

# Layered Social Capital in a Tourism Village: A Phenomenological Study Toward Sustainable Tourism in Cibuntu, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism develops in response to the limitations of conventional tourism models that emphasize economic growth over social, cultural, and environmental balance. In the context of tourist villages, social capital is a key factor determining the success of community-based tourism management. This study aims to analyze the formation and role of social capital in supporting tourism sustainability in Cibuntu Tourism Village, West Java. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological paradigm through the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies using a purposive sampling technique. Analysis was carried out in stages through repeated readings, initial note-taking, theme development, and identification of key themes. The results show that social capital is formed in layers through relational (networks and trust), normative (cultural values), and spatial-ecological (environmental attachment) dimensions. These three dimensions form an adaptive social system that strengthens internal cohesion, external collaboration, and sustainable tourism governance. Social capital also serves as a bridge between local traditions and modern tourism practices. This study concludes that layered social capital is the main foundation for the sustainability of tourist villages. Therefore, it is recommended that tourism development policies place more emphasis on strengthening community social capacity and that further research use a mixed approach to broaden the generalizability of findings.

**Keywords:** social capital, tourism village, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, IPA

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism has developed as a response to the limitations of conventional tourism development models, which tend to emphasize economic growth while neglecting social, cultural, and environmental balance. In this context, community participation is a key principle in inclusive and sustainable tourism governance. A study by Matyile & Ramakumba (2025) shows that community participation is a crucial factor in tourism development, despite often facing various structural, operational, and cultural constraints.

Tourism villages in Indonesia represent a community-based rural development strategy that fosters social, cultural, and economic transformation. In a community-based tourism approach, local community involvement is key to the success of sustainable tourism development. Research by Okazaki (2008) confirms that community participation is a crucial element in the planning and implementation of community-based tourism.

In this context, social capital is a key factor mediating the success of community-based tourism. Social capital, consisting of networks, norms, and trust, plays a role in fostering collective cooperation and community development (Prayitno et al., 2024). Empirical studies indicate that social capital is a fundamental element in supporting sustainable tourism, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, research by Jones (2005) in the context of ecotourism indicates that social capital contributes to the success of community-based tourism management through strengthening social networks and local collaboration.

Furthermore, recent research indicates that social capital influences not only tourism intentions but also attitudes and support for community tourism development. Zhu et al. (2021) found that social capital significantly influences community support for tourism development through mechanisms of trust and perceptions of fairness. In the Indonesian context, a study by Putri et al. (2025) demonstrated that social capital, in the form of trust, norms, and social networks, is a key factor in the successful implementation of community-based tourism in tourist villages.

However, most previous research has focused on quantitative aspects, such as the influence of social capital on community attitudes or support, and the economic impact of tourism (Trinh, 2021; Kuo et al., 2021). This approach tends to ignore how social capital is formed and interpreted in people's daily lived experiences. A recent study (Vongvistin et al., 2024) shows that social capital is contextual and can have complex dynamics within community social practices.

This gap highlights the need for a more interpretive approach to understand the process of social capital formation in depth. Therefore, this study uses a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of local actors in building social capital in Cibuntu Tourism Village, West Java. This village has undergone a transformation from an agrarian village to a community-based tourism destination since 2011, involving changes in social relations, cultural norms, and institutional networks.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the formation of social capital in the context of tourist villages and identify its contribution to supporting sustainable tourism. Theoretically, this study contributes by proposing the concept of layered social capital that integrates relational, normative, and ecological dimensions in the context of rural tourism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Capital Theory

The concept of social capital is an important framework in social science for understanding how social relationships generate collective value. Jang et al. (2024) define social capital as the actual and potential resources embedded in networks of social relationships that can be mobilized by individuals or groups. This definition emphasizes that access to resources is largely determined by position within a social network. Furthermore, Badiglio & Seta (2026) view social capital as a function of social structures that facilitate individual action through norms, obligations, and trust.

Meanwhile, Dinda (2008) defines social capital as networks, norms, and trust that enable coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. This perspective shifts the focus from the individual to the community level and emphasizes the importance of social cohesion in development. This approach is taken by Bhandari & Yasunobu (2009), who emphasize that trust is the core of social capital that influences economic and institutional efficiency.

Contextually, various studies show that social capital has three main dimensions: social networks (structural), norms (normative), and trust (relational), which collectively shape a society's capacity for collective action (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). However, contemporary literature also shows that most studies still operationalize social capital as a quantitative variable in statistical models, thus failing to fully capture the contextual and dynamic complexity of social practices (Gannon & Roberts, 2020).

