

CULTURAL TOURISM IN PALEMBANG: MANAGING MULTICULTURAL HERITAGE ALONG THE BANKS OF THE MUSI RIVER FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC POLICY AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji potensi pengembangan pariwisata budaya di Kota Palembang melalui perspektif kebijakan publik dan pemberdayaan masyarakat lokal. Kajian dilakukan menggunakan metode studi kepustakaan dengan menganalisis berbagai jurnal ilmiah yang diterbitkan pada periode 2021–2025. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa Palembang memiliki kekayaan budaya yang sangat beragam, mulai dari peninggalan sejarah, arsitektur kolonial, budaya maritim Melayu, hingga akulturasi budaya Tionghoa. Meskipun demikian, pengelolaan potensi tersebut masih menghadapi sejumlah kendala, seperti koordinasi antarlembaga yang belum optimal, keterbatasan pemanfaatan teknologi digital untuk promosi, serta rendahnya partisipasi masyarakat dalam pengembangan destinasi wisata. Pendekatan community-based cultural tourism (CBT) menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan pariwisata budaya yang berkelanjutan memerlukan sinergi antara pelestarian warisan budaya, penguatan kapasitas UMKM, serta pemanfaatan teknologi informasi guna meningkatkan pengalaman wisatawan. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini menawarkan sejumlah rekomendasi kebijakan, antara lain penguatan peran pemerintah daerah, pengembangan desa wisata berbasis budaya, serta optimalisasi media digital sebagai strategi untuk meningkatkan daya saing pariwisata budaya Palembang.

Kata kunci: Pariwisata, Kota Palembang, Tepian Sungai Musi, Pemberdayaan Komunitas.

Abstract

This article examines the potential for developing cultural tourism in Palembang City through the perspectives of public policy and local community empowerment. The study was conducted using a literature review method, analyzing various scientific journals published between 2021 and 2025. The results indicate that Palembang possesses a rich cultural diversity, ranging from historical relics and colonial architecture to Malay maritime culture and the acculturation of Chinese culture. However, the management of this potential still faces several obstacles, such as suboptimal inter-institutional coordination, limited use of digital technology for promotion, and low community participation in tourism destination development. The community-based cultural tourism (CBT) approach demonstrates that sustainable cultural tourism development requires synergy between cultural heritage preservation, strengthening the capacity of MSMEs, and utilizing information technology to enhance the tourist experience. Therefore, this article offers several policy recommendations, including strengthening the role of local government, developing culture-based tourism villages, and optimizing digital media as strategies to increase the competitiveness of Palembang's cultural tourism.

Keywords: Tourism, Palembang City, Musi Riverbanks, Community Empowerment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Palembang is one of the oldest cities in Indonesia and has long been recognized as the historical center of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, one of Southeast Asia's most influential maritime empires. This historical legacy has endowed the city with abundant cultural resources, including historical monuments, traditional settlements, religious heritage, local crafts, culinary traditions, and multicultural communities that have evolved along the Musi River for centuries. As the economic and cultural artery of South Sumatra, the Musi River has functioned not only as a transportation route but also as a space where Malay, Chinese, Arab, Indian, and indigenous cultures have interacted and coexisted, creating a distinctive multicultural landscape that distinguishes Palembang from other Indonesian heritage cities.

The multicultural heritage along the Musi River represents a strategic asset for the development of cultural tourism. According to Nopriani (2024), cultural products such as Palembang songket weaving, traditional architecture, and local customs are not merely historical relics but constitute living cultural identities that require sustainable management to remain relevant amid the rapid transformation of the modern tourism industry. Their preservation depends not only on conservation efforts but also on the active involvement of local communities, government institutions, and tourism stakeholders in maintaining their cultural significance while generating economic opportunities.

The growing demand for authentic cultural experiences has significantly reshaped global tourism trends. Contemporary tourists increasingly seek meaningful interactions with local communities, participation in traditional cultural practices, and opportunities to understand the historical and social values embedded within destinations rather than merely visiting iconic attractions (Saksono et al., 2022). This paradigm shift provides Palembang with an opportunity to reposition itself as a cultural tourism destination that offers immersive heritage experiences centered on the multicultural life of the Musi River. However, this opportunity also requires integrated planning capable of balancing tourism development with heritage conservation and community welfare.

