perspectives toward rural areas as key contributors to global sustainability (Hall & Lew, 2009). By leveraging local cultural, natural, and heritage assets, rural tourism can unlock economic opportunities, from hospitality services to local crafts, stimulating rural economic growth and diversification (Sharpley & Telfer, 2014). Additionally, it promotes environmental conservation by preserving natural landscapes and ecosystems.

Community involvement and empowerment are central to rural tourism initiatives, allowing locals to shape tourism activities and ensuring they meet community needs. This fosters a sense of ownership, enhances benefits from tourism, and contributes to social cohesion and resilience (Sharpley & Telfer, 2014). Rural tourism's role in diversifying economies, reducing poverty, and enhancing livelihoods aligns with SDGs, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). By creating jobs, stimulating entrepreneurship, and supporting local businesses, rural tourism aids in poverty alleviation and sustainable economic growth, highlighting its relevance in sustainable development (UNWTO, 2018).

2.2.2 Community Empowerment and Participation

Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) assert that empowering local communities in tourism decision-making leads to more sustainable outcomes. Studies show that community participation positively impacts the sustainability of tourism initiatives. When locals are engaged in planning, implementing, and managing tourism projects, they become stakeholders with a vested interest, fostering ownership and responsibility (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). This ensures that tourism aligns with local needs, aspirations, and cultural sensitivities.

Community participation supports Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting inclusive urban planning for residents' well-being (Mbaiwa, 2005).

2.3 Evaluation of Rural Tourism Resources/Supplies

Evaluation of tourism supplies and resources aim to plan sustainable development, balancing cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental impacts (Martin & Tomas, 2012). The Weighted Score Method (WSM) used in this research is effective for assessing tourism sites, evaluating physical and social attributes objectively using ordinal ranks and scales. WSM helps identify

relevant indicators for each tourism product, clarifying the potential of existing resources (Nasa & Hassan, 2016).

2.4 Evaluation of Community Participation

Community participation in tourism planning ensures practical benefits for sustainable development (Park et al., 2017; Shani & Pizam, 2011), by improving economic conditions and enhancing the quality of life. As mentioned by Martines et al., 2019; Dasic et al., 2020, community who participate in the tourism development are able to encourage younger generations to stay in their villages, addressing rural-to-urban migration. Thus, it is important to examine the willingness of community participation in a tourism development. The Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) framework in study helps to evaluate community participation intentions (MacInnis et al., 1991; Olander & Thøgersen, 1995).

2.5 Resource Management Strategies in Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

Resource management strategies play a crucial role in achieving sustainable development, particularly concerning goals related to poverty eradication, quality education, economic growth, industry innovation, and sustainable cities and communities (SDGs 1, 4, 8, 9, and 11). One of the fundamental aspects of resource management strategies is their contribution to poverty eradication. By conserving natural resources, particularly in regions where communities rely heavily on these resources for their livelihoods, sustainable resource management can help alleviate poverty (Karekezi & Kithyoma, 2002). On the other hand, education plays a vital role in promoting sustainable resource management practices. By integrating environmental education into school curricula and community programs, individuals can develop the knowledge and skills necessary for responsible resource use (UNESCO, 2018). Furthermore, inclusive education initiatives that target marginalized populations, including indigenous communities, empower them to participate actively in sustainable resource management efforts (Choi, 2017). Such initiatives not only promote environmental stewardship but also contribute to social inclusion and equity, aligning with SDG 4 objectives. Besides, efficient resource utilisation is essential for fostering economic growth while minimizing environmental impacts. Resource-efficient practices, such as circular economy models and industrial symbiosis, promote the sustainable use of materials and energy within production and consumption systems (European Commission, 2020). By adopting these strategies, businesses can reduce costs, enhance competitiveness, and create new opportunities for innovation and job creation, thereby contributing to SDG 8 targets for sustained, inclusive economic growth (Stahel, 2016).

