

Local Community Response to Livelihood Commodification in Tanjung Bira Beach Tourism Destination

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Abstract

This study investigates the local community's response to livelihood commodification in the Tanjung Bira Beach tourism destination. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis involving key informants, including community leaders and local business owners. The findings reveal significant impacts of tourism on traditional livelihoods, with many participants experiencing declines in fishing and farming activities while adapting by diversifying into tourism-related work. Cultural practices have also been commodified, raising concerns about authenticity and cultural identity. Despite the economic benefits of increased income and job opportunities, the community faces challenges related to environmental degradation and social tensions. The study highlights the importance of community engagement in decision-making processes and the need for sustainable tourism practices to ensure equitable benefits for all residents.

Keywords: Livelihood Commodification, Tourism Development, Community Resilience

Introduction

The commodification of local livelihoods in tourism destinations, such as Tanjung Bira Beach, has become a significant concern in recent years, particularly in developing countries. As tourism expands globally, communities that were previously reliant on traditional economic activities such as fishing or agriculture are increasingly integrating tourism into their local economies. This process of commodification refers to the transformation of goods, services, and cultural practices into commodities for exchange in the market (While tourism can create new economic opportunities, it can also lead to profound social, cultural, and environmental changes in the host community, often resulting in tensions between the benefits and drawbacks of tourism development (Tosun, 2000).

Tanjung Bira Beach, located in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is a case in point. Known for its pristine beaches and rich maritime culture, this region has experienced a surge in tourist arrivals over the past decade, leading to the development of tourism infrastructure and services that cater primarily

to external visitors (Cervený et al., 2020). Local residents, many of whom have traditionally been engaged in fishing and boat-building activities, now find themselves facing increasing pressure to shift their livelihoods to accommodate the growing demands of the tourism sector. This shift often requires the commodification of cultural practices, labor, and natural resources, raising critical questions about the long-term sustainability of such changes for the local community.

Livelihood commodification can take many forms. In Tanjung Bira, the local fishing industry has been directly affected by tourism as fishers are either drawn into tourism-related activities, such as running boat tours or renting out their boats for recreational purposes, or face declining fish stocks due to environmental degradation caused by increased human activity in coastal areas (Priskin, 2003). Furthermore, the construction of hotels, restaurants, and other tourism facilities has contributed to the loss of access to traditional fishing grounds, which local communities have depended on for generations (Nayak et al., 2022). This phenomenon is not unique to Tanjung Bira but has been observed in other coastal tourism destinations across Southeast Asia.

The responses of local communities to these pressures are varied and complex. While some residents welcome the opportunities brought by tourism, such as new jobs and increased income, others express concerns about the loss of cultural identity, environmental degradation, and unequal distribution of benefits (Cuong, 2020). The commodification of traditional livelihoods often leads to a sense of cultural dislocation, as practices that were once integral to community life become commodified for tourists' consumption. This transformation can have far-reaching implications for social cohesion, particularly in tight-knit communities where cultural traditions and economic activities are deeply intertwined.

One significant consequence of the commodification process is the marginalization of certain community members who may lack the skills or resources to transition into the tourism economy. In Tanjung Bira, for instance, younger generations may find it easier to adapt to tourism-related jobs, while older generations, who are more reliant on traditional livelihoods such as fishing, may struggle to compete in the changing economic landscape. This generational divide can exacerbate social tensions and lead to greater inequality within the community (Lissitsa et al., 2022).

In response to these challenges, some local communities have developed strategies to regain control over their resources and livelihoods. In Tanjung Bira, for example, community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives have emerged as a means to empower local residents by involving them directly in the management and operation of tourism activities (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). Such initiatives aim to ensure that tourism development benefits the broader community, rather than a select few, and that local cultural practices are preserved rather than commodified (Chen & Kong, 2021). By promoting sustainable tourism practices, these efforts seek to mitigate the negative impacts of livelihood commodification while fostering a more equitable distribution of benefits.

However, the success of community-based responses to commodification is contingent on several factors, including the extent to which local residents can effectively organize themselves, the level of external support from governments and NGOs, and the nature of the tourism market itself. In Tanjung Bira, the lack of comprehensive government regulation and support for sustainable tourism has hindered the ability of local communities to fully control the commodification process (Supriadi, 2019). As a result, many residents remain vulnerable to the adverse effects of tourism, including environmental degradation, loss of cultural heritage, and economic inequality.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the local community's response to livelihood commodification in the Tanjung Bira Beach tourism destination, South Sulawesi. The research aimed to explore how commodification has impacted local livelihoods, cultural practices, and environmental sustainability, as well as the community's adaptive strategies to these changes. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the local population, tourism operators, and stakeholders directly involved in the tourism sector. This design facilitated a detailed exploration of social, cultural, and economic transformations brought about by tourism.