### Social Capital in Community-Based Tourism

In the context of community-based tourism (CBT), social capital plays a crucial role in supporting the success of community-based tourism development. Research by Simpson (2008) shows that community participation in tourism planning is strongly influenced by the level of trust and social networks within the community. Furthermore, Wearing (2011) found that trust, as a component of social capital, significantly influences community support for tourism development.

Furthermore, research by Favero (2007) indicates that local social networks contribute to the success of community-based tourism management. To understand the dynamics of social relationships, the bonding–bridging–linking framework developed by Woolcock (1998) has become a widely used approach in development studies. This framework explains that bonding reflects internal cohesion, bridging describes horizontal collaboration, and linking indicates vertical relationships with formal institutions.

However, Gannon & Roberts' (2020) research still focuses on a quantitative approach that examines the relationship between social capital, perceived economic benefits, and community support for tourism, thus underexploring how social capital is formed in everyday social practices. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by assessing social capital as a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing not only relational and normative dimensions but also spatial-ecological dimensions in the context of tourism villages.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore the formation and practice of social capital in the context of rural tourism. A phenomenological approach was chosen because it captures individuals' lived experiences and understands how meaning is constructed through everyday social interactions.

Specifically, this study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which emphasizes subjective interpretations of participants' experiences and the researcher's role in understanding these meanings. IPA is considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of how local actors interpret, negotiate, and invest social capital in the dynamics of community-based tourism. This approach also allows for the uncovering of contextual meanings often inaccessible through quantitative approaches.

### Research Location

This research was conducted in Cibuntu Tourism Village, located in Kuningan Regency, West Java, Indonesia. This village was chosen as the research location because it has undergone a transformation from an agrarian village to a community-based tourism destination since 2011. This transformation reflects not only economic changes but also changes in social relations, cultural practices, and institutional arrangements. The

active involvement of the local community in tourism development makes Cibuntu Tourism Village a relevant location for examining the role of social capital in supporting tourism aspirations.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection was conducted using several techniques to ensure the depth and validity of the findings through data triangulation. The primary technique used was in-depth semi-structured interviews with key actors, such as community leaders, tourism managers, homestay owners, and community members involved in tourism activities. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance and involvement in tourism development in the village. In addition, participant observation was conducted to directly observe social interactions, community practices, and ongoing tourism activities. This technique enabled researchers to gain a contextual understanding of how social capital is practiced in the daily lives of the community. This research also utilized documentation studies, analyzing village documents, tourism reports, related policies, and other archives.

Documentation data was used to complement and validate the findings from the interviews and observations. In addition, participant observation was conducted to directly observe social interactions, community practices, and ongoing tourism activities. This technique enabled researchers to gain a contextual understanding of how social capital is practiced in the daily lives of the community. This research also utilized documentation studies, analyzing village documents, tourism reports, related policies, and other archives. Documentation data was used to complement and validate the findings from the interviews and observations.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was conducted using the systematic and iterative stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The first stage involved repeated reading of the interview transcripts to gain a deeper understanding of the data. The second stage involved initial note-taking, identifying key statements, descriptive comments, and conceptual meanings from the data collected. The third stage involved developing emerging themes by grouping similar meanings and identifying patterns in participants' narratives. The final stage was organizing these themes into superordinate themes that represent higher-order conceptual categories of participants' experiences.

Throughout the analysis process, this study employed a double hermeneutic approach, in which the researcher interpreted how participants made sense of their experiences. To enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, this study employed data triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in participants' perspectives while meeting standards of methodological rigor.

## **RESULTS**

### **Social Networks as Community Infrastructure**

The research findings indicate that social networks in Cibuntu Tourism Village serve as a key infrastructure supporting community-based tourism activities. Based on in-depth interviews, informants described how social relationships between individuals and groups are not merely functional but also built on emotional closeness and a long history of interaction.

Farmer groups, homestay managers, youth organizations, and village organizations form an interconnected network that plays a role in information distribution, activity coordination, and tourism resource management. In daily practice, this network enables spontaneous collaboration, such as sharing guests between homestays, collaborating on village events, and coordinating efforts to maintain the cleanliness and comfort of the tourist environment.

Furthermore, this social network extends beyond the village itself. Informants explained that relationships with external actors, such as universities, government agencies, and tourism industry players, serve as important sources of knowledge, training, and market access. Thus, social networks in Cibuntu serve not only as an internal coordination mechanism but also as a bridge connecting the community to external resources.

### **Normative Foundations of Hospitality**

Research findings reveal that tourism practices in Cibuntu are inseparable from normative values embedded in local traditions. Traditions such as *Berai* and *Sedekah Bumi* (Earth Almsgiving) are understood not only as cultural rituals but also as social mechanisms that foster values of conservation, mutual cooperation, and the responsibility of collecting. Using a phenomenological approach, informants interpret these traditions as part of a social identity that shapes how they interact with tourists. Hospitality is not viewed as an economic obligation, but rather as an expression of cultural values passed down through generations.

