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Social Transformation of Local Communities in Sustainable Tourism Development: A Literature Review in the Sociology of Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism development is increasingly recognized not only as an economic strategy but also as a social process that transforms the structure, relationships, institutions, and identities of local communities. This study aims to analyze the forms, mechanisms, and implications of social transformation experienced by local communities in sustainable tourism development from the perspective of tourism sociology. A systematic-integrative literature review was conducted by referring to the PRISMA 2020 framework. Relevant publications were identified through Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and SINTA/GARUDA, with the search focusing primarily on studies published between 2016 and 2026. After screening, eligibility assessment, and methodological evaluation, 15 peer-reviewed articles were included in the final qualitative and thematic synthesis. The findings reveal six major dimensions of social transformation: livelihood and economic restructuring, community participation and empowerment, social capital and collective action, sociocultural identity, institutional and power transformation, and sustainability outcomes. Empirically, the reviewed studies show that community empowerment, perceived economic benefits, involvement in decision-making, trust, social networks, and collective action significantly strengthen residents' support for sustainable tourism. However, several studies also identify unequal benefit distribution, symbolic participation, elite domination, limited institutional capacity, and cultural commodification as persistent challenges. The study concludes that sustainable tourism should be understood as a negotiated social transformation process in which local communities function as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries. Sustainable outcomes are more likely when tourism development strengthens community agency, equitable benefit distribution, cultural authority, institutional participation, collective capacity, and long-term resilience.

Keywords : Community Empowerment; Local Communities; Social Transformation; Sustainable Tourism; Tourism Sociology.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism development is increasingly positioned as an instrument for regional economic growth, livelihood diversification, cultural revitalization, and sustainable development. However, from a sociological perspective, tourism is not merely an economic activity but a social process capable of restructuring relationships, institutions, identities, values, occupations, and power configurations within destination communities. The expansion of tourism may generate employment, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, and new social networks, while simultaneously producing social differentiation, cultural commodification, unequal access to resources, dependency, and conflicts over the control of tourism assets. Consequently, the

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sustainability of tourism cannot be assessed exclusively through visitor numbers, investment growth, or economic returns, but must also consider how tourism transforms the social structures and everyday lives of local communities. Sustainable tourism theory emphasizes the integration of economic viability, environmental protection, social equity, and community participation. Dangi and Jamal (2016) argue that sustainable community-based tourism requires an integrated relationship between sustainability principles and meaningful local participation. Similarly, Social Exchange Theory explains that residents tend to support tourism when perceived benefits exceed its social, economic, cultural, and environmental costs (Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2017). Empirical evidence further demonstrates that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, opportunities for participation, and access to decision-making significantly influence their support for tourism development (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). These perspectives suggest that tourism sustainability depends not only on the availability of tourism resources but also on the capacity of local communities to negotiate change, maintain social cohesion, and exercise agency within tourism governance.

The issue becomes increasingly important in developing destinations, including Indonesia, where tourism villages and community-based tourism have expanded rapidly. Empirical studies in Indonesia indicate that community participation can strengthen environmental conservation, local culture, household income, and community welfare (Adnyani & Bendesa, 2022; Hanafi, 2024; Mahardika & Utama, 2020). Nevertheless, participation is not always evenly distributed or genuinely influential in tourism decision-making. Differences in economic capacity, knowledge, social networks, institutional authority, and access to tourism resources may create unequal outcomes among community groups. Sustainable tourism therefore needs to be understood as a process of social transformation, rather than simply as tourism-sector development. Contemporary tourism research has increasingly moved from growth-oriented approaches toward community empowerment, inclusive governance, social justice, resilience, and sustainability. Community empowerment theory conceptualizes tourism-related empowerment through psychological, social, economic, and political dimensions. Scheyvens and van der Watt (2021) extend this perspective by emphasizing that sustainable development requires communities not only to receive economic benefits but also to possess confidence, social cohesion, cultural control, political influence, and environmental responsibility. Empirical studies similarly show that community empowerment has significant implications for residents' support for sustainable tourism (Khalid et al., 2019).