On top of that, technologies and infrastructure that enable renewable energy generation, waste recycling, and sustainable transportation systems play a pivotal role in promoting resource conservation and reducing environmental degradation (IEA, 2020). Moreover, fostering innovation ecosystems that support research and development in sustainable technologies can drive economic diversification and industry transformation, aligning with SDG 9 objectives for resilient infrastructure and inclusive industrialization (UNIDO, 2019).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology/Data Collection

This study utilised a mixed-method approach over four months, from December 2022 to March 2022. It commenced with a literature review on resource management, sustainable development, and local economic strategies to establish foundational concepts and best practices. The qualitative methods involved semi-structured interviews and tourism resource assessments. Interviews with 9 key stakeholders-community members, government officials, and local business representatives were conducted using purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives despite the small sample size. These interviews provided detailed insights into resource management challenges and opportunities. Tourism resources were assessed using a simple weighted score method, focusing on accessibility, cultural significance, heritage value, and infrastructure.

3.2 Data Analysis

The first type of qualitative data gathered is tourism resources assessment using the Simple Weighted Score (WSM) method. This systematic approach assigns weights to criteria such as cultural sites, natural attractions, and local cuisine based on their relevance to research objectives. Each criterion receives numerical scores reflecting its performance, which are then weighted and aggregated to identify strengths and weaknesses in tourism resources (Nasa & Hassan, 2016). This framework, adapted to include 34 indicators tailored to the villages' unique characteristics, ensures a context-specific evaluation essential for informed decision-making in tourism development (Weaver, 2006; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). A situational analysis supplements this assessment by identifying potential opportunities and challenges.

Table 1: Indicators for assessment of tourism resources potential

Aspects	Dimensions	Indicators
1. Cultural site	Cultural value	1. The uniqueness of the way of life, wisdom, and knowledge
		2. Continuation of traditional cultures
		3. Cultural beauty
		4. Continuation of the way of life, wisdom, and knowledge
		5. A searchable historical culture
		6. Local commitment
		7. Strengthened to maintain cultural identity
		8. Cultural conservation groups network
	Physical potential and activity	9. Accessibility: Ease of access
		10. Accessibility: Access route signs
		11. Safety and security: The frequency of the dangers of natural disasters in the past year
		12. Safety and security: The frequency of the dangers of external factors such as crime, epidemics, etc.
		13. Diversity of tourism activities
2. Natural Site	Natural value	1. Attractive and unique elements
		2. Richness of vegetation and naturalness of the ecosystem
		3. Opportunity for wildlife sightings
		4. Landscape quality and aesthetics
		5. Appropriateness of tourism activities related to the site characteristics and resources
		6. Diversity of tourism activities
		7. Micro-climate condition
		8. Accessibility
		9. Self-reliance
		10. Opportunity for the challenging and exciting experiences
3. Local cuisine	Attractiveness	1. Attractive and uniqueness elements
	Evaluation of food	2. Taste of the food

	3. Taste of the food
	4. Quality of food
	5. Price range
	6. Using local ingredients
	7. Menu (picture, price, language, presentation)
	8. Presentation of food
Evaluation of customer service and facilities	9. Availability of toilet, signage
	10. Cleanliness of the premise
	11. Good customer service and hospitality
	12. Provide parking area

Adopted from: Nasa and Hassan (2016)

The second type of qualitative data involves interviews with tourism stakeholders to understand perspectives on rural tourism development and local interest in participation. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts reveals recurring themes and patterns in stakeholders' responses, providing deep insights into their perspectives (Bryne, 2021). Validity and reliability were ensured through data triangulation and member checking, enhancing the research's credibility. The third type of data comprises online surveys analysed using Hayes' process model for mediation analysis. This approach examines how motivation, opportunity, and ability mediate community participation in tourism initiatives. By elucidating these mechanisms, the analysis informs intervention design and contributes empirical evidence to theoretical frameworks of community participation in tourism (Hayes, 2013).

