

Examining the Perceived Socio-Cultural Effects of Tourism Among the Residents at Kampung Tuba, Pantu Sri Aman, Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

Tourism development has the potential to shape communities in two distinct cultural directions, i.e., cultural preservation and cultural commodification. The objective of this paper is to examine the perceived socio-cultural effects of tourism on cooperative members/residents in Kampung Tuba, Pantu, Sarawak. The questionnaires were distributed to the cooperative members/residents at Kampung Tuba, Pantu, Sarawak, in August 2025. Findings reveal that two-thirds of respondents view tourism as a positive force that safeguards cultural identity, protects traditions, fosters neighbourhood spirit, enhances social cohesion, and instils pride in heritage. One-quarter of respondents voiced moderate concerns about possible cultural change, commercial exploitation of traditions, and the erosion of authenticity, indicating that these issues are acknowledged but not regarded as urgent threats. Ten percent of the respondents associated tourism with negative outcomes, such as crime, youth misbehavior, or tension with tourists, suggesting that these impacts are presently minimal. The study emphasises that inclusive governance, cooperative structures, and community-based tourism models are critical to ensuring that residents maintain agency over cultural representation. Continuous monitoring and adaptive management remain essential for sustaining authenticity and addressing emerging challenges. Overall, the research affirms that tourism, when responsibly governed, holds significant potential to empower communities, revitalise culture, and strengthen cultural pride while mitigating risks of commodification.

Keywords— Tourism, Community Empowerment, Cultural

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is increasingly perceived not just for its economic benefits but also as a powerful driver of community empowerment and cultural dignity. In many places, it creates opportunities for local people to conserve their heritage, celebrate traditional practices, and reinforce a shared sense of identity. With careful management, tourism can enhance cultural flexibility by providing both financial accolades and social inducements to safeguard cultural resources (García-Hernández, de la Calle-Vaquero, & Yubero, 2017; Nuryanti, 1996). At the same time, it offers a platform for communities to present their culture to a broader audience, strengthening pride and a feeling of ownership over their culture.

Beyond preserving culture, tourism also serves as a motivation for community empowerment through participatory governance and collective management. In this context, a cooperative structure means a formal, community-owned body, such as a village tourism cooperative, that oversees tourism activities together. Members pool resources, distribute profits fairly, and make joint decisions on matters like visitor limits, pricing, and how cultural traditions are showcased. This approach keeps financial gains within the community, avoids domination by local elites, and ensures cultural definition remains under community control. Community-based tourism (CBT), for example, has demonstrated how rural and indigenous groups can gain a stronger impact over how their cultural stories are shared with visitors (Htun, 2020). Empowering residents with absolute decision-making power allows tourism to deliver not only economic benefits but also to boost confidence, cultivate leadership skills, and reinforce social bonds that are necessary elements for inclusive, sustainable development and for fostering deeper pride in local identity.

Tourism is frequently promoted to boost rural economies, strengthen social unity, and reinforce cultural identity. Worldwide, community-based tourism (CBT) has long been explored as a means of empowerment and cultural safeguarding (Scheyvens, 1999; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). In Malaysia, particularly in Sarawak, homestay programmes and cultural tourism initiatives have similarly been promoted to improve livelihoods and protect heritage (Hamzah, 2010; Kayat, 2014). Building on this foundation, recent studies highlight the importance of empowerment and cultural pride while introducing imminent ideas like cultural intelligence and regenerative tourism (Azinuddin et al., 2024; Qi, 2024).

Furthermore, tourism can enhance social unity and foster cross-cultural understanding, linking local communities with the global arena while deepening internal connections. Research shows that rich cultural tourism experiences help communities affirm the worth of their traditions, encourage the passing down of knowledge between generations, and instill pride in their heritage (Jiemei, Qingyue, & Jiafeng, 2023; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). When people view tourism as supporting their cultural identity, they are more prone to participate actively in tourism projects, promoting both sustainability and trustworthiness. In this way, tourism functions not merely as an economic activity but as a catalyst for cultural strength and community empowerment.

Tourism is often presented as a driver for rural development, yet its socio-cultural effects on small indigenous and cooperative-based communities remain unevenly understood. Kampung Tuba in Pantu, Sarawak, shaped by a long struggle for customary land rights and now venturing into community-based tourism, provides a timely case for investigation. While tourism promises new income sources and opportunities for cultural revival, it also poses potential threats such as commodification, loss of authenticity, and social tension. This study is motivated by the need to document how residents themselves perceive these opportunities and risks and to understand how cooperative models and participatory decision-making influence their perspectives.

Kampung Tuba is an Iban village in Pantu, Sri Aman Division, Sarawak, renowned for its long struggle to defend Native Customary Rights (NCR) land. This struggle culminated in a landmark 2010 court ruling that excluded their ancestral territory from the Taman Negara Ulu Sebuyau gazette. Building on that victory, villagers formed Koperasi Kampung Tuba Simunjan Berhad in 2012 to jointly manage compensation funds, upgrade essential infrastructure, and launch economic ventures such as community-based tourism. The cooperative acts as a structured platform for pooling resources, sharing decisions, and ensuring tourism growth remains true to local values and priorities. This history of land-rights defence and collective management offers a strong basis for exploring how tourism can support both cultural preservation and sustainable livelihoods in Kampung Tuba.