Another prominent perspective concerns governance and social capital. Nunkoo (2017) stresses that trust, power, and social capital are critical elements of sustainable tourism governance because tourism development involves negotiations among governments, businesses, communities, and other stakeholders. Social capital expressed through trust, norms, networks, and collective action can strengthen a community's capacity to manage tourism resources collaboratively. Recent Indonesian evidence confirms that social capital positively influences collective action and that collective action subsequently strengthens sustainable tourism outcomes (Auliah et al., 2025). Studies on community-based tourism also demonstrate multidimensional impacts. Lee and Jan (2019), based on evidence from community-based tourism destinations, show that economic, sociocultural, environmental, and quality-of-life outcomes may vary according to stages of destination development. Tourism social entrepreneurship can likewise provide institutional mechanisms for combining local entrepreneurship with community development and social value creation (Aquino et al., 2018). Within Indonesia, studies in Paccekke, Samiran, Magelang, Nglanggeran, and other tourism villages reveal that collaboration, local institutional capacity, community ownership, participation, and empowerment are fundamental to sustaining tourism benefits (Baiquni & Aini, 2024; Hanafi, 2024; Junaid et al., 2022; Suyatna et al., 2024).

Moreover, critical tourism sociology has highlighted the need to move beyond the assumption that tourism growth inherently produces community welfare. Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) argues for tourism systems grounded more explicitly in social and ecological justice, while studies of empowerment indicate that participation should involve meaningful influence rather than symbolic consultation. Recent systematic reviews similarly identify governance structures, participation mechanisms, livelihood diversification, cultural identity, resilience, and barriers to inclusion as recurrent themes in sustainable tourism research (Muda, 2025).

Despite this substantial body of literature, several gaps remain. First, existing studies predominantly examine isolated variables such as residents' attitudes, economic benefits, empowerment, participation, or environmental sustainability, whereas the broader process of social transformation generated by tourism remains fragmented across separate theoretical traditions. Second, many studies conceptualize local

communities primarily as beneficiaries or stakeholders rather than as social actors who actively negotiate changing identities, power relations, livelihoods, social institutions, and cultural meanings. Third, existing community-based tourism studies frequently emphasize successful participation while paying less attention to unequal participation, local elite domination, commodification, shifting social relations, and the redistribution of power produced by tourism development. Evidence from Indonesian tourism villages demonstrates that institutional weakness, uneven community involvement, limited capacities, and unequal access to opportunities continue to constrain sustainable outcomes (Hanafi, 2024; Junaid et al., 2022). Even where empowerment is evident, its psychological, social, economic, and political dimensions may develop unevenly (Rahman et al., 2025). Finally, literature reviews specifically integrating tourism sociology, social transformation, community empowerment, social capital, participation, local identity, power relations, and sustainable tourism remain limited, particularly in the context of developing countries and Indonesian tourism communities. This fragmentation restricts understanding of how tourism gradually changes local social systems and under what conditions such transformation becomes socially sustainable.

Accordingly, this literature review aims to critically synthesize theoretical and empirical evidence concerning the social transformation of local communities within sustainable tourism development. Specifically, it examines how tourism influences livelihood structures, social relations, community participation, empowerment, social capital, cultural identity, institutional arrangements, and local power relations, while identifying the factors that determine whether these transformations support or undermine sustainability. The novelty of this review lies in proposing an integrative sociological perspective that places social transformation as the analytical bridge between tourism development and sustainability. Rather than treating participation, empowerment, culture, social capital, and welfare as independent outcomes, the review conceptualizes them as interconnected dimensions of a dynamic transformation process. This approach also connects international sustainable-tourism scholarship with empirical experiences of community-based and village tourism in Indonesia, thereby providing a contextually grounded analytical framework for future research.

In summary, sustainable tourism should be understood not simply as a strategy for maintaining economic and environmental resources, but as a negotiated social process that reshapes communities. Tourism can create empowerment, collective action, livelihood opportunities, stronger institutions, and cultural revitalization, yet it can also intensify inequality, dependency, conflict, and cultural commodification when communities lack meaningful control over development. A sociological analysis of social transformation is therefore essential for explaining how local communities adapt to, negotiate, benefit from, and occasionally resist tourism-driven change. By synthesizing these interconnected processes, this review seeks to advance a more socially grounded understanding of sustainable tourism in which local communities are positioned not merely as recipients of development, but as central actors in shaping its direction and long-term sustainability.