Participants

Participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that individuals with direct experience and involvement in tourism-related activities and livelihood transformations were included. The study involved 20 key informants, including local fishermen, small business owners, local tourism operators, community leaders, and representatives from local government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The selection criteria focused on those who had witnessed or been affected by the shift from traditional livelihoods, such as fishing and farming, to tourism-based activities. These informants provided diverse insights into the consequences of commodification and how the community has navigated these changes.

Instruments

Data collection was carried out using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The interview protocol was designed to explore key themes, such as the impact of tourism on traditional livelihoods, shifts in local cultural practices, economic inequality, and community adaptation strategies. The interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility in probing participants' unique experiences and perspectives. In addition, focus group discussions were held with community members to capture collective viewpoints and discuss shared challenges and opportunities. Relevant documents, such as local government regulations on tourism, development plans, and reports on environmental impacts, were analyzed to provide contextual background and support the qualitative findings from interviews and focus groups.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were carried out on-site in Tanjung Bira, with each interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and supplemented with observational notes. The focus group discussions, which involved 6 to 8 participants each, were designed to promote dialogue about community-level responses to tourism commodification. Document analysis involved reviewing government reports, tourism development policies, and environmental assessments to contextualize the interviews and focus group data. This multi-method approach ensured that the data collection process captured a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to livelihood commodification.

Data Analysis

Data from the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the commodification of local livelihoods and community responses. The transcripts were coded based on key themes such as livelihood transformation, cultural commodification, community empowerment, environmental degradation, and tourism's impact on social structures. Emerging themes were then categorized and compared across different informants to identify variations in experiences and perceptions. Document analysis helped to triangulate the qualitative findings and provided additional context for understanding the broader impacts of tourism on the community. Thematic categories were developed to organize the data, and cross-case comparisons were conducted to explore how different sectors of the community have responded to the challenges of livelihood commodification.

The analysis focused on understanding how the local community has adapted to the commodification process, the extent to which traditional livelihoods have been maintained or replaced by tourism-related activities, and the broader social and environmental implications of these changes. The results were triangulated across interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Impact of Tourism on Traditional Livelihoods (Fishing and Farming)

Livelihood	Percentage of Participants Reporting Decline	Percentage of Participants Adapting to Tourism	Common Forms of Adaptation
Fishing	80%	60%	Boat rentals, offering fishing tours
Farming	65%	45%	Selling agricultural products to tourists, offering farm stays
Small-scale crafts	70%	55%	Crafting and selling souvenirs, offering craft-making workshops

The data reveals that a significant proportion of participants (80% for fishing and 65% for farming) reported a decline in traditional livelihoods due to the influx of tourism in Tanjung Bira. Many participants have adapted to the changing economic environment, with 60% of former fishermen now engaged in tourism-related activities such as boat rentals and fishing tours. Similarly, 45% of farmers have shifted towards selling products to tourists or diversifying their operations to offer farm experiences. Small-scale craftspeople have also transitioned into tourism by selling handmade products or offering workshops.

Table 2: Perceived Effects of Commodification on Cultural Practices

Cultural Practice	Percentage of Participants Reporting Change	Reported Changes
Boat-building traditions	75%	Shift from functional boats to decorative items for tourists
Traditional ceremonies	60%	Ceremonies performed more frequently for tourist attraction
Local food preparation	50%	Commercialization of traditional dishes in restaurants
Traditional dances	65%	Performed regularly for tourists rather than for community events

The data shows that commodification has significantly altered traditional cultural practices in Tanjung Bira. Boat-building traditions, once essential for the fishing community, have been commodified, with 75% of participants noting a shift towards producing decorative items for tourists. Traditional ceremonies and dances, originally integral to local culture, are now performed more frequently as attractions, with 60% and 65% of participants, respectively, reporting these changes. Additionally, 50% of participants indicated that local food preparation has become commercialized, with traditional dishes being adapted for the restaurant industry.

Table 3: Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Tourism for the Local Community

Category	Percentage of Participants Reporting Benefits	Percentage of Participants Reporting Challenges	Commonly Reported Issues
Economic benefits	85%	40%	Increased income, new job opportunities
Environmental sustainability	30%	75%	Pollution, overuse of natural resources
Cultural preservation	40%	65%	Loss of cultural identity, commercialization of culture
Social cohesion	50%	55%	Tension between long-time residents and new businesses

The majority of participants (85%) view tourism as economically beneficial, with increased income and job opportunities being frequently cited. However, these benefits are tempered by significant challenges. Environmental degradation is a primary concern, with 75% of participants reporting issues such as pollution and overuse of natural resources. Cultural preservation also poses challenges, as 65% of participants feel that local cultural identity is being lost due to commercialization. Social cohesion is a mixed area, with 50% seeing some community benefits while 55% report tensions between long-standing residents and newcomers involved in tourism.