This study is important as it highlights how rural and Indigenous communities can participate in tourism while safeguarding their cultural integrity. Kampung Tuba's journey, from defending its Native Customary Rights (NCR) land to establishing a community-owned cooperative, offers a rare example of grassroots tourism governance. By documenting residents' perspectives on both the advantages and potential drawbacks, the research offers insights for policies that harmonise economic opportunities with cultural preservation. The results can inform government bodies, NGOs, and other villages in Sarawak and beyond in developing community-based tourism models that empower local people, strengthen cultural pride, and guard against cultural commodification.

The objective of this paper is to examine how residents of Kampung Tuba, Pantu, Sarawak, perceive the socio-cultural impacts of tourism. It focuses on how tourism is regarded in relation to cultural preservation, social unity, and community empowerment, while also noting worries about cultural change, commodification, and other possible drawbacks. By examining these views alongside the village's cooperative model and its history of collective land rights, the study seeks to offer guidance for planning inclusive and sustainable community-based tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Sustainability and Pride

Cultural pride, while often considered intangible, is increasingly recognised as an essential component of cultural sustainability. Cultural sustainability pertains to the capacity of communities to preserve, convey, and adapt

cultural practices through generations, ensuring their relevance in modern viewpoints (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). Within this framework, cultural pride reflects the positive valuation and reaffirmation of heritage, traditions, and identity that arise when communities see their culture respected and celebrated through tourism. It functions both as an outcome of tourism and as a condition for sustaining long-term community participation (Throsby, 2017).

Early debates framed tourism as a double-edged process. Concerns about authenticity and commodification (Cohen, 1988; Taylor, 2001) highlighted the risk that tourism could reduce culture to a performance for outsiders, potentially eroding pride. Yet, subsequent scholarship emphasised that when communities control the terms of cultural representation, tourism strengthens local pride, enhances intergenerational transmission, and contributes to broader identity formation (Su & Wall, 2014; Richards, 2018).

Malaysian studies reflect this tension. Research on Sarawak homestays and cultural festivals found that while tourism heightened pride in local traditions and provided platforms for cultural expression, it also risked over-commercialisation and loss of meaning if managed primarily for tourist consumption (Aziz, Rahman, & Hassan, 2014; Tan, 2017). In heritage cities such as Malacca, residents reported pride in cultural visibility but also expressed ambivalence about commercialisation overshadowing authenticity (Abdullah et al., 2021).

More recent research suggests that cultural pride is not only rooted in heritage preservation but also in intercultural competence and agency. The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) has emerged as a useful lens, showing how communities can engage positively with visitors, negotiate cultural differences, and maintain dignity in interactions (Ang et al., 2007; Azinuddin et al., 2024). This reinforces the idea that cultural pride is contingent on both internal capacity (agency, confidence, intergenerational knowledge) and external factors (respectful engagement, equitable benefit-sharing). In this sense, cultural pride bridges the psychological dimension of empowerment with the long-term sustainability of culture, positioning it as both an outcome and enabler of sustainable tourism.

Empirical Evidence from Malaysia and Sarawak: Indigenous and Ecotourism Contexts

Research across Malaysia highlights the dual role of tourism in strengthening empowerment and affirming cultural identity among Indigenous groups. For example, community-led tourism in Sungai Bumbun has supported capacity-building, heritage conservation, and collective identity, producing stronger local pride (Mohd Razali & Abu Seman, 2024). Similarly, studies of the Jakun in Johor demonstrate that cultural assets and ecological knowledge provide a foundation for advancing community-based tourism (CBT). Yet, obstacles such as limited infrastructure and digital access continue to restrict broader empowerment outcomes (IJRIAS, 2025).

In Sabah's Bilit Village, CBT has been associated with income gains, stronger social bonds, and greater cultural affirmation. However, these achievements remain fragile unless they reflect the values and aspirations of the community (Kunjuraman et al., 2020). Such cases illustrate how empowerment and pride reinforce each other, but external inequalities and uneven control over resources also shape them.

Within Indigenous tourism, both revitalization and risks are evident. Tourism may help sustain traditional practices, languages, and ecological systems. At the same time, it can encourage the sale of cultural expressions. It sometimes creates unequal power relations between hosts and external stakeholders (Butcher, 2003; Cole, 2007). When performances are made mainly for tourists, they may generate income. However, such activities can reduce authenticity and weaken the sense of pride within the community (Cohen, 1988). Experiences from Southeast Asia confirm that when external actors dominate tourism projects, local voices often lose influence, leading to unequal benefits and limited empowerment (Scheyvens, 2002; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014).

Importantly, findings across these studies are not always consistent. Ethnographic work (e.g., Cohen, 1988; Cole, 2007) frequently highlights cultural erosion and the dilution of authenticity, whereas more recent survey-based research (e.g., Ward et al., 2021; Azinuddin et al., 2024) tends to emphasise empowerment and community support for tourism. These divergences may be explained by methodological orientations: qualitative approaches tend to privilege detailed narratives of loss and tension, while survey instruments often capture broader, more positive perceptions, sometimes obscuring dissenting experiences. This indicates that methodological choices significantly shape how tourism's impacts on pride and empowerment are represented.