METHODS

This study employed a systematic-integrative literature review to examine the social transformation of local communities within the development of sustainable tourism from a tourism sociology perspective. A literature review was selected because it enables researchers to systematically consolidate fragmented theoretical and empirical knowledge, identify conceptual patterns, evaluate differences across studies, and develop a more comprehensive interpretation of a research phenomenon (Snyder, 2019). In addition, the integrative review approach allows previous empirical findings and theoretical perspectives to be combined to generate new conceptual understanding rather than merely summarize existing publications (Torraco, 2016). Accordingly, this review focused on the relationships among tourism development, community participation, social transformation, empowerment, social capital, livelihood change, cultural identity, local institutions, and sustainability.

The review procedure was structured with reference to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020). PRISMA provides a transparent framework for documenting the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of relevant publications (Page et al., 2021). Systematic reporting of these procedures is particularly important because methodological transparency improves the reproducibility and credibility of literature-based research (Snyder, 2019; Page et al., 2021). The search strategy was conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and SINTA/GARUDA, to incorporate both internationally indexed studies and relevant Indonesian research.

Literature searches employed combinations of keywords such as “social transformation,” “local community,” “sustainable tourism,” “community-based tourism,” “tourism sociology,” “community empowerment,” “social capital,” “local participation,” “tourism development,” and “tourism sustainability.” Boolean operators AND and OR were used to broaden or narrow the search according to the thematic focus. The publication period was restricted primarily to 2016–2026, reflecting the study's intention to capture contemporary theoretical and empirical developments. Only peer-reviewed journal articles written in English or Indonesian and directly addressing social dimensions of tourism development were considered.

The inclusion criteria required studies to: (1) examine local communities in tourism destinations; (2) discuss at least one dimension of social transformation, participation, empowerment, social capital, cultural change, livelihood, institutional change, or power relations; (3) explicitly relate the findings to sustainable tourism or community-based tourism; (4) present sufficient methodological and empirical information; and (5) be published in reputable Scopus-indexed or nationally accredited journals. Studies focusing exclusively on tourist satisfaction, destination marketing, hospitality operations, or purely technical environmental management without a community-social dimension were excluded. Following duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, full-text evaluation, and methodological relevance assessment, 15 articles were retained as the final objects of analysis.

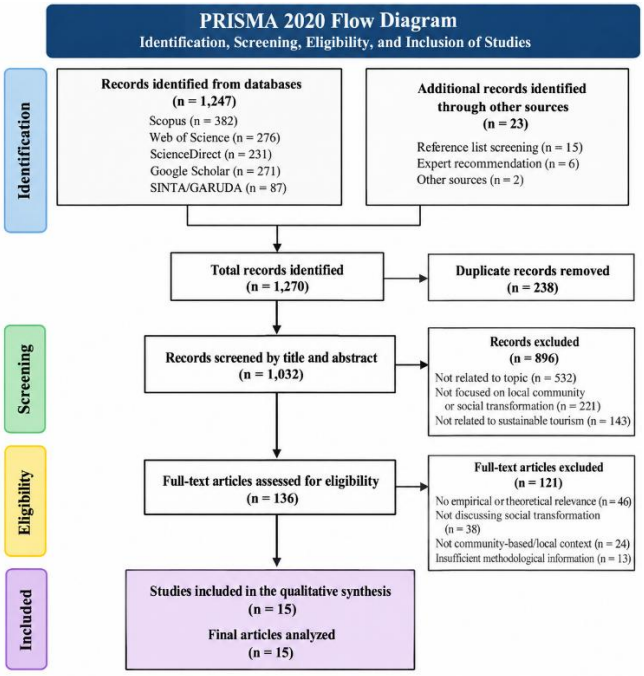


Figure 1. Prisma 2020 Flow Diagram of study selection

Data from the 15 selected studies were systematically extracted into an analytical matrix containing authorship, publication year, geographical setting, research objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, participant characteristics, dimensions of social transformation, and principal findings. Such structured extraction supports comparison across heterogeneous studies and minimizes unsystematic interpretation during evidence synthesis (Torraco, 2016; Snyder, 2019). The analytical process subsequently employed thematic synthesis, in which recurring concepts and empirical findings were coded, compared, categorized, and interpreted.

The synthesis focused on six interrelated themes: (1) livelihood and economic restructuring, (2) community participation and empowerment, (3) social capital and collective action, (4) cultural identity and sociocultural change, (5) institutional and power transformation, and (6) implications for sustainable tourism. This thematic orientation is supported by contemporary community-based tourism research, which increasingly identifies participation, cultural preservation, community welfare, institutional capacity, and social inclusion as central dimensions of sustainability. Recent systematic evidence similarly indicates that participation and cultural heritage remain dominant themes in research on the sociocultural impacts of sustainable community-based tourism.

