

Unveiling the Success of Bilebante Tourism Village: Competitiveness, Participation, and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT: The Indonesian government positions tourism villages as a strategic instrument for advancing sustainability, yet the determinants of their success remain underexplored. This study investigates how destination competitiveness, community participation, and local empowerment shape the development of Bilebante Village, Lombok. Previous studies have addressed isolated issues such as participation or empowerment, but none have identified the core reasons for the village's overall success. This gap is critical because identifying what truly makes a village succeed is essential for advancing tourism village development. A qualitative case study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected Pokdarwis members and participatory observation across the village's zones. Data were analyzed with Miles and Huberman's interactive model through thematic coding on competitiveness, participation, and empowerment. The findings show that Bilebante's success emerges from the interaction of three interconnected factors. Its green tourism attractions provide a competitive advantage that is reinforced by strong community participation. Through this participation, residents gain skills and confidence, creating empowerment that drives further innovation and, in turn, strengthens competitiveness. Theoretically, this study contributes to rural tourism literature by showing how competitiveness, participation, and empowerment operate in a mutually reinforcing cycle rather than in isolation. Practically, it highlights that government and external support should integrate these three dimensions, and that initiatives such as community learning hubs and inter-village exchange programs can help replicate Bilebante's model in other contexts.

Keywords: Tourism Village, Destination Competitiveness, Community Participation, Local Empowerment.



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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has increasingly become a strategic pillar in Indonesia's national development agenda. It is recognized for its contributions to economic growth, cultural heritage preservation, and community empowerment. ([Hubungan Masyarakat Ekonomi Kementerian Koordinator Bidang](#)

[Perekonomian Republik Indonesia, 2024; Latifah et al., 2024](#)). To ensure these contributions are distributed more evenly, the Indonesian government has positioned the development of *desa wisata* (tourism villages) as a key policy instrument ([Kementerian Pariwisata RI, 2025](#)). Tourism villages are regarded not only as vehicles for cultural preservation and economic growth but also as strategic interventions to reduce rural–urban disparities and to strengthen local governance ([Latifah et al., 2023](#)).

In the literature, tourism villages have become a prominent topic of examination. Many scholars have discussed them as vehicles for sustainability and community empowerment ([Hermawan et al., 2023; Latifah et al., 2023; Rosalina et al., 2023](#)). However, few studies have investigated the success factors of individual villages through case studies. This gap is significant since understanding why some villages succeed is essential for replication and long-term sustainability. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining how three critical factors of destination competitiveness, community participation, and empowerment interact as determinants of success in a tourism village. This integrated focus represents the novelty of the study.

To address this aim, the study investigates Bilebante Village in Central Lombok. This village is selected since it demonstrates how the key success factors in tourism development operate in practice. Since its official designation as a tourism village in 2015 ([Profile Desa Wisata Hujan Bilebante, n.d.](#)), Bilebante has gained recognition as a Desa Wisata Maju and has received several national awards. These achievements confirm its status as a successful model of community-based rural tourism and provide a relevant context for analyzing destination competitiveness, community participation, and empowerment.

The significance of these three factors has also been demonstrated in previous research. Turčinović et al. (2025) found that their interaction accounts for 86.25 percent of the variance in sustainable tourism outcomes. Their findings further indicate that although destination competitiveness is critical to the success of village tourism, it is not sufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. Enduring success requires the active engagement of local residents. Through participation in tourism development, communities become empowered by acquiring new skills, diversifying income sources, and exercising greater control over tourism benefits and governance. The integration of competitiveness, participation, and empowerment thus provides the foundation for sustainable village tourism that delivers benefits to both residents and visitors.

The synergy among these three dimensions is therefore essential. Community participation ensures that empowerment is genuine rather than symbolic, which in turn strengthens legitimacy and effectiveness. Destination competitiveness also needs to be rooted in local capacities and aspirations; otherwise, it risks prioritizing short-term gains over long-term sustainability. At the same time, empowerment must be meaningful. When it is absent, tourism benefits often bypass local residents, undermining social equity and community resilience. Understanding how these dimensions interact in practice is thus crucial for informing sustainable rural tourism strategies.