A growing consensus stresses that Indigenous tourism flourishes when supported by rights-based frameworks and cultural protection strategies (Notzke, 2006; Soini & Birkeland, 2014). Community-led approaches in land management, education, and digital initiatives can strengthen empowerment while holding heritage. The incorporation of indigenous knowledge into conservation practices not only expands livelihood opportunities but also strengthens cultural identity within global sustainability debates (Zeppel, 2006; Wani et al., 2022). In Malaysia, this directs to the importance of pairing community-driven tourism with institutional safeguards that protect rights, heritage, and long-term resilience.

Recent Empirical Findings on Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and Support for Tourism

Recent academic work has revealed how empowerment, cultural pride, and community sustenance are interwoven through tourism. Evidence from Azinuddin et al. (2024) demonstrates that social and economic benefits can enhance cultural intelligence (CQ) and encourage local communities to show support for tourism. Pride acts as a key mechanism, ensuring that participation is maintained rather than fading over time.

As outlined by Ang et al. (2007), cultural intelligence is the capacity to adapt and establish effective relationships in multicultural settings. Communities with enhanced CQ tend to engage more confidently with visitors, represent their traditions truthfully, and resist feelings of cultural inferiority during cross-cultural exchanges (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). This ability, by cultivating pride and empowerment, fosters both individual development and collective welfare of the community.

Research by Ward et al. (2021) and Rockstuhl and Van Dyne (2018) highlights that CQ underpins tourism resilience over the long term by fostering inclusiveness and adaptability. Within Malaysia's multicultural setting, which frequently engages international tourists, CQ provides a valuable lens for reconciling heritage preservation with authenticated cultural exchange. Embedding CQ training within community-based tourism (CBT) and homestay initiatives can strengthen empowerment, enhance pride, and build sustained community support, while simultaneously promoting both cultural integrity and economic viability.

Policy and NGO Interventions

Malaysia's tourism policies have increasingly prioritised sustainability and cultural protection. The National Ecotourism Plan (1996), reviewed in 2016, positioned CBT as a pathway for rural development, while the Sarawak Tourism Masterplan (2021) emphasized ethical practices, cultural heritage, and immersive experiences (Sarawak Tourism Board, 2022–2024).

These efforts are reinforced by NGOs, which help implement policies through practical action. In Sarawak, the Green Livelihoods Alliance incorporates conservation goals with tourism-related income, combining empowerment with heritage protection (Green Livelihoods Alliance, 2024). Similarly, the Sarawak Dayak Iban Association (SADIA) in Simunjan highlights how ecotourism can bring together economic opportunity and cultural preservation.

Synthesis: Conditions for Empowerment and Pride

Across the literature, several conditions emerge as central to whether tourism fosters empowerment and pride. The first is participatory governance, where residents engage in planning and decision-making. Okazaki (2008) and Tosun (2005) emphasised this as a prerequisite for empowerment, and more recent Malaysian studies confirm that participation enhances both agency and support for tourism development (Azinuddin et al., 2024). A second condition involves skills development and capacity-building. Without adequate training, communities often remain dependent on external actors, limiting empowerment (Hamzah, 2010; Supian, 2022).

A third condition concerns institutional support and market linkages. Earlier work stressed the crucial role of government and NGOs in connecting rural communities to larger markets (Hamzah & Hampton, 2013). In Sarawak, initiatives by tourism boards and NGOs in training, certification, and promotion have been shown to strengthen both community participation and pride (Sarawak Tourism Board, 2022–2024). Finally, cultural sustainability and cultural intelligence (CQ) are increasingly recognised as vital. While earlier debates centred

on the authenticity–commodification tension (Taylor, 2001), recent evidence suggests that communities with higher CQ can adapt more effectively to intercultural encounters while reinforcing cultural pride (Azinuddin et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, contradictory findings remain visible. Long-term ethnographies frequently emphasise cultural erosion, authenticity loss, and internal tensions, whereas survey-based studies tend to highlight pride, resilience, and favourable perceptions. These divergent outcomes point to methodological biases: qualitative approaches tend to privilege critical narratives of marginalisation, whereas quantitative surveys aggregate positive responses and may obscure dissenting voices. Moreover, many studies are highly context-specific, making it difficult to generalise their findings across different cultural or geographic settings. This indicates that empowerment and pride should not be viewed as automatic outcomes of tourism but as contingent processes shaped by governance structures, institutional arrangements, and methodological lenses.

Gaps and Justification for the Present Study

Although scholarship on tourism, empowerment, and cultural pride has expanded, several gaps persist. First, research has largely concentrated on prominent destinations such as Barrio or Malacca, while emerging and lesser-studied areas like Simunjan remain underexplored. Second, while many studies link empowerment to participation and income, the precise ways these factors influence everyday expressions of pride have not been systematically examined. The role of cultural intelligence as a mediating factor is particularly underdeveloped despite its recent prominence (Azinuddin et al., 2024).

Third, much of the existing evidence is shaped by methodological limitations. Cross-sectional surveys often capture only positive, aggregated perceptions, while ethnographic case studies foreground narratives of cultural erosion. These divergent portrayals highlight how methodological design influences findings and limits the comparability of results. Scholars have increasingly argued for longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches that can capture empowerment and pride as dynamic processes rather than static outcomes (Cole, 2006; Tosun, 2000).