4.0 Findings

4.1 Assessment of Potential Tourism Sites

The assessment of potential tourism sites in Kampung Kuala Juru, Kampung Sekolah, and Kampung Sungai Semilang involves evaluating various factors that contribute to their suitability and attractiveness as tourist destinations. The findings from the situational analysis reveals promising opportunities for tourism development. By capitalising on their geographical features, cultural heritage, improving infrastructure, ensuring accessibility, and adopting sustainable practices, these villages can emerge as sustainable tourism destinations, benefiting both the local communities and visitors alike.

Table 2: The assessment results of potential tourism sites in the study area.

Aspects	Potential Tourism Sites	Location	Potential	
			Weighted Score	Level of Potential
(A) Cultural Products	Traditional Stilted House	KSS	1.4375	Low
	Kuala Juru Jetty	KKJ	2.3750	Moderate
	Masjid Bagan Nyiur	KKJ	2.2813	Moderate
	Masjid Jamek Kampung Sekolah Juru	KSJ	2.2813	Moderate
	Masjid Jamek Kuala Juru	KKJ	2.2813	Moderate
	Mak Cik Su Bahulu	KKJ	1.4688	Low
	Pn. Rashilah Belacan	KKJ	1.5625	Low
	Dried Fish	KSS	2.0313	Moderate
	Cockles	KKJ	2.2188	Moderate
	Symbiosis Aquaculture	KSS	2.0000	Moderate
(B) Natural Sites	Paddy Field	KKJ	2.0435	Moderate
	Sungai Juru	KKJ	1.6957	Moderate
	Bukit Juru	KKJ	2.5217	High
	Sungai Semilang	KSS	1.5652	Low

	Animal Farm	KSS	1.8696	Moderate
	Sungai Semilang Mangroves	KSS	1.9130	Moderate
(C) Local cuisine	Jamu Selera Restaurant	KKJ	2.4074	High
	Kedai Makan Zulaila	KKJ	2.1481	Moderate
	Warung Pak Su	KKJ	1.7407	Moderate
	Roti Canai Sungai Semilang Juru	KSS	2.0370	Moderate

Note: Score range 1.00-1.66 (Low potential), 1.67-2.33 Moderate potential, 2.33-3.00 (High potential)

From the assessment, Bukit Juru and Jamu Selera Restaurant emerge as high-potential tourism sites. Bukit Juru, a well-maintained natural landmark, attracts hikers and visitors with its scenic views of the Penang Second Bridge and Penang Island, along with amenities like ample parking and biodiversity exploration opportunities (Nasa & Hassan, 2016). Jamu Selera Restaurant is noted for its affordable, fresh local seafood dishes such as mee udang and mee ketam, as well as its clean environment and friendly service (Rosalina et al., 2023). Moderate potential sites include 14 out of 20 identified cultural sites like mosques and the Kuala Juru Jetty, reflecting local Muslim village life and former fishing activities. These sites require local authority support for development due to neglect and insufficient tourism awareness. Natural sites such as paddy fields, rivers, and mangroves, along with local eateries, also show promise but need better management and visitor engagement strategies (Nasa & Hassan, 2016). Low potential sites include the traditional stilted house in Kampung Sungai Semilang, Mak Cik Su Bahulu, Pn. Rashilah Belacan, and Sungai Semilang, which face challenges such as cultural conservation issues and inadequate signage, limiting their tourism appeal (Nasa & Hassan, 2016).