According to this theoretical framework, this study seeks to explain how destination competitiveness, community participation, and empowerment contribute to the sustained development of Bilebante Village. Previous research has examined specific drivers of tourism development in Bilebante, including community participation ([Fitrisna Widayarsi et al., 2022](#);

[Handika Putra et al., 2023](#)), economic empowerment ([Jani et al., 2024](#)), and women empowerment ([Cahyani et al., 2024](#)). While these studies provide valuable insights, they remain fragmented and do not capture the broader set of factors that explain the village's success. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how destination competitiveness, community participation, and local empowerment operate together to shape outcomes in Bilebante. Addressing this issue is particularly relevant because it aligns with the government's agenda to distribute economic growth more evenly and strengthen community empowerment across Indonesia. Against this background, the central research question is: How do destination competitiveness, community participation, and local empowerment contribute to the sustained success of Bilebante Village?

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach. A qualitative approach is appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research, which seeks to uncover the lived experiences, perceptions, and motivations of local stakeholders, insights that cannot be captured through quantitative measurement alone ([Sugiyono, 2019](#)). The case study method, in particular, allows for an intensive examination of a single village as a bounded system. It enables the researcher to engage deeply with how destination competitiveness, local empowerment, and community participation influence tourism outcomes in Bilebante.

The informants in this study consisted of six members of the *Kelompok Sadar Wisata* (Pokdarwis) Bilebante, selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in tourism activities. The selection was guided by recommendations from the head of Pokdarwis, who identified these individuals as the most engaged contributors to the village's tourism development. The sample comprised four young men aged 17 to 23, one middle-aged man serving as the Pokdarwis chief, and one middle-aged woman actively involved in organizing community-based tourism initiatives. This composition reflects both generational and gender diversity within the core team, allowing the research to capture a range of perspectives on local empowerment, intergenerational participation, and tourism planning at the grassroots level. However, since most informants were from Pokdarwis, there is potential representation bias. Triangulation through observation was used to mitigate this limitation. This study was conducted in Bilebante Village, located in Pringgarata Sub-district, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. Recognized as a *Desa Wisata Hijau* (Green Tourism Village), Bilebante spans an area of approximately 28.365 km² and is home to a population of 4,264 residents. The village is accessible by land transportation from both Mataram City and Lombok International Airport (BIL), making it relatively well-connected for domestic and international visitors.

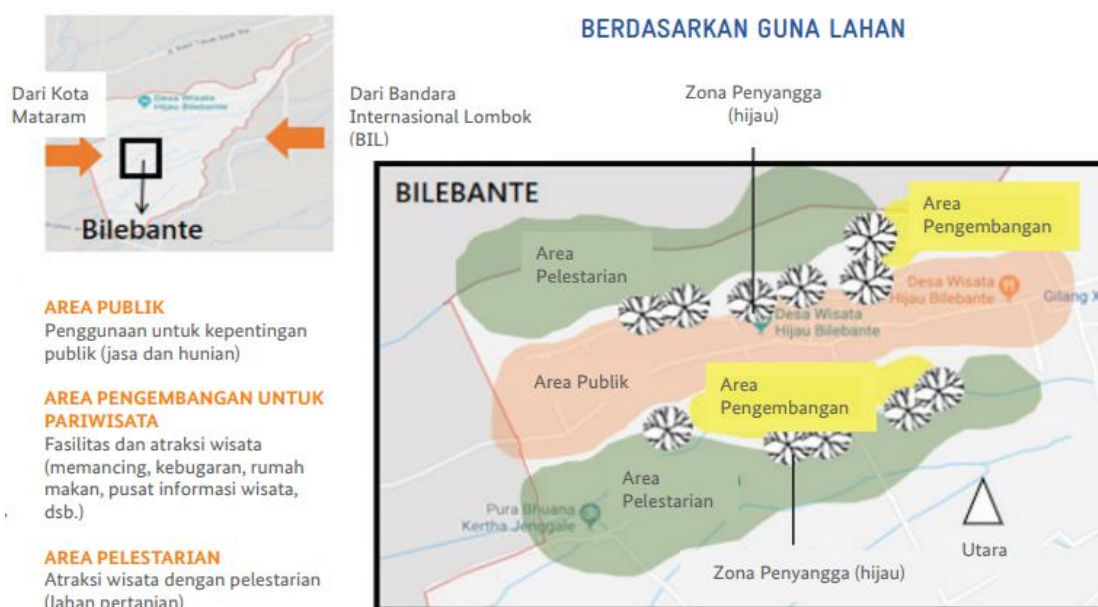


Figure 1. Map of Bilebante Village

Source: Author's Documentation, 2025

As illustrated in Figure 1, Bilebante Village is spatially divided into three main functional zones. The Preservation Zone (green) consists of rice fields and agricultural land, developed as agro-tourism attractions. The Public Area (light orange) includes residential spaces, the tourist information center, and other service-related facilities. Meanwhile, the Development Area (yellow) is designated for tourism infrastructure, such as the fishing market, cycling tracks, restaurants, and community training centers.