The present study responds to these gaps by focusing on Simunjan’s emerging tourism sector. It aims to provide new insights into how empowerment and cultural pride are cultivated in under-studied contexts while also accounting for the methodological challenges that have shaped existing narratives. In doing so, it contributes to both theoretical debates and practical strategies for sustainable rural tourism development.

Conceptual Framework

Socio-Cultural Effects of Tourism

Tourism development has the potential to shape communities in two distinct cultural directions (Fig. 1). On one hand, it can promote cultural preservation, where local identity is safeguarded, community pride is strengthened, and social cohesion is reinforced. Studies highlight that tourism often serves as an incentive for protecting heritage sites and revitalising traditional practices, as communities recognise the economic and symbolic value of maintaining their culture (Nuryanti, 1996; García-Hernández, de la Calle-Vaquero, & Yubero, 2017). This positive pathway reflects tourism’s role as a driver of cultural continuity and pride.

On the other hand, tourism can also foster cultural commodification, in which traditions risk being reshaped for commercial purposes. Conversely, tourism may also strengthen the commodification of culture, where traditions are transformed to meet commercial demands. Such changes can destroy credibility, promote cultural uniformity, and at times exploit indigenous practices. Scholars warn that if tourism expands unchecked, the tension between cultural integrity and market adaptation could ultimately weaken the very ancestry it aims to celebrate (Nuryanti, 1996; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016).

The balance between cultural conservation and commodification in tourism largely depends on the strength of governance and oversight. Evidence shows that community-driven planning and participatory governance enable residents to shape how their culture is presented, helping to prevent misrepresentation or exploitation (Luo et al., 2023). Similarly, programmes that prioritise accurate cultural education and intercultural dialogue encourage

mutual respect between visitors and host communities (Jiemei, Qingyue, & Jiafeng, 2023). Ongoing assessment of cultural impacts through surveys, community consultations, and flexible management remains crucial to ensure tourism supports cultural flexibility rather than expedites its erosion (Harrison, 2023).

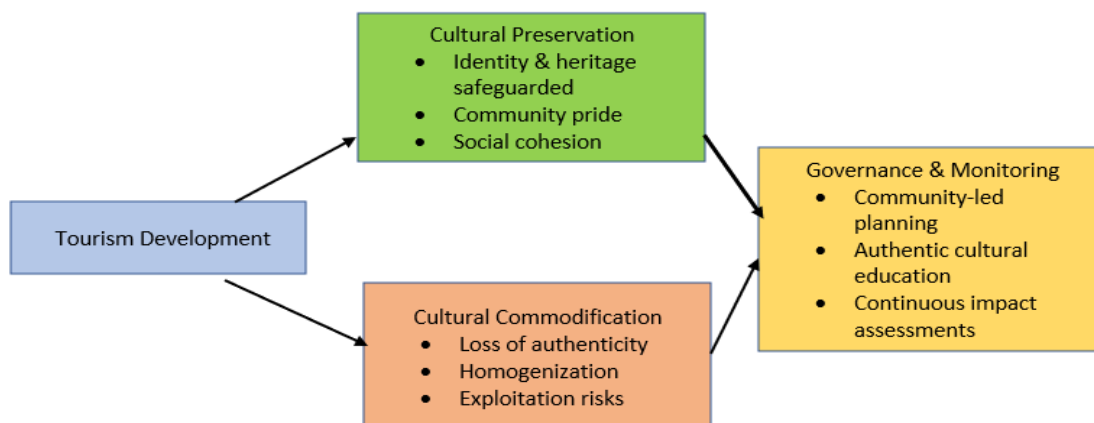


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework of Socio-cultural Effects of Tourism

Tourism: Balancing Cultural Preservation and Commodification

Tourism acts as a key catalyst of cultural change, guiding communities along two possible trajectories (Fig. 2). On the positive side, it can foster cultural preservation, where heritage and identity are safeguarded, community pride is enhanced, and social cohesion is strengthened. Research shows that when tourism is managed responsibly, it provides strong encouragement to protect cultural assets and revive traditional practices. (García-Hernández, de la Calle-Vaquero, & Yubero, 2017; Nuryanti, 1996). Such outcomes demonstrate tourism's potential as a mechanism to enhance cultural resilience and pride.

Conversely, tourism can drive cultural commodification, where heritage is reshaped primarily for market consumption. This often erodes correctness, promotes cultural uniformity, and at times exploits indigenous practices. Scholars caution that unchecked commercialisation may ultimately weaken the very cultural identity that draws visitors (Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). These risks highlight the need for proactive measures to ensure that benefits outweigh potential harms.

To maintain this delicate balance, two interrelated strategies are essential. First, community-led governance, often operationalized through cooperatives or community-based tourism (CBT) models, ensures that residents have genuine authority over how their culture is represented to visitors (Htun, 2020; Luo et al., 2023). Second, robust monitoring and adaptation mechanisms, such as surveys, participatory feedback loops, and continuous cultural impact assessments, are crucial in identifying emerging issues and adapting strategies accordingly (Harrison, 2023). Together, these approaches create a governance framework that empowers communities, protects authenticity, and sustains cultural vitality amid tourism growth.