Finally, findings were synthesized through narrative and comparative interpretation rather than statistical meta-analysis because the selected articles employed heterogeneous designs, populations,

destinations, theories, and outcome measures. The analysis emphasized convergence, contradiction, contextual differences, and underexplored relationships across the studies. This procedure enabled the review to move beyond descriptive aggregation and develop an integrated sociological explanation of how sustainable tourism simultaneously transforms livelihoods, social relationships, cultural meanings, institutional arrangements, and community power structures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

The systematic-integrative review resulted in 15 articles that met the predetermined eligibility criteria and were subsequently included in the qualitative and thematic synthesis. The selected studies represented diverse geographical and sociocultural settings, including Indonesia, Taiwan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Peru, and other tourism destinations. Methodologically, the reviewed literature consisted of quantitative surveys using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), qualitative case studies, comparative studies, and conceptual studies. This methodological diversity was particularly valuable because social transformation in tourism involves both measurable changes in attitudes, participation, empowerment, and livelihood outcomes and less quantifiable processes concerning identity, power, institutional arrangements, and social relationships.

Empirical studies constituted the dominant evidence base. Several studies included relatively large community samples. For example, Lee and Jan (2019) surveyed 849 residents from six community-based tourism destinations in Taiwan and demonstrated that economic, sociocultural, environmental, and life-satisfaction outcomes varied according to the stage of tourism development. Nugroho and Numata examined 934 respondents from 12 villages surrounding Gunung Ciremai National Park, Indonesia, finding that perceived economic benefits and community involvement were among the strongest determinants of residents' support for community-based tourism.

Similarly, Khalid et al. (2019), using data from 353 residents in northern Pakistan, identified a significant relationship between community empowerment and sustainable tourism development. Community support partially mediated this relationship, demonstrating that empowerment influences sustainability partly through residents' willingness to support tourism. More recent evidence is consistent with this pattern. Gautam and Bhalla analyzed 253 residents and found psychological empowerment to be the strongest empowerment-related antecedent of support for sustainable tourism development, while political empowerment was particularly important for residents' quality of life.

The Indonesian literature further revealed the importance of social capital and collective action. Auliah et al. (2025), based on 261 household heads in Bangelan Tourism Village, reported that trust, networks, and social norms positively strengthened collective action and that collective action subsequently contributed strongly to sustainable tourism. Meanwhile, Megawati et al. (2025), involving 328 respondents from tourism villages in East Java, demonstrated that psychological empowerment had the strongest effect on tourism support, followed by social and political empowerment; technology adoption further strengthened these relationships.

Table 1. Characteristics and Main Findings of the 15 Reviewed Studies

Study	Context/Design	Main Focus	Principal Findings Relevant to Social Transformation
Dangi & Jamal (2016)	Conceptual/ integrative study	Sustainable CBT	Sustainable CBT requires integration between community development, participation, environmental responsibility, equity, and local control.
Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017a)	World Heritage Site; quantitative	Community participation	Motivation, opportunity, awareness, and knowledge determine different levels of participation; opportunity becomes especially important for higher-level participation.
Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017b)	Urban–rural comparative study	Perception, participation, support	Relationships between perceived tourism impacts, community participation, and support differ between rural and urban communities.
Nunkoo (2017)	Conceptual/governance analysis	Trust, power, social capital	Sustainable governance depends on trust and social capital but must simultaneously address