In-depth interviews were conducted at the Pokdarwis secretariat office, located within the Public Area, to provide a quiet and accessible environment free from external disturbances. Complementing the interviews, field observations were carried out across all three zones: Preservation, Public, and Development Areas, to gain a holistic understanding of spatial usage, tourism activities, and the integration of local livelihoods with tourism functions.

The interview instrument was a semi-structured guide organized around three themes: destination competitiveness, local empowerment, and community participation. The guide ensured consistency across informants while remaining flexible for deeper exploration of individual experiences. Field observation was supported by systematic note-taking instruments that documented tourism activities, community interactions, and the integration of cultural practices.

To enhance validity, both the interview guide and the observation focus were informed by an extensive review of rural tourism literature, particularly studies on community-based approaches. The draft question list was further reviewed by two academic experts in tourism and sustainability, whose feedback refined its content and structure. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and field notes were compiled daily to ensure accuracy and completeness. For reliability, a subset of transcripts was independently coded by multiple researchers, with discrepancies discussed and reconciled to maintain consistency in thematic interpretation.

Data were collected through a combination of in-depth interviews and field observation, allowing the researcher to capture rich, contextually grounded insights into the dynamics of tourism development in Bilebante Village ([Malhotra, 2015](#); [Sugiyono, 2016](#)). The interviews were conducted face-to-face with all informants and lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes each. Field observation was used to complement and deepen the interview findings. During this stage, the researcher directly observed tourism-related activities, spatial arrangements, and community interactions. These observations documented real-time behaviors and participation patterns, providing contextual depth and enabling triangulation of data sources.

The data in this study were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three core components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification ([Sugiyono, 2019](#)). This iterative process was complemented by a thematic analysis guided by the study's three analytical dimensions: destination competitiveness, local empowerment, and community participation.

In the *data reduction* phase, raw data from interview transcripts and field notes were systematically organized, coded, and categorized to highlight relevant information aligned with the research objectives. Initial coding was both deductive, based on predefined themes and inductive, allowing for the emergence of unanticipated insights. During the *data display* phase, the coded data were presented in the form of narrative summaries to facilitate pattern recognition and comparison across informants and observation settings. Finally, in the *conclusion drawing and verification* stage, interpretations were made based on the patterns that had emerged, and these were cross-checked against the original data to ensure internal consistency and analytical rigor.

All participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and gave their voluntary consent to participate. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from the data, and interview transcripts and field notes were securely stored. The research process was carried out with cultural sensitivity and respect for local norms and practices. Ethical clearance for this study was formally granted by the appropriate academic authority overseeing research ethics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this section are based on in-depth interviews and field observations conducted on Monday, 23 June 2025, in Bilebante Village, Central Lombok. These data collection activities captured rich, contextual insights into the dynamics of tourism development from the perspectives of local stakeholders, including residents, community leaders, and tourism actors. The results are organized into three thematic categories that reflect the key dimensions examined in this study: (1) destination competitiveness, (2) community participation, and (3) local empowerment. Each theme highlights the interrelated factors that contribute to the sustained success of Bilebante as a model of rural tourism development.

Destination Competitiveness

A key factor underlying Bilebante's sustained growth as a tourism village is its ability to remain competitive as a destination. Bilebante has developed a diverse array of attractions and experiences that appeal to a broad spectrum of market segments. The following analysis examines the distinctive attractions that contribute to Bilebante's destination competitiveness and explores how these offerings are curated to meet the evolving preferences of diverse tourist groups.

