Reimagining Rural Tourism Through Food and Community Power: A Model for Sustainable Culinary Tourism Development in Bali

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Abstract. Culinary tourism has emerged as an important driver of sustainable rural development, yet its role in fostering community empowerment remains insufficiently understood, particularly in developing tourism destinations. This study examines how culinary tourism contributes to community empowerment and sustainable rural tourism development through a qualitative multiple-case study of three tourism villages in Bali, Indonesia: Serangan, Sebatu, and Aan. Data were collected from 18 key informants, including tourism village managers, Pokdarwis representatives, culinary entrepreneurs, fishers, a farmer, community leaders, and tourists, complemented by three focus group discussions, participant observation, and document analysis. Data were analysed using the interactive qualitative analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal three distinct pathways of culinary tourism development: seafood-based experiences in Serangan, farm-to-table tourism in Sebatu, and traditional culinary heritage in Aan. Community participation was strongest in food production and visitor experiences but remained limited in strategic planning, destination branding, and collaborative governance. Synthesising the empirical findings with community-based tourism and empowerment theories, the study develops an empirically grounded integrative conceptual model linking culinary tourism, community empowerment, and sustainable rural tourism. The findings provide practical guidance for strengthening inclusive and sustainable rural destination development.

Keywords: Bali, Culinary Tourism, Community Empowerment, Food Value Chain, Sustainable Rural Tourism

1 Introduction

Culinary tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, reflecting travellers' increasing demand for authentic, place-based, and culturally meaningful experiences. Food has evolved beyond its traditional role as a consumable product to become a medium through which visitors experience local identity, cultural heritage, and destination uniqueness (Di-clemente, 2020; Hall & Sharples, 2002; Moliterni

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et al., 2025). In rural destinations, culinary tourism creates opportunities to integrate agriculture, local food production, and cultural traditions into tourism experiences that generate economic value while preserving local heritage. From a community development perspective, the sustainability of culinary tourism depends not only on the attractiveness of local cuisine but also on the extent to which local communities participate in creating, managing, and benefiting from tourism activities.

In Indonesia, particularly in Bali, culinary tourism represents an important opportunity to diversify tourism beyond its long-standing dependence on cultural and nature-based attractions. Bali currently has 243 officially designated tourism villages distributed across its nine regencies and municipalities, reflecting the provincial government's commitment to promoting community-based and sustainable tourism development. These tourism villages provide a strategic platform for integrating local cultural assets, culinary traditions, agriculture, fisheries, and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) into destination development. Culinary MSMEs play a crucial role in generating local employment, supporting household incomes, and strengthening local supply chains. Nevertheless, many tourism villages continue to face challenges in integrating local agricultural and fisheries products into tourism value chains, enhancing product innovation and destination branding, and expanding market access. As a result, local cuisine remains largely positioned as a complementary tourism product rather than a strategic driver of destination competitiveness and inclusive rural development. Strengthening culinary tourism within tourism villages therefore represents an important opportunity to increase local value creation, improve community livelihoods, and diversify Bali's tourism economy while reinforcing the sustainability of rural destinations.

Community empowerment provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for understanding how culinary tourism contributes to sustainable rural development. Empowerment extends beyond community participation as service providers and emphasises local capacity building, equitable access to economic opportunities, meaningful participation in decision-making, and community control over tourism resources and development processes (Saarinen, 2021; Scheyvens, 1999). To examine these processes, this study employs value chain analysis as an analytical framework for understanding how economic value is created and distributed among tourism stakeholders, while sustainable rural tourism serves as the expected development outcome. This integrated perspective enables a more comprehensive understanding of how culinary tourism can strengthen local economies, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance destination sustainability through active community participation.