			asymmetrical power relationships among tourism stakeholders.
Aquino et al. (2018)	Conceptual framework	Tourism social entrepreneurship	Tourism social entrepreneurship can transform community assets into social and economic value when community development remains its central purpose.
Lee & Jan (2019)	Taiwan; quantitative; n = 849	CBT sustainability	Economic, sociocultural, environmental, and life-satisfaction outcomes vary significantly across destination development stages.
Khalid et al. (2019)	Pakistan; quantitative; n = 353	Community empowerment	Empowerment significantly predicts sustainable tourism; community support partially mediates empowerment–sustainability relationships.
Ranasinghe & Pradeepamali (2019)	Sri Lanka; quantitative	Resident empowerment	Psychological, social, and political empowerment help explain residents' support for tourism development.
Cornelisse (2020)	Peru; qualitative case study	Power and empowerment	CBT does not automatically eliminate inequality; internal and external stakeholders employ different forms of power and community members experience unequal empowerment.
Nugroho & Numata (2022)	Indonesia; n = 934, 12 villages	Involvement and resident support	Economic benefits and community involvement strongly influence tourism support; perceived costs and benefits mediate community responses.
Gautam & Bhalla (2023)	India; SEM; n = 253	Empowerment and quality of life	Psychological empowerment is a major predictor of tourism support; political empowerment strongly contributes to quality of life.
Suryandhani et al. (2023)	Gunungsari, Indonesia; SEM	Social capital and collective action	Social networks are important components of social capital, while social capital strongly contributes to community collective action.
Auliah et al. (2025)	Bangelan, Indonesia; PLS-SEM; n = 261	Social capital and sustainability	Trust, networks, and norms strengthen collective action, which subsequently supports sustainable tourism development.
Megawati et al. (2025)	East Java, Indonesia; SEM; n = 328	Empowerment and technology	Psychological, social, and political empowerment increase tourism support; technology adoption strengthens empowerment effects.
Malalantang & Timah (2026)	Tandengan, Indonesia; qualitative case study	Integrated empowerment	Political, psychological, economic, and social empowerment promotes participation, entrepreneurship, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship, although inequality and capacity limitations persist.

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the 15 reviewed studies.

The reviewed evidence therefore illustrates that community transformation is not restricted to changes in household income. Instead, tourism modifies opportunities for participation, community confidence, social networks, political influence, cultural practices, institutional structures, and patterns of cooperation. This supports treating social transformation as a multidimensional rather than exclusively economic process.

Dimensions of Social Transformation

The thematic synthesis generated six major dimensions of social transformation: (1) livelihood and economic restructuring, (2) community participation and empowerment, (3) social capital and collective action, (4) sociocultural identity and community cohesion, (5) institutional and power transformation, and (6) sustainability outcomes.

Livelihood and Economic Restructuring

Tourism development consistently produced changes in the structure of local livelihoods. Traditional agriculture, forestry, fisheries, or informal occupations were increasingly complemented by accommodation services, culinary businesses, tour guiding, handicrafts, transportation, and micro-enterprises. Tourism social entrepreneurship provides one mechanism through which local resources can be transformed into market opportunities while maintaining a social mission (Aquino et al., 2018).

However, economic transformation was not uniformly distributed. Tourism benefits depended upon residents' access to capital, information, tourism networks, skills, and decision-making opportunities. The Gunung Ciremai evidence is particularly important because economic benefits exerted a strong influence on community support, while perceived costs remained relevant to resident responses. This indicates that tourism-related economic transformation should be interpreted through the distribution of benefits rather than aggregate destination income alone.

Community Participation and Empowerment

Participation emerged as one of the most consistent mechanisms connecting tourism development and sustainable social change. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) demonstrated that the intensity of participation is influenced by residents' motivation, opportunity, awareness, and knowledge. Particularly significant is the finding that opportunity is crucial for achieving higher levels of participation, suggesting that willingness alone does not guarantee meaningful involvement unless institutional structures provide residents with genuine decision-making space.

Empirical results also distinguish psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment. Khalid et al. (2019) reported a standardized direct relationship between community empowerment and sustainable tourism development of $\beta = 0.494$, while empowerment also influenced community support ($\beta = 0.326$) and community support influenced sustainable tourism ($\beta = 0.305$). The indirect empowerment → community support → sustainable tourism pathway was also significant ($\beta = 0.099$). These findings provide quantitative evidence that transformation occurs not only through material benefits but through strengthened community agency.

Gautam and Bhalla's findings reinforce this interpretation. Empowerment and quality-of-life variables jointly explained approximately 69.73% of the variation in residents' support for sustainable tourism development, with psychological empowerment emerging as the most influential empowerment dimension.

Social Capital and Collective Action

Social capital constituted another dominant mechanism of community transformation. Conceptually, social capital consists of relationships of trust, shared norms, networks, and reciprocal cooperation that facilitate coordinated action. Nunkoo (2017) demonstrates that social capital cannot be separated from governance because trust and networks influence stakeholder cooperation, while power determines whose interests receive institutional recognition.

Empirical Indonesian evidence strongly supports this relationship. In Gunungsari Tourism Village, Suryandhani et al. (2023) identified social networks as an important component of social capital (0.445) and reported a very strong relationship between social capital and collective action (0.950). Auliah et al. (2025) similarly found that social capital comprising trust, networks, and social norms positively influenced collective action among 261 households, while collective action generated an even stronger contribution to sustainable tourism. Thus, the transformation of tourism communities depends substantially on their capacity to act collectively rather than solely on individual entrepreneurial participation.