Tourist Attractions

Bilebante Village has been officially recognized as a *Desa Wisata Hijau* (Green Village Tourism), a designation that underscores its commitment to sustainable and inclusive tourism development. According to the Indonesian Green Village Tourism Association (n.d.), the *Desa Wisata Hijau* model represents a new generation of tourism villages. It integrates green economy principles to improve community welfare and strengthen social equity. At the same time, it seeks to reduce environmental degradation and limit economic vulnerability ([Indonesian Green Tourism Village Association, n.d.](#)). Therefore, as *Desa Wisata Hijau*, Bilebante's destination competitiveness is fundamentally anchored in its ecotourism orientation. Rather than relying on mass tourism or large-scale infrastructure, the village strategically leverages its natural and cultural assets to offer low-impact, experience-rich tourism grounded in sustainability.

As illustrated in Figure 2, Bilebante offers a portfolio of attractions that highlight its commitment to environmental stewardship. The Herbal Garden showcases local biodiversity and sustainable farming, while the D'Gonggress Ecotourism Garden promotes eco-friendly leisure through natural swimming pools. Curated bike and ATV routes run through the rice fields, connecting visitors to these sites while encouraging sustainable mobility. At the same time, spa and massage services incorporate local wellness traditions within a green rural landscape. The alignment of these offerings with global sustainability trends and experiential travel preferences positions Bilebante as a forward-looking rural tourism destination ([Ban et al., 2025](#); [Carra et al., 2023](#); [Lukoseviciute et al., 2022](#); [Zhang et al., 2022](#)).



Figure 2. Bilebante Village Tourism Map

Source: Author's Documentation, 2025

Bilebante's natural and cultural attractions enhance its appeal as a destination. Together, they form a key pillar of the village's tourism competitiveness ([Pavluković et al., n.d.](#); [Tešin et al., 2024](#)). In [Dwyer & Kim's \(2003\)](#) integrated model, this corresponds to their "inherited resources" and "created resources" categories—elements that provide the foundational appeal of a destination. At the same time, Bilebante's investments in infrastructure, services, and event programming resonate with the "supporting factors and resources" dimension. These dynamics align with [Ritchie & Crouch's \(2010\)](#) conceptual model, which argues that core resources and supporting factors must be managed together to sustain destination competitiveness. As emphasized by [Youdelis \(2013\)](#) it is the synergy among tourism assets, rather than their individual qualities that plays a critical role in shaping a destination's enduring appeal.

This approach is also consistent with the analysis by [Baydeniz et al. \(2024\)](#) who argue that well-coordinated ecotourism offerings are central to achieving long-term destination resilience. Their findings emphasize that when tourism attractions are not only diverse but also strategically integrated, destinations can better adapt to changing market demands while preserving their ecological and cultural foundations. In the case of Bilebante, this is achieved by curating attractions that are environmentally and culturally rich, and linking them through well-designed routes and thematic experiences. More than just enhancing short-term tourist appeal, this model contributes to the formation of a distinctive and memorable destination identity, positioning Bilebante not merely as a rural tourism site, but as a competitive ecotourism ecosystem capable of thriving in an increasingly dynamic and demand-sensitive global tourism landscape.

Cultural Performance

Beyond its ecotourism attractions, Bilebante Village further strengthens its destination competitiveness through vibrant cultural performances and event-based tourism that enhance the visitor experience on both emotional and cultural levels. A prominent example is the Festival Sampi Malean, a unique Sasak tradition held as a form of gratitude for the harvest and to welcome the planting season. This event functions as more than a cultural celebration, it acts as a strategic differentiator by embedding participatory authenticity into the village's tourism offering. Unlike passive sightseeing, the festival's interactive and immersive elements elevate the perceived value of the visitor experience. As noted by [Richard and King \(2022\)](#), festivals foster emotional engagement and memorability among tourists, while [Lopes and Hiray \(2024\)](#), emphasize that culturally authentic events directly enhance tourist satisfaction and positively influence repeat visitation.

Additionally, bilebante consistently hosts traditional Sasak dance performances to welcome visiting groups. These performances are not simply entertainment; they serve as living expressions of Sasak cultural identity. As highlighted by [Banio and Malchrowicz-Moško \(2019\)](#) dance tourism fosters deeper cultural understanding, which correlates strongly with higher levels of perceived value and, ultimately, destination competitiveness.

Together, the Festival Sampi Malean and recurring dance performances form a multi-dimensional cultural ecosystem. Their synergistic interplay contributes to Bilebante's competitiveness through

layered experiential offerings that cater to diverse visitor profiles. While the festival generates temporal excitement and draws event-focused travelers, the regularity of dance performances ensures continuous cultural engagement throughout the year. This strategic duality reflects the principles of *portfolio theory in tourism*, where destinations that balance episodic and recurring attractions achieve more stable and diversified visitor flows ([Ziakas & Getz, 2021](#)).