Although previous studies have examined culinary tourism, community empowerment, and tourism value chains, important gaps remain. Theoretically, these concepts have largely been investigated independently, resulting in limited understanding of their interrelationships within sustainable rural tourism. Empirically, most studies focus on single destinations, providing little comparative evidence regarding how different culinary tourism models influence community empowerment. Contextually, research in Bali remains limited despite its rich culinary heritage and diverse tourism villages. To address these gaps, this study adopts a multiple-case study approach involving three tourism villages with

distinctive culinary characteristics: Serangan, which represents seafood-based culinary tourism; Sebatu, which integrates agricultural and farm-to-table experiences; and Aan, which preserves traditional Balinese culinary heritage. The diversity of these cases enables a richer understanding of how different local resource bases shape community participation and tourism development.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is culinary tourism developed across Serangan, Sebatu, and Aan Tourism Villages? (2) How do local communities participate in and benefit from the culinary tourism value chain? (3) What factors facilitate or constrain community empowerment in culinary tourism development? (4) How can the empirical findings be synthesised into an integrative conceptual model for sustainable rural tourism development? By answering these questions, this study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it advances community-based tourism research by integrating culinary tourism, community empowerment, and value chain analysis within a unified analytical framework. Second, it develops an empirically grounded integrative conceptual model explaining how culinary tourism contributes to sustainable rural tourism through community empowerment. Third, it provides practical recommendations for policymakers, destination managers, and local communities seeking to strengthen inclusive, resilient, and sustainable tourism development in Bali and other rural destinations with similar characteristics.

2 Research Methodology

A qualitative multiple-case study was conducted to explore how culinary tourism supports community empowerment and sustainable rural tourism in three tourism villages in Bali. The design facilitated comparisons across cases to reveal shared themes and contextual variations. (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted in Serangan Tourism Village, Sebatu Tourism Village, and Aan Tourism Village, which were purposively selected because they represent distinctive community-based culinary tourism models based on coastal seafood, agricultural experiences, and traditional Balinese cuisine, respectively.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants with direct knowledge and experience of culinary tourism development. A total of 18 key informants participated in the study, comprising three tourism village managers, three representatives of tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis), three culinary entrepreneurs, two fishers, one farmer, three community leaders, and three tourists. These participants represented both the supply and demand sides of the tourism system. Fieldwork was conducted over a four-month period (Mart–June 2026) using four complementary methods: semi-structured in-depth interviews, three focus group discussions (one in each tourism village involving key community stakeholders), participant observation, and document analysis. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved.

Data were analysed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), The data were analyzed through condensation, display, and conclusion verification. An iterative coding process was applied during data collection, followed by cross-case analysis to

examine common themes and contextual variations in culinary tourism's contribution to community empowerment and sustainable rural tourism.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source, method, and case triangulation were employed by systematically comparing evidence obtained from different stakeholder groups, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations, and documentary sources across the three tourism villages. Emerging interpretations were continuously refined through iterative analysis, while member checking with selected informants was undertaken to verify the consistency and credibility of the findings, thereby strengthening the dependability and confirmability of the research.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Reframing Culinary Tourism as Experiential and Identity-Based Development

The empirical evidence across the three case study villages demonstrates that culinary tourism in Bali has evolved beyond food consumption into an experience-centred form of rural tourism in which gastronomy functions as a medium for communicating local identity, cultural heritage, and everyday community life. Interview data consistently revealed that visitors valued culinary experiences not solely because of the food itself, but because these experiences enabled them to engage with local traditions, production practices, and community narratives. Field observations further supported these findings by showing that culinary activities were embedded within the everyday social and economic practices of local communities, allowing visitors to experience not only the final products but also the processes, environments, and cultural meanings behind local cuisine. Although each village offers distinctive culinary resources, a common pattern emerged whereby food was deliberately integrated into tourism experiences that reflected the social and cultural characteristics of each destination.

In Serangan, seafood experiences were closely connected with the livelihoods of local fishers and coastal traditions. One informant explained that “Serangan seeks to highlight fresh seafood as the village’s culinary strength because it represents our coastal identity and the freshness of local catches.” This perspective was reinforced through field observations of local seafood restaurants and food stalls, where freshly harvested marine products were displayed, processed, and served directly to visitors. The interaction between seafood suppliers, culinary operators, and visitors illustrated how local gastronomy reflects the relationship between coastal resources, community livelihoods, and tourism experiences. Thus, seafood in Serangan functions not merely as a culinary attraction but as a representation of maritime identity and a mechanism for differentiating the destination.