Previous studies indicate that the Musi River waterfront contains the highest concentration of cultural heritage attractions in South Sumatra, including historical mosques, Chinese temples, Arab villages, colonial architecture, traditional markets, museums, and cultural festivals. Despite this richness, the management of these cultural assets remains fragmented, with limited coordination among government agencies, tourism operators, cultural organizations, and local communities. Consequently, community participation in tourism planning and destination management remains relatively weak, reducing both the effectiveness and sustainability of tourism development (Hermawanto, 2021; Pidadari & Nuryanti, 2021).

From a public policy perspective, cultural tourism development requires governance frameworks that integrate heritage preservation, economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. Sustainable tourism emphasizes the balance among economic viability, cultural integrity, environmental protection, institutional governance, and community empowerment. Nevertheless, these dimensions have not yet been comprehensively incorporated into regional tourism policies in Palembang, resulting in inconsistencies between development planning and implementation (Oktavia, 2025). Furthermore, multicultural heritage management requires policies that recognize cultural diversity not only as a tourism commodity but also as a social asset that strengthens local identity and intercultural harmony.

Community empowerment has become a critical component of sustainable cultural tourism. Local residents are no longer viewed merely as beneficiaries of tourism but as active stakeholders involved in decision-making, cultural preservation, entrepreneurship, and destination governance. Empowering communities through capacity building, participatory planning, cultural entrepreneurship, and collaborative governance enables cultural tourism to generate inclusive economic benefits while safeguarding local traditions for future generations.

Despite the growing body of literature on Palembang tourism, relatively few studies have examined the integration of multicultural heritage management, public policy, and community empowerment within a single analytical framework. Most previous research has focused on cultural heritage preservation, tourism potential, or destination management separately, leaving limited discussion on how policy interventions can strengthen collaborative governance and community participation in managing multicultural heritage along the Musi River.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the development of cultural tourism in Palembang by examining the management of multicultural heritage along the Musi River from the perspectives of public policy and community empowerment. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the existing policy framework, explore the role of local communities in heritage management, examine challenges in implementing sustainable cultural tourism, and formulate evidence-based policy recommendations for strengthening collaborative governance. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of sustainable cultural tourism models that simultaneously preserve multicultural heritage, improve community welfare, and enhance Palembang's competitiveness as a leading cultural tourism destination in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a library research design. The qualitative method was selected because the study seeks to understand and interpret public policies, multicultural heritage management, and community empowerment within the context of cultural tourism rather than measuring variables statistically (Creswell, 2020; Sugiyono, 2023).

The study relied exclusively on secondary data collected from various academic and policy sources. These included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, government regulations, tourism policy documents, reports published by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the South Sumatra Provincial Government, the Palembang City Government, UNESCO heritage documents, and statistical publications relevant to tourism development and cultural heritage management. Additional sources included conference proceedings and institutional reports discussing sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, and multicultural heritage conservation.

Data were collected using the documentation method, involving systematic identification, selection, classification, and review of documents related to cultural tourism in Palembang. The analysis focused on publications discussing the historical development of the Musi River, multicultural communities, tourism governance, cultural heritage preservation, and community participation.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of four stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions. Information obtained from the literature was categorized into four analytical themes: (1) multicultural cultural heritage along the Musi River, (2) public policy on cultural tourism development, (3) community empowerment in tourism management, and (4) sustainable cultural tourism strategies. The findings were interpreted through the perspectives of sustainable tourism, public policy, and community-based tourism to formulate comprehensive recommendations for strengthening collaborative governance and enhancing the sustainable management of multicultural heritage in Palembang.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1) *Theoretical Framework: Cultural Tourism, Destination Management, and Community-Based Tourism*

The concept of cultural tourism development has evolved considerably over the past decades. Whereas destination management was previously dominated by government agencies and private investors through a supply-driven approach, contemporary tourism planning increasingly emphasizes Community-Based Tourism (CBT), which positions local communities as the primary stakeholders in tourism development. Aditya et al. (2026), referring to Giampiccoli (2018), explain that the essence of CBT lies in granting communities substantial control over tourism planning and management while ensuring that economic benefits are achieved alongside environmental conservation. Similarly, Djumrianti (2025) defines CBT as a tourism development model that actively involves local communities in planning, managing, and sharing economic benefits without compromising their cultural values. Hartono and Saputra (2022) further argue that CBT functions as an empowerment strategy that places local residents at the center of sustainable tourism development rather than treating them merely as supporting actors.