This is manifested in the community's voluntary assistance to tourists, providing information, and maintaining environmental comfort without formal instruction. Furthermore, these normative values also play a

role in tourism governance. Decisions regarding the management of tourist villages are often based on deliberation and the principle of togetherness, demonstrating that social norms underpin collective decision-making processes. Thus, local traditions serve as normative infrastructure that supports tourism sustainability.

### **Trust Formation in Everyday Social Practices**

Trust emerges as a key element in the social dynamics of the Cibuntu community and is formed through repeated daily interactions. Informants explained that trust is not built instantly, but develops through shared experiences, intensive communication, and consistency in social behavior. Internal trust among community members strengthens social cohesion and minimizes conflict in tourism management. For example, in homestay management, business owners trust each other with guests without a formal contract mechanism. This demonstrates that trust functions as an informal mechanism for regulating the distribution of economic benefits.

Conversely, external trust in institutions is also a crucial factor in supporting tourism development. Informants stated that good relationships with the government and external partners enable the village to access assistance, training, and promotional programs. This trust is built through transparency, open communication, and prior collaborative experiences. Thus, trust in Cibuntu serves not only as an internal social glue but also as strategic capital for building external collaborations.

### **Bonding, Bridging, and Linking Processes**

Further analysis shows that social capital in Cibuntu operates through three interrelated processes: bonding, bridging, and linking, which shape the dynamics of social relationships within the community. Bonding social capital is manifested in strong internal community solidarity. Informants described a sense of ownership and shared responsibility in maintaining the sustainability of the tourism village. This solidarity is evident in mutual cooperation activities, participation in village events, and support among community members in facing challenges.

Bridging social capital emerges through interactions between groups within the village, such as collaboration between farmer groups and tourism businesses. These interactions enable the exchange of knowledge and resources and encourage innovation in tourism product development. Meanwhile, linking social capital is manifested in relationships between the community and external actors, including government, academics, and the private sector. These relationships provide access to broader resources, such as funding, training, and marketing networks. These three processes do not operate in isolation but complement each other, forming an adaptive social system. From a phenomenological perspective, informants interpret these relationships as part of a collective strategy to maintain tourism continuity while preserving the community's social identity.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Layered Social Capital**

The results of this study reveal that social capital in the Cibuntu Tourism Village is not a single entity, but rather is formed in layers through three main dimensions: the relational, normative, and spatial-ecological dimensions. The relational dimension is reflected in the social networks and trust that develop through daily interactions between community members. This network serves not only as a coordination mechanism but also as a means of distributing resources and information that support tourism. The normative dimension, on the other hand, relates to cultural values such as mutual cooperation, compassion, and collective responsibility that regulate community social behavior. Meanwhile, the spatial-ecological dimension demonstrates the community's attachment to the local landscape and environment, which are viewed not only as economic resources but also as part of their social and cultural identity.

These three dimensions interact with each other and form an adaptive social system. This system enables communities to respond to external changes, such as increased tourist numbers or policy interventions, without losing social cohesion and local identity. Thus, social capital functions not only as a social resource but also as an adaptation mechanism in sustainable tourism development. This finding expands on previous research that tends to view social capital as a combination of networks and trust alone. Okazaki (2008) study emphasized the role of social capital in encouraging community participation through networks and collaboration, but did not explicitly integrate the ecological dimension into her analysis.

Furthermore, Jones (2005) study demonstrated that social capital plays a role in the formation of community cooperation, but can also be ambivalent, potentially leading to conflict and social exclusion. Research by Vongvisitsin et al. (2024) emphasized that social capital has a "double-edged sword" nature, where bonding can strengthen cohesion but also limit inclusiveness, while bridging and linking can expand resource access but have the potential to cause social tension. Compared to these studies, this research makes a new contribution by demonstrating that social capital is not only relational and structural, but also has an ecological dimension inherent in the social practices of rural tourism communities.

### **Integration of Tradition and Modern Tourism**

Research findings indicate that social capital serves as a bridge connecting traditional values with modern tourism practices. In the context of the Cibuntu Tourism Village, local traditions have not been eroded by tourism development, but rather have undergone a process of reinterpretation and adaptation in daily practices. Values such as mutual cooperation and conservation are not only preserved as cultural heritage but also integrated into tourism services, such as welcoming tourists, managing homestays, and organizing cultural activities. Thus, tourism modernization does not replace tradition but rather strengthens its relevance in the new economic and social context.