Table 4: Local Community's Adaptive Strategies to Livelihood Commodification

Adaptive Strategy	Percentage of Participants Engaging	Description of Strategy
Diversification of income sources	70%	Combining tourism work with traditional livelihoods
Community-based tourism initiatives (CBT)	45%	Setting up homestays, locally managed tours
Environmental conservation efforts	35%	Initiating clean-up programs, preserving coral reefs
Cultural preservation initiatives	40%	Hosting cultural festivals, creating cultural centers

The data suggests that 70% of participants have diversified their income sources by engaging in both tourism-related activities and maintaining traditional livelihoods such as fishing and farming. Community-based tourism initiatives (CBT) are becoming a popular strategy, with 45% of participants involved in locally managed homestays and tours. Additionally, 35% of participants are actively engaged in environmental conservation efforts, including beach clean-ups and reef preservation. Efforts to preserve cultural identity, such as hosting cultural festivals and setting up cultural centers, are being undertaken by 40% of the community.

Table 5: Generational Differences in Responses to Tourism

Generation	Positive Perception of Tourism (%)	Negative Perception of Tourism (%)	Common Concerns/Opportunities
Older generation (50+ years)	40%	60%	Loss of traditional livelihoods, difficulty adapting to change
Middle generation (30-50 years)	60%	40%	Economic benefits, balancing tradition with tourism
Younger generation (<30 years)	75%	25%	Job opportunities, embracing modernity

Generational differences in perceptions of tourism are evident in the data. The older generation, largely dependent on traditional livelihoods, is more skeptical of tourism, with 60% expressing negative views, particularly concerning the loss of traditional practices and difficulty adapting to the changes. The middle generation is more balanced, with 60% viewing tourism positively due to economic benefits but also recognizing challenges in balancing tradition with modern demands. The younger generation, however, is largely optimistic, with 75% expressing positive perceptions of tourism, seeing it as a source of new job opportunities and a way to embrace modernity.

Table 6: Community Involvement in Decision-Making Processes

Type of Participation	Percentage of Participants Involved	Reported Level of Influence	Common Barriers to Participation
Attending community meetings	55%	Low	Lack of time, inadequate representation in decision-making
Participating in tourism planning	35%	Moderate	Language barriers, limited access to resources
Leading local tourism initiatives	20%	High	Limited to a few individuals with business connections

The data indicates that while 55% of participants attend community meetings, they report a low level of influence over tourism decisions. Only 35% of participants are involved in direct tourism planning, and their influence is moderate, often constrained by language barriers or lack of resources. Leadership in local tourism initiatives is relatively low, with only 20% of participants actively taking on leadership roles, often limited to those with pre-existing business connections. This reflects an uneven distribution of power and influence in the decision-making process, where a small group benefits the most.

Discussion

The data suggests that the majority of participants (80% for fishing and 65% for farming) have experienced a decline in traditional livelihoods due to tourism, with many adapting by engaging in tourism-related activities such as boat rentals, fishing tours, and farm stays (Table 1). This finding is consistent with studies that document the transition of local communities from subsistence livelihoods to service-based economies in tourism hotspots. For example, in coastal regions of Thailand, tourism has caused a marked shift from fishing to tourism, particularly among younger generations who find tourism to be more lucrative and stable (Swastiwi, 2024). However, unlike the rapid abandonment of traditional occupations seen in some areas, Tanjung Bira's community shows a significant trend of livelihood diversification, with many residents maintaining dual roles in tourism and their traditional professions.

This dual role of income diversification as a coping strategy is supported by previous research in Southeast Asia, where communities facing tourism-driven commodification continue to engage in subsistence farming or fishing while leveraging tourism to supplement their income (Dlomo, 2021). The fact that 70% of the participants reported diversifying their income sources (Table 4) underscores the adaptive resilience of the community, a pattern similarly observed in Bali, where farmers combine agricultural production with tourism-related work. This nuanced response contrasts with more acute cases of livelihood abandonment, such as in parts of Indonesia's Lombok, where entire villages have ceased agricultural work due to overwhelming tourism demand.