4.2 Perspective of Tourism Development by the Stakeholders

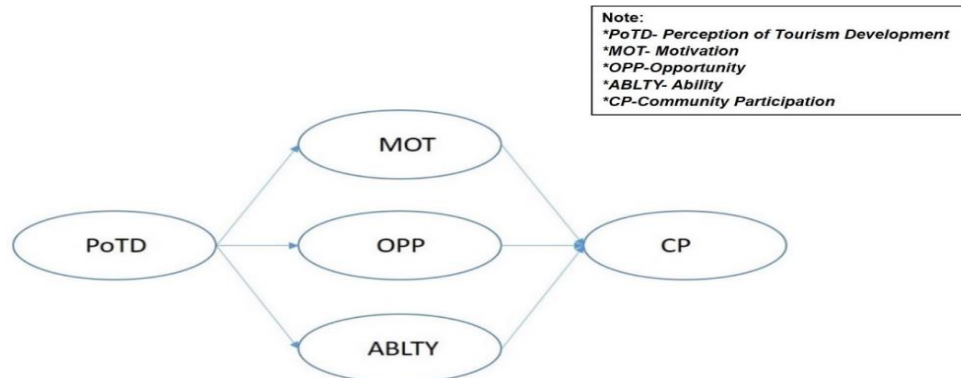
The research indicates that while local communities and stakeholders in the three villages generally support rural tourism development, there is a noticeable divergence between the perspectives of local authorities and the community. Authorities have organised plans and a long-term vision for village development and the potential benefits of tourism. In contrast, the community prioritises immediate issues affecting their daily lives over a broader vision for sustainable economic benefits from tourism. Concerns include potential time investments in tourism at the expense of household management and the need to address basic infrastructure like sewage systems before advancing tourism. A village committee member stressed resolving infrastructure problems to garner local support for tourism. Both parties recognise tourism's potential benefits, but authorities focus on long-term solutions, while the community seeks immediate improvements and direct aid for small businesses.

During site visits, locals expressed concerns about living conditions and support needs for their livelihoods, suggesting a focus on daily survival rather than future-oriented planning. Further education and awareness about how rural tourism can positively impact their lives long-term may be necessary to secure full community support (Nasa & Hassan, 2016)

4.3 Motivation, Opportunity, and Ability of Local Community

The research explores the mediating role of the Motivation, Opportunity, and Ability (MOA) of the community participation in tourism development. MOA model is applied within a tourism context to assess how locals' perceptions of tourism development influence their engagement (MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski's, 1991). The mediation analysis, conducted

using the Hayes Process Macro, reveal insights into how tourism development perceptions influence community participation through MOT, OPP, and ABTY, with significant relationships identified for most factors, except MOT and community participation.



Note: The mediation effect of Motivation, Opportunity and Ability in the relationship of perception of tourism development and community participation. Derived from *Enhancing and Measuring Consumers' Motivation, Opportunity, and Ability to Process Brand Information from Ads* (p. 34), by MacInnis, D. J., Moorman, C., & Jaworski, B. J., 1991, *Journal of Marketing*.

Fig. 1: Research Model

Table 3: Mediation Analysis Summary

Total Effect (PoTD -> Community Participation)	Direct Effect (PoTD -> Community Participation)	Relationship	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		t-stats	Conclusion
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
0.3021 (p=0.018)	0.0597 (p=0.5188)	H1: PoTD ->MOT ->CP	0.0129	-0.0900	0.1189	0.2549	No mediation H1 is not supported
		H2: PoTD ->OPP ->CP	0.0912	-0.0060	0.2399	1.4227	No mediation H2 is not supported
		H3: PoTD ->ABTY ->CP	0.1384	0.0264	0.2866	2.0906	Full mediation H3 is supported

Through the analysis, hypothesis 1 (motivation) is not supported. It is found that the local communities are lacked of motivation for initiating tourism development despite being informed about its potential benefits. There are Concerns over business expansion, hiring helpers, and potential losses overshadow their motivation. Some entrepreneurs are content with their current business state, indicating a preference for stability over growth. Hypothesis 2 (Opportunity) is also not supported. Opportunities provided are not perceived as encouraging for participation in tourism development in the study area. Few issues have been raised include limited space for accommodations, river pollution affecting local businesses, and inadequate infrastructure support from local authorities. However, hypothesis 3 (Ability) is supported. Ability mediates the relationship between PoTD (Perceived of Tourism Development) and CP (Community Participation). It is found that positive perceptions of tourism development can enhance the community's abilities, leading to greater participation. The development could

bring access to resources like training programs and educational opportunities, which help in skill development and community involvement.