Market Segment

The diverse array of attractions and tourism products in Bilebante reflects more than just spatial creativity, it underpins a strategic orientation toward market diversification. This intentional heterogeneity in tourism offerings enables Bilebante to attract a wide spectrum of visitor segments, including families, school groups, corporate travelers, and environmentally conscious tourists. According to portfolio theory in tourism, such diversification in both product design and market targeting enhances a destination's overall competitiveness by optimizing resource use, expanding market reach, and reducing dependency on a single tourist profile ([Ziakas & Getz, 2021](#)). Rather than relying solely on one segment, Bilebante's multi-targeted strategy fosters long-term stability, minimizes vulnerability to seasonal fluctuations or external disruptions, and encourages repeat visitation.

One clear manifestation of this multi-targeted strategy can be seen in Bilebante's development of family-friendly facilities, which reflects a deliberate effort to attract multi-generational travelers. These facilities are carefully curated to provide safe, educational, and interactive experiences, making them particularly suitable for families with children, elderly visitors, and school groups alike. Importantly, such offerings align with key motivations identified in family tourism research, including the desire for educational and nature-based experiences that strengthen family bonds while fostering environmental awareness ([Li et al., 2020](#); [Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015](#)).

Simultaneously, Bilebante's expansive outdoor areas and curated tourism packages provide ideal settings for corporate outings, group retreats, and community-based team-building. According to Pahrul Azim, Head of Pokdarwis Bilebante, the village has hosted thousands of corporate and institutional visitors for *outing* programs and benchmarking visits. These events have attracted participants not only from Lombok but also from other islands, including Java and Sumatra. In response, the village has developed structured tourism packages that combine educational components, cultural interaction, and recreational engagement. This influx of institutional visitors expands Bilebante's market beyond leisure tourism, positioning the village as a model site for sustainability benchmarking, educational travel, and organizational retreats.

Bilebante also appeals strongly to environmentally conscious and experience-driven tourists through innovations based on its natural assets. As Pahrul Azim explained, the village's expansive rice fields have been transformed into recreational areas with bike and ATV trails as well as photo spots. A local resident added that Bilebante has become especially well known for its ATV activities. This recognition strengthens its identity as a nature-based recreational destination and adds value to its tourism portfolio. Collectively, these strategic developments exemplify how

Bilebante leverages both product and market diversification to sustain and enhance its destination competitiveness.

Community participation

Community participation stands as a cornerstone of Bilebante's success as a tourism village. The level of involvement among local residents is not only high but also deeply embedded in the collective fabric of daily life. The following analysis explores the diverse manifestations of community participation in Bilebante.

Levels of Participation

The level of community participation in Bilebante can be effectively analyzed using Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation ([Arnstein, 2019](#)). Arnstein's framework classifies citizen involvement into eight ascending levels, grouped into three main categories: nonparticipation (Manipulation, Therapy), tokenism (Informing, Consultation, Placation), and citizen power (Partnership, Delegation, Citizen Control). The lower levels represent limited or superficial engagement, whereas the upper levels reflect genuine participation characterized by meaningful empowerment and shared decision-making authority. While many tourism villages in Indonesia remain at tokenism, Bilebante has made significant strides toward the highest rungs, specifically Citizen Control.

In Bilebante, villagers play a leading role in planning, implementing, and evaluating tourism initiatives. Youth, women, and elders participate actively in shaping strategies, reviewing performance, and addressing challenges through open forums and regular meetings. Community members also manage homestays, organize culinary and cultural events, and lead the development of local products such as snacks and souvenirs. These examples demonstrate significant local authority and autonomy in tourism development. However, the continued involvement of external actors, including the government and private partners such as Bank Central Asia, shows that community control is not absolute. Instead, Bilebante's experience reflects a high level of delegated power complemented by strategic external support, which together enhance both sustainability and legitimacy.

Crucially, Bilebante's tourism sector is not financially dependent on the government or external agencies. No direct funding is provided, and tourism activities are managed independently by the community, with Pokdarwis coordinating rather than directing. As Pahrul Azim notes, *"We don't want to wait around or keep asking for funding from the government because the process is always complicated and difficult."* External support exists, but it takes the form of empowerment programs rather than financial aid. For example, Bank Central Asia's Desa Binaan initiative provides training in digital branding, tour guiding, and homestay standards, as well as access to e-commerce platforms for local products. This non-financial support strengthens local capacity while keeping control in community hands.