Sociocultural Identity and Community Cohesion

The review also identified transformation in cultural identity, local values, place attachment, and community cohesion. Tourism creates opportunities to revitalize local traditions, arts, culinary heritage, rituals, and cultural landscapes by increasing their social and economic visibility. At the same time, tourism may encourage cultural commodification when cultural expressions become primarily reorganized according to visitor expectations.

Lee and Jan's comparative evidence indicates that sociocultural sustainability changes according to destination development stage and does not necessarily progress linearly with tourism growth. This suggests that cultural transformation must be continuously assessed throughout the destination life cycle. Similarly, recent research from Vietnam indicates that psychological empowerment can mediate the relationship between place identity and tourism support, demonstrating that local identity alone may not translate into sustainable-tourism support unless residents perceive themselves as capable of influencing tourism development.

Institutional and Power Transformation

One of the most critical findings concerns changing power relations. Although community-based tourism is frequently assumed to decentralize decision-making, the evidence indicates that participation does not necessarily equal control. Cornelisse's (2020) study in Peru revealed power asymmetries between both

internal and external actors and demonstrated that community members did not receive equal levels of empowerment from CBT.

This finding changes the interpretation of tourism transformation significantly. Local communities cannot be conceptualized as homogeneous entities. Community leaders, entrepreneurs, women, youth, economically disadvantaged households, government agencies, investors, and tourism organizations may possess different capacities to influence tourism decisions. Consequently, institutional transformation becomes socially sustainable only when governance mechanisms distribute decision-making opportunities, resources, and benefits in an inclusive manner.

Transformation toward Sustainable Tourism

Across the reviewed studies, sustainable outcomes were strongest when economic benefits were accompanied by empowerment, institutional participation, social capital, and collective ownership. Conversely, economic growth alone was insufficient. Lee and Jan (2019) demonstrate that CBT can accumulate wealth without necessarily maximizing resident happiness or fully protecting the environment and local culture. Likewise, critical tourism research warns that tourism sustainability requires attention to social and ecological justice rather than merely maintaining the tourism industry's economic continuity.

Table 2. Thematic Synthesis of Social Transformation in Sustainable Tourism

Transformation Dimension	Main Indicators Identified	Positive Outcomes	Potential Negative Outcomes	Implications for Sustainability
Livelihood and economic restructuring	New employment, MSMEs, entrepreneurship, livelihood diversification, tourism income	Higher household income; economic diversification; new markets	Unequal benefits; tourism dependency; unequal access to capital	Equitable benefit distribution and local ownership are required
Participation and empowerment	Decision-making, psychological confidence, political voice, skills, knowledge	Stronger agency; tourism support; higher capacity	Token participation; exclusion of marginal groups	Meaningful participation should extend beyond consultation
Social capital and collective action	Trust, networks, norms, reciprocity, cooperation	Stronger coordination; collective management; resilience	Closed networks; elite dominance; unequal network access	Bridging and inclusive social capital strengthen sustainability
Sociocultural transformation	Cultural identity, traditions, place attachment, social cohesion	Cultural revitalization; stronger local pride; heritage preservation	Commodification; changing values; social tension	Local communities should retain authority over cultural representation
Institutional and power transformation	Governance, leadership, stakeholder relations, control of resources	More democratic local governance; stronger community institutions	Elite capture; external domination; unequal bargaining power	Transparent and accountable governance is essential
Sustainability transformation	Community support, quality of life, conservation, resilience	Integration of social, economic, and environmental objectives	Growth-oriented development may marginalize social sustainability	Sustainability should be community-centered and multidimensional

Source: Authors' thematic synthesis of 15 reviewed articles.

Cross-Study Empirical Pattern

A cross-study comparison revealed an interconnected transformation pathway rather than six independent dimensions. The dominant relationship identified across the literature can be represented as:

Tourism Development → Community Involvement → Empowerment and Social Capital → Collective Action and Local Agency → Improved Livelihoods and Institutional Capacity → Community Support → Sustainable Tourism

Nevertheless, this pathway was moderated by benefit distribution, power relations, institutional inclusiveness, cultural control, destination development stage, and community capacity. Therefore, tourism did not automatically produce positive social transformation.