Within this framework, local communities are not only empowered economically but are also encouraged to preserve, celebrate, and promote their cultural identity. Everyday community life itself becomes an authentic tourism attraction capable of providing meaningful cultural experiences for visitors (Manteiro, 2021). Consequently, local people become the principal owners and managers of tourism resources, assuming responsibility for planning, organizing, and developing their destinations independently (Arfani et al., 2025). Kamila et al. (2026) emphasize that CBT addresses many shortcomings of conventional tourism by redistributing decision-making authority to local communities. Likewise, Landjani et al. (2024) argue that CBT restores tourism ownership to residents by encouraging self-reliance and strengthening community participation. Similar perspectives have been reported by Sawu (2020), Permatasari (2022), and Silitonga (2026). This approach is particularly relevant to Palembang because many of its cultural neighborhoods, including Kampung Kapitan, Kampung Arab Al-Munawar, and settlements along the Musi River, continue to function as living heritage communities where traditional lifestyles remain actively practiced.

Complementing CBT, Destination Management (DM) theory emphasizes the importance of coordination among multiple stakeholders to create high-quality and sustainable tourism experiences. According to Putri and Pratiwi (2021), successful heritage destination management depends upon four essential components—attractions, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services (the 4A framework). Deficiencies in any of these elements reduce destination competitiveness

regardless of its historical or cultural significance. Likewise, Pidadari and Nuryanti (2021) argue that cultural tourism products are determined primarily by cultural attractions, supporting facilities, and visitor accessibility. Within the context of Palembang, these principles can be implemented through preserving traditional Rumah Limas, revitalizing Musi River transportation, strengthening heritage interpretation, and improving visitor information systems.

2) *Cultural Tourism Potential in Palembang: A Multidimensional Analysis*

Palembang possesses exceptionally rich multicultural heritage that provides a strong foundation for sustainable cultural tourism development. This diversity extends beyond historical monuments to encompass traditional architecture, local customs, culinary heritage, performing arts, and multicultural community life that continue to thrive along the Musi River. These resources are concentrated within several cultural corridors, each characterized by distinctive historical values, tourism assets, and management challenges.

Table 1. Mapping of Palembang's Cultural Heritage Corridors

Koridor Budaya	Aset Utama	Karakteristik	Tantangan Pengelolaan
Tepian Sungai Musi	Jembatan Ampera, rumah Limas, pasar tradisional	Ikon kota, akulturasi Melayu-Arab-Cina	Degradasi fisik, tekanan komersialisasi
Kampung Kapitan	Klenteng, rumah panggung Tionghoa, makam leluhur	Living heritage, toleransi beragama	Gentrifikasi, penurunan partisipasi generasi muda
Pulau Kemaro	Pagoda, legenda Putri Sriwijayang	Destinasi religi-budaya multietnis	Aksesibilitas terbatas, musiman
Kampung Arab (Al-Munawar)	Arsitektur Arab, kuliner khas, tradisi keagamaan	Autentisitas komunitas, UMKM lokal	Fragmentasi kelembagaan, promosi terbatas

The diversity of these heritage assets demonstrates Palembang's significant potential to develop experience-based cultural tourism. Saksono et al. (2022) note that contemporary cultural tourists seek not merely historical buildings but authentic interactions involving traditional cuisine, cultural festivals, creative industries, and everyday community life. Consequently, tourists gain deeper cultural understanding through direct engagement with local communities. In this regard, Palembang offers distinctive attractions rarely found elsewhere, including traditional pempek, pindang patin, songket weaving, and the annual Sriwijaya Festival, all of which reinforce regional identity while generating economic opportunities for local residents (Nopriani, 2024).

Firmansyah (2021) further explains that successful cultural tourism destinations are built upon three interrelated dimensions: authenticity, interactivity, and interpretation. Kampung Kapitan exemplifies these principles by preserving original architecture, maintaining traditional lifestyles, and enabling visitors to interact directly with residents, artisans, and community leaders. Heritage interpretation through information boards and local guides further enriches visitor experiences.

These findings align with Ahsani et al.'s (2018) study of Candirejo Tourism Village, cited by Triana and Atthahara (2021), which demonstrates that CBT contributes positively to economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability. Similarly, Aditya et al. (2026), referring to Astuti and Handayani (2019), found that CBT-based training programs significantly improved managerial skills and expanded market opportunities for local products in Kampung Wisata Malang. Khusnawati and Wahyudi (2023), citing Muslim (2009), likewise argue that the ultimate objective of community empowerment is improving residents' quality of life by transforming them from tourism beneficiaries into active tourism entrepreneurs. Comparable conclusions have also been reported by Arsyad (2025), Febrian (2020), Apriyanto and Hamdany (2025), Triana and Atthahara (2021), Utami (2022), Puspitasari (2024), Sriwijaya (2024), and Minardi (2026).