Beyond tourism, the village has strategically developed a range of local products, including traditional herbal remedies and handmade snacks, all produced and managed by residents. This diversification not only reduces dependency on a single income source but also strengthens community resilience against external shocks and market fluctuations. By expanding into both tourism and value-added products, Bilebante demonstrates an adaptive and entrepreneurial mindset. This trajectory reflects progress toward the principles of citizen control and genuine community empowerment ([Arnstein, 2019](#)).

Collective Action and Shared Responsibility

Collective action is a defining feature of Bilebante's approach to rural tourism development. Rather than operating as isolated individuals, the people of Bilebante mobilize shared resources, labor, and ideas to pursue common goals across every dimension of their tourism operations. One of the most prominent manifestations of this collective spirit is the community's frequent participation in regional and national competitions (see Figure 3). Importantly, any financial rewards or prizes earned through such contests are not treated as personal gain, but are instead collectively reinvested in public goods, such as constructing new facilities, upgrading tourism infrastructure, or funding community-wide initiatives. This pattern demonstrates a deeply embedded commitment to mutual benefit and long-term communal progress.



Figure 3. Bilebante Awards

Source: Author's Documentation, 2025

Such behavior aligns with theories of collective action, which emphasize that the willingness to reinvest shared resources for the common good is a critical factor in the success of community-based initiatives ([Ostrom, 2015](#)). This approach not only strengthens social cohesion and trust within the village but also enhances the long-term resilience of tourism development by ensuring that benefits are broadly distributed. As a result, Bilebante stands as an example of how collective action, driven by solidarity and a shared vision, can be harnessed to achieve both immediate goals and enduring community advancement.

Collective action in Bilebante is also evident in the establishment of the Eco Rangers, a community-based initiative that promotes sustainable tourism and environmental stewardship. One of their flagship activities is the *Freedom from Waste* campaign, held annually around Independence Day, which combines village clean-up efforts with community competitions. Plastic waste collected during the event is sold to private partners, and the proceeds are reinvested into

tourism development. This phenomenon reflects what Pretty (2003) describes as “functional participation,” where communities work collectively, pooling resources and responsibilities to achieve shared objectives. Research further suggests that collective action in tourism settings can increase social capital, promote local pride, and strengthen a sense of belonging among participants ([Mair & Duffy, 2018](#)).

Local Empowerment

The transition from active community participation to genuine local empowerment represents a critical step in achieving sustainable rural tourism development. When community members are directly involved in all aspects of tourism operations, their participation becomes the foundation for local empowerment. People in Bilebante are empowered in a way that enables them to actively shape decisions, introduce innovations, and continuously develop their skills and enterprises, outcomes that we will discuss in detail in the following sections.

Governance & Community Leadership

In Bilebante, tourism decisions are truly community-led, with all major strategies and initiatives rooted in collective agreement. This approach is institutionalized through the Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis). Under the leadership of Pahrul Azim, Pokdarwis brings together a dynamic team of young and passionate individuals who collaborate to shape the village’s tourism direction. Empowerment within this team is not limited to delegated authority; rather, it is reinforced through the active involvement of members in every stage of decision-making. Regular meetings foster open dialogue, enabling members to share ideas, assess ongoing initiatives, and collectively determine tourism strategies. As a result, Pokdarwis operates with real autonomy and responsibility, successfully managing tourism operations, addressing challenges, and driving innovation that reflects the aspirations of the entire community.

Importantly, Bilebante’s governance model is also characterized by a strong commitment to gender equality. Both women and men are given equal opportunities to participate and hold leadership roles in tourism management, with nearly 55% of management positions in Desa Wisata Hijau Bilebante currently held by women. This equitable approach is grounded in the belief, as stated by Pahrul Azim, that *“everyone should have the same opportunity to contribute, regardless of gender or background.”* This inclusive practice aligns with findings from [Scheyvens \(2018\)](#), who argues that gender-inclusive, participatory structures in community-based tourism empower women, foster social cohesion, and promote fairer distribution of benefits.