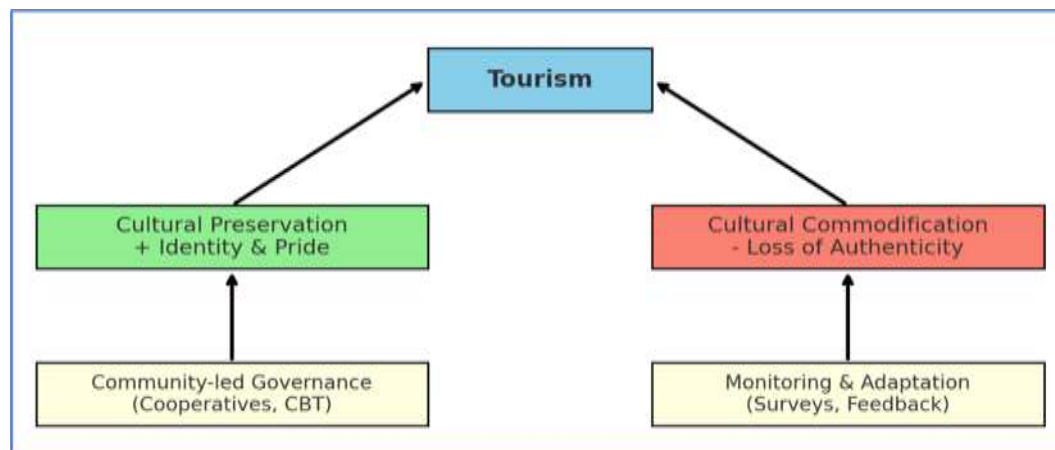


Fig. 2 Balancing cultural preservation and commodification

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Instrument

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine the perceived socio-cultural effects of tourism among residents of Kampung Tuba, Pantu, Sarawak. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from Mohd Zaidi et al. (2017), which has been previously applied in Malaysian community-based tourism (CBT) contexts. The instrument consisted of 18 items assessing residents' perceptions of socio-cultural effects, grouped into domains such as cultural preservation, social interaction, lifestyle changes, and community cohesion. The questionnaire was structured into two sections.

Section A: This section collected respondents' background characteristics, including gender, age, occupation, and length of residence.

Section B: This section measured respondents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from **1 (Strongly Disagree)** to **5 (Strongly Agree)**, with a neutral midpoint at **3 (Neutral)**.

Prior to distribution, the questionnaire underwent content validation by two academic experts familiar with CBT research to ensure relevance and clarity of items. A pilot test involving 10 residents from a neighboring village was conducted to refine wording and structure.

Population, Sampling, and Justification

The study population comprised residents of Kampung Tuba who had direct exposure to the community-based tourism (CBT) program. Due to the absence of a complete sampling frame, convenience sampling was employed. This approach was considered appropriate because data collection was carried out during a cooperative programme in August 2025, where participants were directly involved in or affected by tourism-related activities.

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 80 were returned, representing a response rate of 80%. Following screening for incomplete or inconsistent responses, 76 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. Although the sample size was modest, it is consistent with prior exploratory studies on rural tourism and CBT (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Moreover, because all respondents had prior engagement with the programme, their responses were considered both relevant and informative for the study objectives.

The chosen sampling strategy and final sample size align with the study's exploratory nature, where the goal is to provide empirical insights into residents' perceptions rather than to generalise to a larger population.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed immediately after the CBT programme. Descriptive statistics, i.e., mean score, were used to analyse the perceived socio-cultural effects of tourism among the residents at Kampung Tuba, Pantu, Sarawak.

FINDINGS

Demographic

The demographic profile of respondents shows a balanced gender distribution, with females (52.6%) slightly outnumbering males (47.4%). Age-wise (Table II), the sample spans from 20 to 71 years old, with an average age of 45 years. The majority of respondents fall within the 40–59 age range, making middle-aged adults the core contributors to community and cooperative activities. There is also a healthy representation from seniors (60+), meaning that older adults participate in sufficient numbers to reflect their real presence and influence in the village. Their inclusion ensures that the perspectives, traditional knowledge, and long-term experience of this age group are well captured and not merely tokenistic. In contrast, the youth segment (20–29) remains smaller, indicating that younger voices are less prominent in the current dataset.

Cooperative member participation (Table I) is notably high, with 84% of respondents identified as active members (A). Engagement is strongest among the 50–59 group, where almost all individuals are members, while participation is relatively weaker among younger respondents, where non-members are more common. These patterns suggest that the cooperative and community initiatives are largely driven by middle-aged members, with strong contributions from both genders, but may require targeted strategies to involve younger generations more actively.

Table I Crosstabulation Between Gender and Membership

Gender	Member (A)	Non-member (B)
Male (M)	30	6
Female (F)	34	6
Total	64	12

Table II Crosstabulation Between Age Group and Membership

Age Group	Member (A)	Non-member (B)
20–29	8	4
30–39	6	1
40–49	16	3
50–59	20	1
60+	14	3
Total	64	12

Table III Crosstabulation Between Age Group and Gender

Age Group	Male (L)	Female (P)
20–29	6	6
30–39	3	4
40–49	9	10
50–59	11	10
60+	7	10
Total	36	40

Socio-Cultural Effects of Tourism

The findings disclose that tourism is strongly perceived as a guardian of culture and heritage. Respondents highlighted that it helps preserve cultural identity (4.20), protects traditions (4.13), and drives demand for cultural exhibitions (4.12). It also encourages the conservation of historical sites (4.17) and strengthens neighbourhood spirit (4.18). The highest score in this category was for encouraging cultural activities (4.36), suggesting that tourism not only safeguards but also revitalises cultural practices.