The commodification of cultural practices was evident in Tanjung Bira, where 75% of participants reported a shift in boat-building traditions from functional vessels to decorative items, while traditional ceremonies and dances are now frequently performed for tourists rather than community purposes (Table 2). This aligns with existing literature that critiques the commercialization of indigenous cultural practices in tourism settings, such as in Mexico's Mayan

communities, where ceremonial practices have been adapted for tourist consumption, leading to concerns about the loss of authenticity (Brown, 1999).

However, while commodification often dilutes cultural practices, Tanjung Bira's community appears to be proactive in preserving its heritage through community-led initiatives such as cultural festivals and the establishment of cultural centers (Table 4). This is consistent with findings from studies in African tourism contexts, where communities have used tourism as a means to protect and showcase their cultural heritage, provided they maintain control over the narrative. In contrast to more negative portrayals of cultural commodification in some contexts, where local communities feel disempowered, the Tanjung Bira community seems to have a stronger sense of agency, participating actively in cultural preservation efforts. This is evident from the 40% of participants involved in cultural initiatives (Table 4), which contrasts with other studies, such as those in Thailand, where local involvement in cultural tourism decision-making is often minimal (Thammajinda, 2013).

The economic benefits of tourism are clear, with 85% of participants recognizing increased income and job opportunities (Table 3). This mirrors findings from tourism research in other developing regions, where tourism has been a powerful driver of economic growth. Studies from the Caribbean and Southeast Asia confirm that tourism provides new avenues for income, particularly for women and younger community members. In Tanjung Bira, younger generations were notably more positive about tourism, with 75% of those under 30 perceiving it as an opportunity (Table 5). This enthusiasm is also found in studies of young entrepreneurs in Kenya's coastal tourism sector, where tourism has opened up new career paths and economic opportunities (Kamau, 1999).

However, despite these benefits, there are significant challenges. A major concern is environmental degradation, with 75% of participants reporting negative environmental impacts such as pollution and overuse of resources (Table 3). This reflects a common trend in coastal tourism destinations where the demand for tourism infrastructure leads to resource depletion and environmental harm. Tanjung Bira's struggle with environmental sustainability echoes findings from Bali, where unregulated tourism growth has led to severe water shortages and pollution (Gruetzmacher, 2021). The community's efforts to initiate environmental conservation, as noted in 35% of participants engaging in clean-up programs and reef preservation (Table 4), suggest that the local population is aware of these risks and is actively trying to mitigate them. However, the question remains whether these grassroots efforts will be sufficient without broader regulatory support from local authorities, a challenge seen in other tourism-dependent regions.

Social cohesion in Tanjung Bira appears to be mixed, with 50% of participants recognizing benefits from tourism, while 55% report tensions between long-term residents and newcomers (Table 3). This tension is not uncommon in tourism destinations, where the influx of external capital and new businesses can create divisions between those who benefit from tourism and those who feel marginalized (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). In Tanjung Bira, the power dynamics in tourism planning and decision-making are skewed, as reflected in the low levels of community participation in tourism planning (35%) and leadership roles in tourism initiatives (20%) (Table 6). This limited involvement is similar to findings in Thailand, where local communities often feel excluded from key decisions related to tourism development.

However, the involvement of 45% of participants in community-based tourism initiatives (CBT) (Table 4) indicates that local residents are finding ways to exert some control over tourism. Community-based tourism has been lauded in various contexts for promoting more equitable distribution of benefits and greater local involvement. In Tanjung Bira, the establishment of homestays and locally managed tours suggests that the community is gradually reclaiming a stake in the tourism economy. This approach contrasts with more exploitative tourism models found in other parts of Indonesia, where external investors dominate the tourism sector, leaving locals with minimal benefits.

Conclusion

The study on local community response to livelihood commodification in Tanjung Bira Beach tourism destination reveals the complex interplay between tourism-driven economic opportunities and the accompanying social, cultural, and environmental challenges. While tourism has undeniably brought financial benefits to the community, as seen in increased income and job opportunities, it has also contributed to the decline of traditional livelihoods like fishing and farming, forcing many locals to diversify their economic activities. Cultural commodification, environmental degradation, and social tensions have emerged as significant concerns, yet the community's adaptive strategies, including community-based tourism initiatives and cultural preservation efforts, demonstrate resilience and a proactive approach to managing these changes.

Despite these efforts, the study highlights the need for more inclusive decision-making processes and stronger regulatory support to ensure that tourism development benefits the entire community equitably and sustainably. Local involvement in tourism planning and environmental conservation initiatives remains limited, indicating that future efforts should focus on empowering the community and addressing power imbalances. By fostering greater local participation and enhancing sustainable tourism practices, Tanjung Bira can better navigate the challenges of commodification while preserving its cultural heritage and natural resources for future generations.

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