3) *Comparing Heritage Tourism and Community-Based Cultural Tourism*

Selecting an appropriate tourism development model is fundamental to achieving sustainable cultural tourism. Two dominant approaches are commonly discussed in tourism literature: Heritage Tourism and Community-Based Cultural Tourism (CBT).

Table 2. Comparison between Heritage Tourism and Community-Based Cultural Tourism

Aspek	Heritage Tourism	Community-Based Cultural Tourism (CBT)
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Aktor utama	Pemerintah, lembaga konservasi, investor swasta	Komunitas lokal, asosiasi warga, UMKM
Tujuan	Preservasi artefak, peningkatan devisa, branding kota	Pemberdayaan ekonomi, revitalisasi tradisi, keadilan sosial
Pengalaman wisatawan	Observasi, edukasi dalam setting terkontrol	Partisipasi, homestay, storytelling langsung
Kontrol akses	Terregulasi, tiket masuk, zona-zona tertentu	Terbuka, adaptif terhadap ritme komunitas
Risiko	Komodifikasi, Disneyfication, alienasi masyarakat	Konflik internal, eksploitasi budaya, kapasitas terbatas

According to Putri and Pratiwi (2021), heritage development in the Sekanak Market area has primarily adopted a heritage tourism approach emphasizing physical conservation and urban revitalization. While such efforts are important for preserving historical value, they have yet to position local residents as central actors in destination management.

Conversely, Lusetyowati et al. (2025) argue that CBT offers a more suitable framework for Palembang because many of its heritage neighborhoods remain active residential communities. Conservation should therefore strengthen rather than displace local communities. Excessive physical revitalization without meaningful community participation may diminish authenticity and generate social conflicts. Similar arguments are advanced by Nurwahyuliningsih (2024), Menghayati (2021), Novita (2025), and Haswati (2021). Syaputra et al. (2024) propose integrating both approaches through the concept of a Cultural Heritage Zone, where governments, customary communities, private enterprises, and civil society jointly manage heritage destinations. Such collaborative governance enables heritage conservation and community empowerment to progress simultaneously through transparent, inclusive, and sustainable management practices.

4) *Institutional Roles and Public Policy*

The success of cultural tourism development depends not only on heritage resources but also on effective governance and institutional collaboration. In Palembang, local government plays a strategic role as a facilitator connecting communities, tourism businesses, academics, cultural organizations, and private stakeholders. Such collaboration is essential for ensuring that tourism policies simultaneously promote cultural preservation and local economic development.

Wargadalem and Yusuf (2025) observe that Palembang's tourism policies remain largely promotion-oriented, focusing primarily on annual festivals and social media campaigns. Although these initiatives successfully increase destination visibility, they have yet to sufficiently encourage active community participation. Programs supporting community tour guides, cultural entrepreneurs, and local SMEs remain relatively limited.

Pratama (2021) proposes establishing the Palembang Cultural Center in the 13 Ilir district as a cultural node that functions not merely as a museum but also as a creative hub where songket artisans, culinary entrepreneurs, artists, and performers interact directly with visitors. Such initiatives align with the concept of creative tourism, where tourists actively participate in cultural production rather than simply observing cultural artifacts.

Similarly, Sabilla (2023) identifies a disconnect between official cultural promotion and the dynamic reality of Palembang's contemporary culture. Promotional materials often portray culture as static and historical, whereas cultural practices continue to evolve, particularly among younger generations. Consequently, future cultural tourism policies should encourage bottom-up innovation, allowing communities to shape tourism narratives that better reflect their contemporary cultural identities.

Overall, effective public policy should move beyond regulatory functions toward collaborative governance, enabling government institutions to facilitate partnerships among stakeholders while ensuring that tourism development remains socially inclusive, culturally sensitive, and economically beneficial for local communities.

5) *Digital Transformation and Visitor Experience Innovation*

Rapid advances in digital technology have fundamentally transformed the way tourists search for information, plan trips, and experience destinations. Consequently, digital transformation has become an essential component of strengthening Palembang's competitiveness as a cultural tourism

destination.