Tourism also strengthens social bonds and nurtures pride among locals. Respondents agreed that it improves understanding of other cultures (4.28) while reinforcing respect for their own traditions (4.29). Pride in cultural heritage was rated highly (4.28), as was the sense that tourism positively improves lifestyle (4.01). These findings suggest that tourism simultaneously promotes intercultural exchange and strengthens the community's own

cultural roots, ensuring that heritage is not only preserved but celebrated. Fig. 3 summarized the strong preservation and pride-building outcomes of the survey.

Nevertheless, there are minor concerns that warrant careful management (Fig. 4). Respondents expressed moderate concern about changes to traditional culture (3.59 and 2.49) and potential exploitation of indigenous residents (3.16). Other risks, such as tension with tourists (2.97), crime (2.16), youth misbehaviour (2.14), and negative lifestyle effects (2.18), scored low, indicating they are not currently major issues. Still, these factors highlight the need for balanced tourism planning to prevent cultural dilution and ensure that growth continues to enrich rather than disrupt community life.

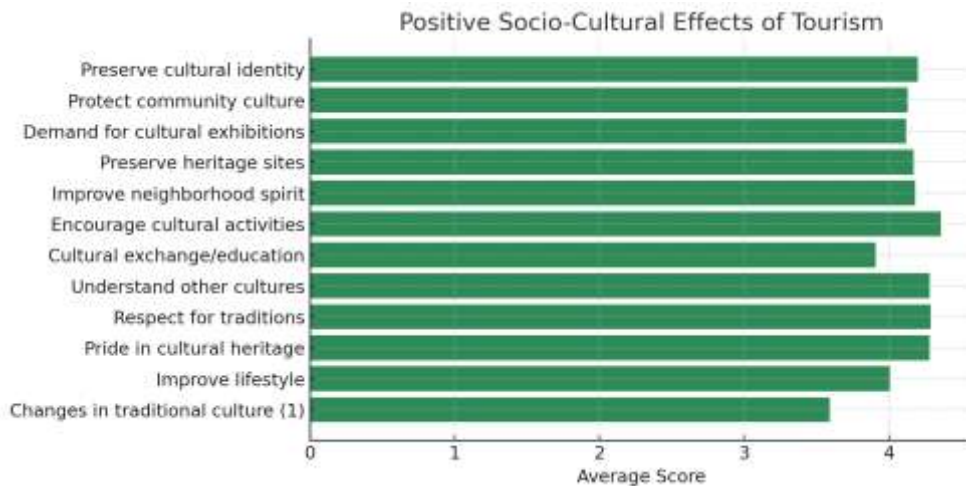


Fig. 3 Positive effects chart (green): shows strong preservation and pride-building outcomes

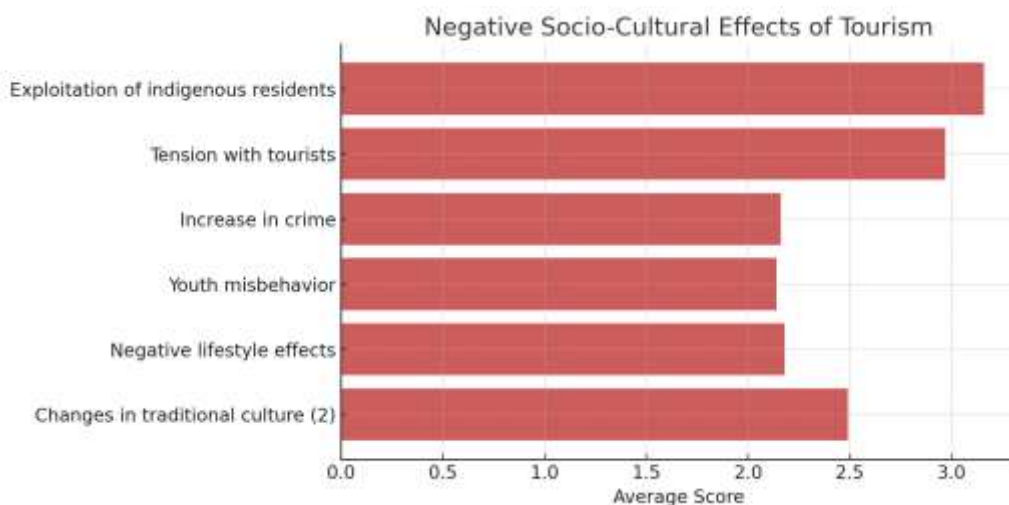


Fig. 4 Negative effects chart (red): shows relatively low concerns, though cultural change remains a moderate

DISCUSSION

The survey findings indicate that tourism is widely perceived as a driver of cultural preservation and identity. Respondents strongly agreed that tourism helps safeguard community culture ($M = 4.20$), preserve traditions ($M = 4.13$), and maintain heritage sites ($M = 4.17$). These results align with earlier research framing tourism as a lever for cultural conservation (Nuryanti, 1996) and more recent work on community-led tourism governance in reinforcing both culture and livelihoods (Luo et al., 2023).