The impacts of this inclusive and participatory governance model are evident not only in the effectiveness of organizational management but also in the well-being of the broader community. By cultivating a strong sense of collective ownership, Pokdarwis members are motivated to actively engage in tourism development and contribute innovative solutions to local challenges. Such a structure enhances the village’s capacity to adapt to changes in the tourism sector and capitalize

on new opportunities for growth, consistent with evidence from community-based tourism studies ([Su & Wall, 2014](#)).

Community-Based Tourism Products

Building on its foundation of inclusive governance and collective decision-making, Bilebante has fully embraced a tourism model in which all products and services are owned and operated by the local people. Every aspect of the tourism business, from planning and management to daily operations is handled directly by residents. As Ibu Nita, a local resident, explains, *“Here, all tourism businesses are managed collectively by local residents through mutual cooperation. We do everything together, and as a result, the benefits can be enjoyed by our own community”*. For instance, homestays in Bilebante are not only operated but also managed entirely by local residents, exemplifying a participatory approach to tourism governance. This model ensures that financial benefits are retained within the community rather than leaking to external operators. Mitchell and Ashley emphasize that locally owned lodging in rural tourism settings retains a significantly higher proportion of tourism income within the host community, resulting in broader distribution of benefits and greater local impact ([Mitchell & Ashley, 2009](#)).

This commitment to community-based management is further exemplified by Bilebante’s innovative spa service, which is entirely staffed by local residents and draws on indigenous phytotherapy knowledge and cultural traditions. All masseurs are local people who have received specialized certification and training by Martha Tilaar (one of Indonesia’s leading beauty enterprises), enabling them to deliver authentic treatments that seamlessly blend traditional wisdom with contemporary wellness practices. This approach not only empowers local residents with valuable skills and economic opportunities, but also ensures that the entire value chain remains within the community. For instance, a masseus highlight that earnings from spa had expanded their sources of income and improved family well-being.

Extending beyond wellness services, Bilebante also fosters local economic participation through its vibrant souvenir shops. Bilebante’s souvenir shops are fully managed and operated by local residents, reflecting the village’s commitment to community ownership and empowerment. Many of the snacks sold are handmade by community members in their own homes using local ingredients. As one local vendor explained, *“We prepare these snacks ourselves at home using local ingredients. By selling them here, we can support our families and promote our village’s unique flavors to visitors.”* This model allows families to directly benefit from tourism while strengthening micro and small enterprises at the village level. As [Briedenhann and Wickens \(2004\)](#) highlight, community-based tourism enterprises, including the local production of crafts and food products, not only provide substantial economic benefits by expanding income opportunities and entrepreneurial skills, but also foster a strong sense of pride and ownership. By supporting MSMEs in this way, Bilebante ensures that the benefits of tourism are widely distributed among its people, promotes sustainable rural development, and maintains the authenticity of the visitor experience ([Novelli et al., 2006](#)).



Figure 5. Bilebante Snacks Production

Source: Author's Documentation, 2025

Education and Training Program

Bilebante's success in community-based tourism comes from the residents' strong commitment to learning. Training and workshops have been central to building local capacity. Villagers are eager to gain new skills and quick to apply them in practice. From the early stages of tourism development, the community actively sought support. This led to MSME workshops on product innovation, followed by training in hospitality, homestay management, and sustainability standards. These efforts show that the community takes initiative rather than waiting for outside help. Research highlights the importance of such participation. [Jurowski et al. \(2011\)](#), show that tourism training increases empowerment by involving communities in planning and decision-making. [Giampiccoli and Mtapuri \(2012\)](#) also emphasize that genuine empowerment is achieved when local people actively pursue education, participate in skill-building programs, and maintain control over their own development.

To further support empowerment, Bilebante has established strategic partnerships with universities across Indonesia. These partnerships provide local residents with technical training, entrepreneurship workshops, and opportunities for product innovation. [As Lang et al. \(2024\)](#) note, university–community partnerships accelerate local innovation and build social capital, generating long-term benefits for rural areas. The private sector has also contributed, particularly through Bank of Central Asia (BCA), which supports infrastructure, human resource development, and digitalization of local enterprises. [Mitchell and Ashley \(2009\)](#), emphasize that such partnerships are crucial for enhancing local capacity, especially when public funding is limited. Together, these collaborations complement community initiatives and expand the resources available for sustainable tourism development.