The quantitative evidence provides strong support for this interpretation. Khalid et al. documented significant empowerment–sustainability relationships among 353 residents, Nugroho and Numata demonstrated the importance of involvement and economic benefits among 934 residents, Gautam and Bhalla identified empowerment as a major predictor of sustainable-tourism support among 253 residents, while Auliah et al. and Megawati et al. provided contemporary Indonesian evidence regarding social capital, collective action, resident empowerment, and technology.

Summary of Research Findings

Overall, the literature synthesis demonstrates that sustainable tourism acts as a multidimensional mechanism of social transformation. Its most visible effects involve livelihood diversification and tourism-based entrepreneurship, but its deeper sociological consequences concern changing community agency, social networks, collective identities, institutional arrangements, and power relations.

The evidence also reveals an important distinction between participation and empowerment. Communities may participate in tourism activities without gaining meaningful authority over tourism resources or development decisions. Sustainable transformation therefore occurs when participation evolves from operational involvement toward psychological confidence, economic ownership, collective organization, political influence, and institutional control.

The review further indicates that social capital functions as a connecting mechanism between individual participation and collective sustainability. Trust, reciprocal relationships, community networks, and shared norms make it possible for individual tourism benefits to develop into collective action. Nevertheless, strong internal networks alone are insufficient when decision-making remains externally controlled or local power is concentrated among a limited number of actors.

Accordingly, the central empirical finding of this review is that the social sustainability of tourism is determined not simply by how much tourism grows, but by who participates, who benefits, who controls resources, whose culture is represented, and who possesses authority in tourism governance. Social transformation can therefore be considered sustainable when tourism simultaneously expands livelihood opportunities, strengthens collective capacity, preserves sociocultural identity, democratizes local governance, and provides communities with meaningful control over the direction of destination development.

Discussion

The findings of this review demonstrate that sustainable tourism development should be understood as a process of social transformation rather than merely as an expansion of economic activity. Across the reviewed studies, tourism development altered livelihood structures, social relations, community participation, collective organization, cultural identity, institutional arrangements, and local power relations. This confirms that the social consequences of tourism are multidimensional and that sustainability depends on the capacity of local communities to influence the transformation generated by tourism. Dangi and Jamal (2016) similarly argue that community-based tourism becomes sustainable only when economic development is integrated with community participation, equity, environmental responsibility, and local control. In this context, the present review extends conventional tourism-impact analysis by demonstrating that sustainability is fundamentally linked to the redistribution of opportunities, resources, and authority within destination communities.

A central finding concerns the relationship between community participation and empowerment. The reviewed evidence indicates that community involvement becomes socially transformative when residents move beyond being recipients of tourism benefits toward becoming active decision makers. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) emphasize that participation is influenced by residents' motivation, knowledge, awareness, and particularly opportunities to participate. This distinction is significant because participation may remain symbolic when local residents are invited to attend meetings without having meaningful influence over tourism planning. Empirical evidence from Gautam and Bhalla (2023) strengthens this interpretation, showing that psychological empowerment was the strongest empowerment-related predictor of residents' support for sustainable tourism. Their model explained approximately 69.73% of variation in support for sustainable tourism development. Thus, tourism participation produces stronger sustainability outcomes when residents perceive themselves as capable, respected, politically represented, and able to influence destination development.

The significance of empowerment is also consistent with Khalid et al. (2019), who found that community empowerment positively affected sustainable tourism development and that community support mediated part of this relationship. This implies that empowerment is not simply an individual psychological condition but a social mechanism through which tourism legitimacy is created. Similar patterns are identified by empowerment research in community-based tourism, where facilitators, advocates, and community actors can progressively strengthen local capacity and autonomy (Giampiccoli et al., 2020). However, empowerment should not be assumed to occur automatically through tourism participation. Dolezal and Novelli (2022), based on ethnographic research in rural Bali, demonstrate that empowerment is strongly shaped by partnerships, institutional structures, and pre-existing hierarchical relations.

The review further identifies social capital and collective action as critical mechanisms linking individual involvement with broader community transformation. Social capital provides communities with trust, reciprocal norms, social networks, and cooperative capacity that allow fragmented individual interests to develop into collective responses. This is particularly relevant in tourism villages where destination management depends on coordination among residents, community organizations, local government, businesses, and external actors. Recent evidence further confirms that social capital plays a significant role in strengthening community participation and sustainable rural transformation. A recent bibliometric review involving 634 documents similarly positions social capital as a central connector between participation and sustainable agritourism development. These findings reinforce the earlier argument of Nunkoo (2017) that trust and social capital are fundamental to sustainable tourism governance, although their effectiveness depends on the distribution of power within tourism systems.