Beyond its preservation, tourism is also conceptualized as a catalyst for social cohesion and intercultural understanding. Elevated mean scores relating to neighbourhood solidarity ($M = 4.18$), participation in cultural activities ($M = 4.36$), and pride in heritage ($M = 4.28$) underscore its integrative role in fostering community solidarity. Notably, younger respondents emphasized the importance of “understanding other cultures” and

“cultural exchange/education,” a pattern that accords with scholarship identifying cultural tourism as a mediator of social cohesion (Jiemei, Qingyue, & Jiafeng, 2023) and as a contributor to enhanced quality of life through participatory cultural engagement (Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016).

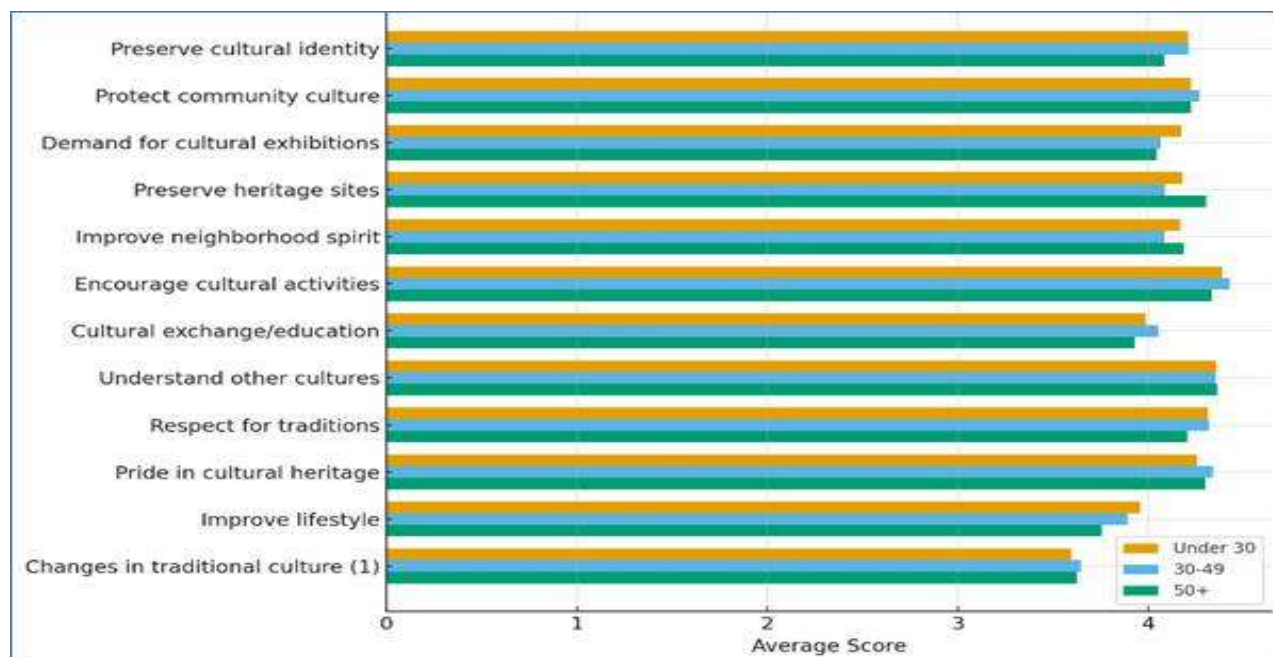


Fig. 5 Positive socio-cultural effects of tourism by age group

Demographic differences add further nuance. Older respondents (50+), as shown in Fig. 5, emphasised preservation (“protect community culture,” “respect for traditions”), while younger participants (<30) prioritised openness and exchange. Gender analysis (Fig. 6) showed women rated “community pride” and “neighbourhood spirit” slightly higher, while men leaned toward “improve lifestyle.” Education also mattered: respondents with less education valued direct lifestyle improvements, whereas postgraduates stressed heritage protection and expressed stronger concern over cultural change. These layered findings (Fig. 2–4) illustrate how interpretations of tourism’s role vary according to social background.