Widyawan et al. (2025) demonstrate that the implementation of QR-code-based heritage interpretation along the Sekanak River significantly improves visitors' understanding of local history and cultural values by enabling instant access to digital information through smartphones. Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly inadequate internet infrastructure and limited digital literacy among tourism managers. These findings indicate that technological innovation must be accompanied by capacity-building initiatives for local stakeholders.

Malihah and Andari (2025) further highlight the importance of integrating educational tourism (edutourism) and agrotourism with local cultural resources, as demonstrated in Tuan Kentang Tourism Village. Although not a purely heritage destination, its participatory management model provides valuable lessons for developing community-based tourism villages along the Musi River. Active community involvement in providing attractions, educational activities, and local products enriches visitor experiences while strengthening household incomes.

Novitasari and Rahmanita (2023) add that the attractiveness of the Musi River waterfront derives not only from historical buildings but also from the multicultural social life that continues to characterize riverside communities. Interactions among Malay, Arab, Chinese, and other ethnic groups create a distinctive atmosphere that differentiates Palembang from other Indonesian heritage cities. Accordingly, the concept of waterfront cultural tourism should preserve the Musi River's multifunctional role as a transportation corridor, economic resource, and public social space while simultaneously supporting tourism development.

Digitalization therefore functions not merely as a promotional instrument but also as a platform for cultural education, heritage interpretation, visitor engagement, and service quality improvement. Supported by adequate infrastructure and competent human resources, digital innovation can significantly enhance the competitiveness of Palembang's cultural tourism while preserving its authenticity and cultural identity. Astuti et al. (2025) emphasize that digital transformation should integrate technological innovation with local wisdom rather than replace traditional cultural practices. Empirical evidence provided by Alkarimah et al. (2026) demonstrates that web-based digital platforms developed by Dekranasda Palembang have successfully expanded community-based tourism promotion, strengthened interactive cultural education, and introduced South Sumatra's cultural heritage to wider international audiences. Similar conclusions have been reported by Suryayusra (2025) and Amalia (2025), who argue that digital innovation represents a critical strategy for enhancing the global visibility and long-term sustainability of community-based cultural tourism.

3. CONCLUSION

Overall, it can be concluded that Palembang possesses substantial potential to develop as a sustainable cultural tourism destination, supported by its rich multicultural heritage encompassing Malay, Arab, Chinese, and colonial influences that collectively shape the city's distinctive identity. This cultural wealth is reflected not only in its historic architecture and heritage sites but also in its living traditions, culinary heritage, handicrafts, and the everyday practices of local communities that continue to preserve their cultural values. Despite these strengths, cultural tourism development in Palembang continues to face several challenges, including weak institutional coordination, limited integration of digital technologies, the risk of cultural commodification that may undermine authenticity, and relatively low community participation particularly among younger generations in heritage conservation and tourism management. Unless these issues are effectively addressed, the city's cultural assets will be unable to realize their full tourism potential. From a theoretical perspective, integrating the principles of heritage tourism and Community-Based Tourism (CBT) offers the most appropriate development framework, as it balances heritage conservation with community empowerment while generating sustainable economic, social, and cultural benefits. Accordingly, several strategic recommendations are proposed: strengthening institutional governance through the establishment of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) involving government agencies, academics, cultural communities, private stakeholders, and local residents to improve destination coordination; enhancing digital capacity through digital literacy programs, QR-code interpretation systems, augmented reality applications, and online promotion and reservation platforms; developing thematic cultural routes, such as the Songket Heritage Route, Heritage Culinary Route, and Religious Harmony Route, to provide integrated visitor experiences and extend tourists' length of stay; regenerating Palembang Cultural Ambassadors so they function not only as

promotional representatives but also as facilitators capable of interpreting Palembang's cultural identity in an inclusive and contemporary manner; and expanding community-based cultural tourism villages by adapting the participatory model implemented in Tuan Kentang Tourism Village to other communities along the Musi River while respecting the unique cultural characteristics of each area. Ultimately, the sustainable development of cultural tourism in Palembang requires strong collaboration among government institutions, local communities, academic institutions, and the private sector. Such multi-stakeholder partnerships will strengthen heritage conservation efforts while enhancing destination competitiveness, ensuring that cultural tourism becomes a major driver of regional development that generates long-term economic prosperity while safeguarding Palembang's multicultural identity for future generations.

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