Economic transformation also emerged as an important but insufficient condition for sustainability. Tourism can diversify household livelihoods through accommodation, culinary enterprises, handicrafts, transportation services, guiding, and other microbusinesses. Lee and Jan (2019), in their study of six community-based tourism destinations, demonstrated that economic, sociocultural, environmental, and life-satisfaction outcomes vary according to the stage of tourism development. This finding is important because it challenges the assumption that continued tourism growth necessarily improves community welfare. Tourism may increase aggregate income while simultaneously producing dependency, economic inequality, or differentiated access to opportunities. Therefore, the relevant sociological question is not merely whether tourism produces income, but who receives the benefits, under what institutional conditions, and with what consequences for social relations.

The sociocultural dimension is equally important. Sustainable tourism can strengthen place attachment, cultural pride, traditional knowledge, and community cohesion when local residents retain authority over cultural representation. At the same time, tourism may transform cultural expressions into market commodities and alter meanings originally embedded in community life. Accordingly, sociocultural sustainability should not be interpreted as maintaining culture in a static form. Rather, it concerns whether communities retain the capacity to negotiate cultural change according to their own priorities. The findings of Lee and Jan (2019) support this interpretation because residents' perceptions of sociocultural sustainability changed across stages of destination development. Power relations constitute one of the most critical dimensions emerging from the synthesis. Tourism development involves unequal actors with different access to capital, political authority, knowledge, and networks. Community-based tourism may therefore reproduce rather than eliminate existing inequalities. Dolezal and Novelli (2022) show that local empowerment in Bali is conditioned by hierarchical sociocultural structures and by the nature of partnerships between local and external actors. This finding suggests that local communities should not be treated analytically as homogeneous entities. Local elites, entrepreneurs, women, youth, poorer households, government agencies, and investors may experience tourism differently and possess unequal bargaining power.

Finally, the findings support a multidimensional interpretation of sustainable tourism in which community resilience becomes an important long-term outcome. Recent Indonesian evidence shows that multistakeholder collaboration strengthens social, human, and physical forms of community capital and that these forms of capital are associated with rural tourism resilience. This indicates that sustainability is not only about maintaining tourism activity but also about increasing the capacity of communities to adapt to economic, social, and environmental change.

Overall, the discussion confirms that sustainable tourism development depends on a transformation pathway in which tourism involvement strengthens empowerment, social capital, collective action, livelihood

diversification, institutional capacity, and resilience. However, positive transformation is contingent upon equitable benefit distribution, meaningful participation, cultural control, and balanced power relations. Therefore, the sociological sustainability of tourism should ultimately be evaluated not by tourism growth alone, but by the extent to which local communities gain agency, collective capacity, institutional voice, cultural authority, and equitable access to development benefits.

CONCLUSION

This literature review concludes that sustainable tourism development generates a multidimensional process of social transformation within local communities. Based on the synthesis of 15 selected studies, the most consistent transformations occurred in six interconnected dimensions: livelihood restructuring, community participation and empowerment, social capital and collective action, sociocultural identity, institutional and power relations, and sustainability outcomes. Empirically, the reviewed studies demonstrate that tourism can diversify household income, expand local entrepreneurship, strengthen community networks, and improve residents' participation in destination development. However, these benefits are not distributed automatically or equally. Quantitative evidence from the reviewed literature shows that empowerment, perceived economic benefits, community involvement, and collective action are significant predictors of residents' support for sustainable tourism. At the same time, qualitative findings reveal persistent challenges related to unequal participation, elite domination, limited institutional capacity, cultural commodification, and imbalanced access to tourism resources. Therefore, tourism growth alone cannot be considered an adequate indicator of sustainability. Conceptually, the review confirms that sustainable tourism should be understood as a negotiated sociological process in which local communities act not merely as beneficiaries, but as agents who shape development outcomes. Sustainable social transformation occurs when tourism strengthens community agency, equitable benefit distribution, cultural authority, institutional voice, collective capacity, and long-term resilience. These dimensions should therefore become central considerations in future tourism planning, governance, and community-based development strategies.

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