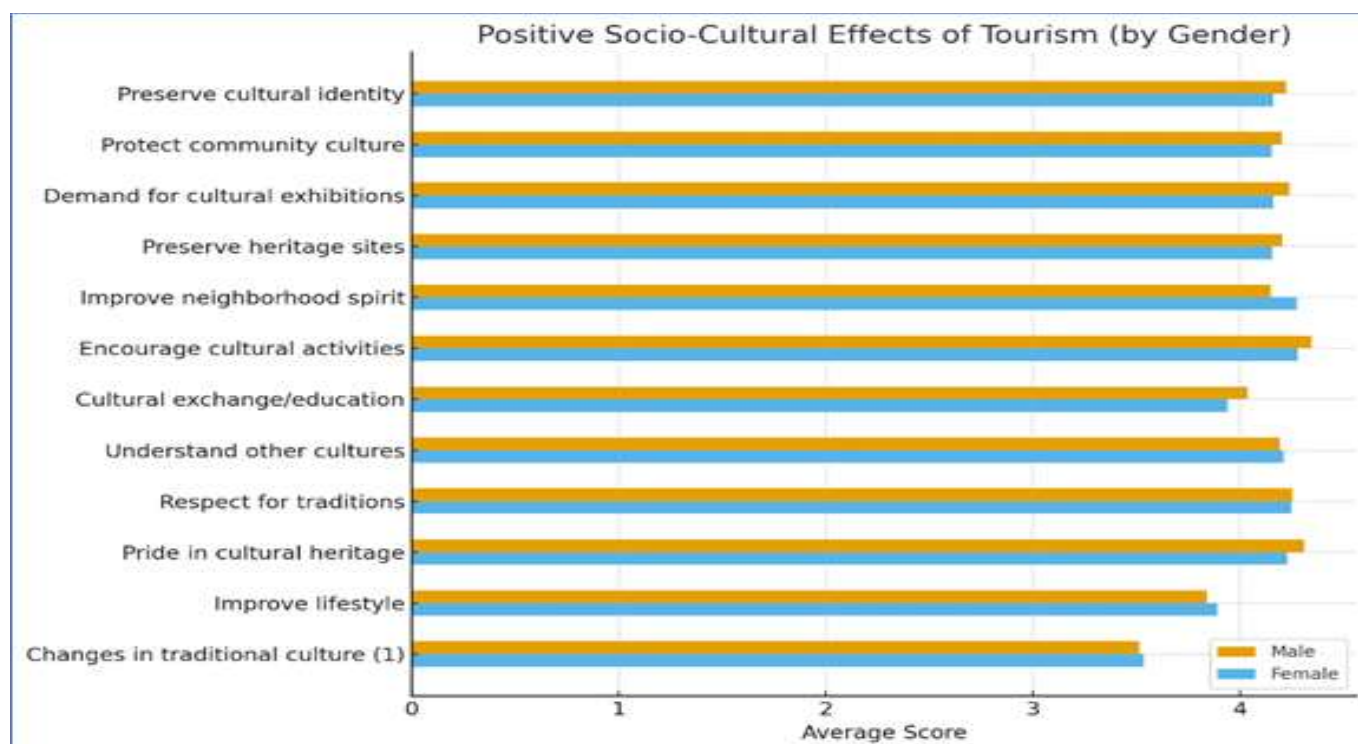


Fig. 6 Positive socio-cultural effects of tourism by gender

At the same time, concerns about cultural commodification surfaced, with “changes in traditional culture” receiving lower average scores ($M = 3.59$; $M = 2.49$ in sub-groups). This reflects longstanding debates on heritage commodification (García-Hernández, de la Calle-Vaquero, & Yubero, 2017; Nuryanti, 1996). Recent studies warn that global tourism and digital platforms accelerate cultural dilution and appropriation (Marbun, 2025), often recasting heritage for market appeal, while commodification of “photogenic sites” reduces cultural meaning to visual consumption (Dinh, 2025). Critical tourism scholarship also highlights power imbalances in deciding who benefits from these processes (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2025; Liu et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, newer approaches suggest alternatives. Research on regenerative community-based tourism emphasizes adaptive cultural programs, reinvestment, and agency to reconcile preservation with vitality (Peris-Ortiz et al., 2025). Similarly, heritage management reviews highlight integrated frameworks that connect conservation with climate resilience and urban development (Min et al., 2025). Taken together, the findings underline tourism’s dual role: it can safeguard culture, strengthen solidarity, and foster exchange, but risks commodification if not managed inclusively. Effective governance and reflexive, regenerative models are therefore critical to ensuring tourism remains a positive cultural force.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study confirm that the host community experiences both the positive and negative socio-cultural effects of rural tourism. The positive contributions by tourism are cultural identity, strengthening social cohesion and pride, and promoting intercultural understanding. On the other hand, there are cautions to be looked into on the potential exploitation of indigenous residents, commercialisation of the culture, and host–guest tensions. These negative effects should not be taken lightly, even though they show lower scores than the positive effects, as they may spiral into major concern if no immediate action is taken.

From these findings, four viable approaches can be adopted to make rural tourism sustainable. Firstly, to establish the cultural preservation program through the community leaders and tourism authorities to ensure tourism will strengthen the culture rather than diluting it. To materialise these, preservation of tourism products or services, such as oral traditions, should be documented, and heritage sites to be safeguarded. Secondly, to ensure the host residents are included in capacity building related to tourism activities, such as training or workshops. This will give them the required know-how of the industry that will ensure they are not exploited, and thus give them a fair share to enjoy the benefits derived from their locality. Thirdly, to introduce the visitor awareness campaigns and codes of conduct to foster mutual respect between the host and tourist, as it will lessen the disputes or conflicts between hosts and tourists. Lastly, to prevent cultural erosion, policymakers should include the three approaches above in the community-based tourism (CBT) guidelines with a continuous monitoring mechanism to alert the relevant authority to early intervention.

In conclusion, as rural tourism in Kampung Tuba offers substantial positive socio-cultural results, the potential harms can be reduced, which will enable the tourism development to remain sustainable, inclusive, and respectful of indigenous traditions by the implementation of the four-approach strategy mentioned earlier. The exploration of the long-term socio-cultural changes and the assessment of the effectiveness of the present study recommendation on the interventions can be considered in future studies.

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