Additionally, Bilebante's English club further illustrates how education and training drive local empowerment. By welcoming international volunteers, the village creates opportunities for language learning, cross-cultural exchange, and increased confidence in hosting foreign tourists. As [Dowling \(2003\)](#), notes, such initiatives foster both language skls and broader intercultural understanding, further strengthening community empowerment and competitiveness. Overall, it is the sustained and enthusiastic participation of Bilebante's residents in trainings and workshops

that lies at the heart of local empowerment and underpins the village's success in tourism development.

Firstly, while the study seeks to understand the dynamic interdependence among destination competitiveness, participation, and empowerment, the qualitative design may not fully disentangle the causal mechanisms or the relative strength of each factor. In the context of Bilebante Village, these elements are deeply embedded in everyday interactions and local practices, making it challenging to isolate their individual contributions to tourism development. The complex overlap between participatory governance, local empowerment initiatives, and efforts to enhance destination competitiveness means that observed outcomes often result from a web of reinforcing influences rather than linear or easily traceable relationships. As such, the analysis in this study provides holistic insight but may not capture all underlying intricacies or directional causality between the identified dimensions. Future studies might employ mixed-methods, combining in-depth qualitative insights with quantitative approaches such as structural equation modeling or social network analysis, to more precisely map and measure the causal pathways and relative influence of each factor in sustaining tourism village development.

Secondly, the evolving nature of community perceptions represents another limitation. The findings presented in this research reflect the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of Bilebante residents and stakeholders during the specific period of fieldwork conducted in June 2025. However, community perceptions regarding empowerment, participation, and tourism benefits are not static. They may shift over time in response to changes in leadership, external interventions, market conditions, or internal village dynamics. Consequently, the study offers only a temporal snapshot and may not account for future developments or the long-term evolution of collective attitudes within the community. Future research might consider employing longitudinal designs that track changes in community perceptions over time, or incorporating repeated rounds of data collection to capture the dynamic and evolving nature of stakeholder attitudes. Such approaches would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how perceptions shift in response to various internal and external influences, and how these changes ultimately affect the sustainability of tourism village development.

Lastly, Lastly, there is a risk that this study may unintentionally overlook the voices of minority or marginalized groups within the community. Because the research primarily engaged with key stakeholders and active participants such as Pokdarwis leaders or residents already involved in tourism, it may underrepresent the experiences of those who are less engaged, skeptical, or negatively affected by tourism initiatives. This limitation opens the door for future research using participatory methods that deliberately involve marginalized groups. More inclusive sampling strategies should intentionally seek out the perspectives of ordinary residents who are not members of Pokdarwis, as well as those whose livelihoods are less directly connected to tourism. By broadening representation in this way, future studies can generate a richer and more balanced understanding of the diverse impacts and meanings of tourism village development within the community.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how destination competitiveness, community participation, and local empowerment contribute to the sustained success of Bilebante Village. Drawing on in-depth interviews with members of the Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis) and extensive fieldwork, the findings reveal a synergistic relationship among these three factors. Each reinforces the other, together sustaining Bilebante's vitality as a tourism destination.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on rural tourism by demonstrating that destination competitiveness, participation, and empowerment need to be analyzed as interconnected rather than separate factors in explaining village success. In practice, these elements are interdependent. Destination competitiveness attracts visitors through diverse and sustainable tourism products. Strong participation ensures that the community is directly involved in managing these attractions, which builds legitimacy and shared ownership. In turn, participation generates empowerment, as residents gain skills, confidence, and the ability to innovate. Empowered residents then new ideas and initiatives that strengthen the village's competitiveness. Through continuous learning and training, they are able to innovate and develop new products and services that enhance Bilebante's appeal. This cycle illustrates how competitiveness, participation, and empowerment complement one another, producing sustained success that cannot be explained by any single factor alone.

Practically, this study offers three key implications. *First*, support from government and external actors should not focus narrowly on a single area, such as infrastructure or marketing. Instead, assistance must integrate the three perspectives of destination competitiveness, community participation, and empowerment. *Second*, Bilebante could establish a structured internal training program or "learning hub" where skills, knowledge, and best practices are continuously updated and transferred to younger generations, ensuring long-term sustainability. *Third*, Bilebante can participate in and host comparative study visits with less successful villages to share experiences and promote its community-based approach. Government-backed exchange programs would further strengthen networks, foster innovation, and accelerate rural tourism development across the region, while reinforcing Bilebante's role as a model village.

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