These findings align with literature emphasizing that community-based tourism can be a vehicle for cultural preservation if managed in a participatory manner. A study by Cordova-Buiza et al. (2025) demonstrated that community-based tourism plays a role in preserving cultural heritage while improving community well-being through active community participation. However, previous research also highlights challenges to this integration. Okazaki (2008) found that power imbalances and conflicts between stakeholders can hinder community participation in tourism.

In this context, the findings of this study indicate that the successful integration of tradition and modernity is strongly influenced by the strength of social capital, particularly in maintaining a balance between cultural values and economic demands. Social capital enables communities to adapt to the loss of identity, thus creating a form of tourism that is socially and culturally sustainable.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

This research contributes theoretically by expanding the social capital framework, which has been dominated by structural and relational perspectives. Specifically, this research offers three main contributions. First, this research introduces the concept of layered social capital, which integrates relational, normative, and spatial-ecological dimensions. This concept complements classical approaches that generally focus solely on networks, norms, and trust. Second, this research integrates the ecological dimension into the analysis of social capital. This broadens the understanding that human relationships with the environment are not only economic, but also social and cultural, particularly in the context of rural tourism.

Third, this research contributes methodologically by applying a phenomenological approach (IPA) to the study of rural tourism. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of community life experiences, previously understudied in studies dominated by quantitative approaches. Therefore, this research not only enriches the literature on social capital and community-based tourism but also offers a new, more contextual and holistic perspective for understanding social dynamics in rural tourism destinations.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research shows that the successful development of the Cibuntu Tourism Village is not solely determined by the availability of physical resources or tourist attractions, but is strongly influenced by the existence of layered social capital embedded in the community's social life. This social capital is formed through the dynamic interaction between the relational dimension (networks and trust), the normative dimension (cultural values and social norms), and the spatial-ecological dimension (attachment to the local environment and landscape).

These three dimensions do not stand alone but interact to form an adaptive social system. In practice, social capital enables strong internal cohesion, strengthens collaboration between actors, and opens access to external resources through broader networks. Furthermore, social capital functions as an informal governance mechanism that supports participatory and sustainable collective decision-making.

This research also shows that social capital acts as a bridge between traditional values and modern tourism practices. This enables communities to adapt to the dynamics of the tourism industry without losing their cultural identity and uniqueness to the local environment. Thus, multi-layered social capital becomes the main foundation in building a tourism system that is not only economically sustainable, but also socially, culturally, and ecologically sustainable.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Theoretical Implications**

This study makes a theoretical contribution by developing the concept of layered social capital as a more comprehensive approach to understanding social dynamics in the context of community-based tourism. Unlike classical approaches that tend to emphasize the aspects of networks, norms, and trust separately, this study demonstrates that social capital is multidimensional and integrated into everyday social practices. Furthermore, this study integrates the spatial-ecological dimension into social capital theory, which has received relatively little attention in the literature. These findings broaden the understanding that the relationship between humans and the environment is not only economic, but also social and cultural, especially in the context of rural

communities that have strong contentions over the local landscape. The use of a phenomenological approach through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides a methodological contribution by presenting a lived-experience perspective, thereby enriching the literature that has been dominated by quantitative approaches.

### Practical Implications

Practically, this research offers a conceptual model that can be used as a basis for designing social capital-based tourism governance. This model emphasizes the importance of strengthening social relationships, cultural values, and ecological processes as an integral part of developing community-based tourism destinations. For policymakers, these findings emphasize that village tourism development should not only focus on physical infrastructure development but also address the need to enhance community social capacity. Policies that encourage community participation, transparency, and cross-actor collaboration will be more effective in creating long-term desire. Furthermore, for tourism practitioners and village tourism managers, this research emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between tourism modernization and preserving local values. Strengthening traditions, mutual cooperation practices, and sustainable environmental management are key factors in increasing destination competitiveness without sacrificing cultural identity.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the study used a phenomenological approach with a focus on a single case study, so the findings are contextual and cannot be broadly generalized. Nevertheless, this approach provides an in-depth understanding of social dynamics within the specific context of a tourism village. Second, the use of qualitative methods limits the study's ability to quantitatively measure the contribution of each dimension of social capital to tourism.

Based on these limitations, further research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across several tourism villages to identify common patterns and contextual differences in social capital formation. Furthermore, using a mixed-methods approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding by combining the depth of qualitative analysis with the power of quantitative generalization. Future research should also develop quantitative indicators to measure social capital desirability so that the concept of layered social capital can be empirically tested across contexts. Furthermore, further exploration of the role of ecological dimensions in social capital is an important research agenda, particularly in addressing the challenges of environmental diversity in the tourism sector.

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