5.0 Proposed Research Framework

Based on the study findings, this research proposes a comprehensive planning framework integrating rural tourism resource evaluation, community participation assessment, total quality management (TQM), and resource management strategies aligned with SDGs. This framework is particularly crucial for villages like Kampung Kuala Juru, Kampung Sekolah, and Kampung Sungai Semilang, which boast rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and traditional lifestyles, offering significant tourism potential for economic development and community well-being.

The structured framework, informed by thorough analysis, ensures sustainable and inclusive tourism growth that preserves environmental integrity, cultural authenticity, and enhance infrastructure. It aims to mitigate issues such as over-tourism, environmental degradation, and cultural erosion, while fostering local community engagement and stakeholder partnerships. By empowering residents and aligning tourism development with local aspirations, the framework enhances visitor experiences, stimulates local economies, and improves living standards. Ultimately, it aims to transform these villages into sustainable tourism destinations that celebrate their unique identities.

This proposed framework integrates rural tourism supply evaluation, community participation, TQM, and resource management strategies to advance sustainable development and inclusive local economies, addressing SDGs 1, 4, 8, 9, and 11. Figure 3.0 illustrates the comprehensive framework proposed in this study.

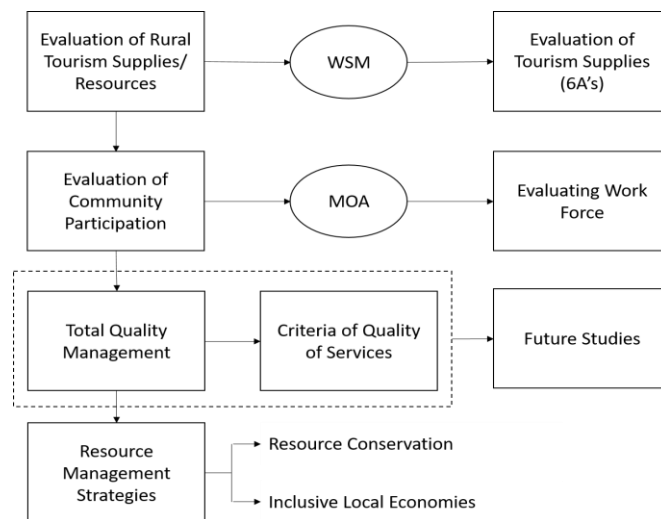


Fig. 3: Proposed Planning Framework for Rural Tourism Resources Management Strategies.

6.0 Practical Implications

Implementing a planning framework for rural tourism resource management strategies, requires an interdisciplinary approach integrating theoretical research and practical applications. A practical implementation would involve partnerships among academia, government agencies, nonprofits, and local communities to pilot and evaluate these strategies

in real-world settings, such as promoting agroecological farming to enhance soil and health and biodiversity (Smith et al., 2020). Policy reforms supporting sustainable practices and capacity-building efforts would be crucial, alongside monitoring and evaluation using participatory approaches to ensure alignment with community priorities (Leach et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2019).

7.0 Future Research

For future studies, comparative studies across regions and socio-economic contexts can enrich understanding of contextual factors affecting resource management effectiveness. Analysing case studies from diverse settings helps identify best practices and tailor approaches to local socio-cultural dynamics and institutional capacities (Brown & Miller, 2019). In conclusion, future research on the planning framework for Resource Management Strategies holds potential for advancing sustainable development goals. By leveraging empirical studies, interdisciplinary insights, comparative analyses, technological innovations, and community engagement, researchers can refine the framework to address complex challenges and foster resilient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable local economies.

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