Similarly, in Sebatu, locally produced coffee and agricultural activities were integrated into farm-based tourism experiences, enabling visitors to engage with farming practices, local production systems, and rural livelihoods. In contrast, Aan positioned traditional snacks and Balinese culinary practices as expressions of cultural heritage. Field observations in Aan revealed that traditional food preparation activities remained closely

associated with household practices and community interactions, where local women and culinary entrepreneurs continued to produce traditional snacks using inherited knowledge and techniques. These observations demonstrate that culinary tourism in Aan operates not only as a tourism activity but also as a platform for preserving intergenerational knowledge transfer and maintaining cultural continuity. Collectively, these cross-case findings indicate that gastronomy has become an experiential resource through which destinations communicate their unique identities rather than merely offering food products to visitors.

This cross-case pattern supports previous studies that conceptualize gastronomic tourism as a mechanism for constructing place identity through the interaction between food, culture, and the social space of destinations (Stalmirska & Ali, 2025). It also aligns with the perspective of Critical Tourism Studies, which argues that gastronomic experiences constitute spaces where cultural meanings are negotiated and social relationships between visitors and host communities are continuously constructed (Cheng et al., 2025). However, the present study extends this literature by demonstrating that the construction of gastronomic identity is fundamentally community-driven. Rather than emerging solely from the uniqueness of culinary products, destination identity is co-created through the interaction between local resources, cultural traditions, community participation, and the narratives communicated to visitors. Consequently, traditional Balinese dishes, including lawar, babi guling, and seafood-based dishes, should be understood not merely as tourism attractions but as cultural assets that preserve heritage, strengthen destination identity, and generate meaningful tourism experiences that enhance emotional attachment and destination loyalty (Ellis et al., 2018; Richards, 2018; Stone et al., 2018).

Despite these strengths, the findings also reveal a recurring challenge across the three villages: maintaining culinary authenticity while responding to the commercial demands of tourism markets. Product standardization, flavour adaptation, packaging innovation, and digital marketing were evident across cases as strategies for improving market competitiveness without abandoning local culinary identity. These findings suggest that authenticity is not a static attribute but a dynamic process of negotiation between cultural preservation and economic adaptation, supporting the arguments of Cheng et al. (2025 and loyd-parkes & Filipponi, (2025). At the same time, the evidence indicates that communities continue to play a central role in safeguarding the cultural meanings embedded in local cuisine, enabling authenticity to remain a significant determinant of memorable gastronomic experiences, place attachment, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty (Eck & Zielinski, 2026; Koufodonstis & Gaki, 2025; Stone et al., 2017). These findings indicate that culinary authenticity should be understood not only as an experiential outcome perceived by tourists but also as a community-based governance process through which local communities retain authority over the production, representation, and transmission of culinary heritage while adapting to changing tourism markets.

3.2 Community Power as the Core of Rural Tourism Transformation

The empirical evidence across the three tourism villages demonstrates that local communities constitute the primary actors in developing and sustaining culinary tourism,

although their roles vary according to each village's socio-economic and cultural context. As one tourism village manager explained, "The tourism village cannot develop without the community because they are the owners of the culture, the culinary traditions, and the tourism experiences that visitors come to enjoy." This statement illustrates that community members are regarded not merely as tourism service providers but as the custodians of local knowledge and cultural assets. In Serangan, local fishers, seafood entrepreneurs, Pokdarwis (community-based Tourism Awareness Group), the village government, and the desa adat (Balinese customary village institution) collaboratively maintain the seafood-based tourism experience by linking fishing activities with culinary services and destination promotion. In Sebatu, farmers, coffee producers, culinary micro-enterprises, Pokdarwis, village authorities, and the desa adat integrate agricultural production, traditional food practices, and agritourism experiences, allowing visitors to engage directly with local farming systems and rural livelihoods. Similarly, in Aan, culinary entrepreneurs, women's groups, Pokdarwis, village government, and the desa adat play an important role in preserving traditional Balinese snacks and culinary knowledge while incorporating them into tourism activities. Across the three cases, community members were involved throughout the culinary tourism value chain, from food production and processing to hospitality services and visitor experiences, indicating that local communities function not merely as beneficiaries of tourism but as the principal agents responsible for maintaining culinary heritage and shaping destination identity. The cross-case analysis therefore suggests that the success of culinary tourism depends not only on the availability of local resources but also on communities' capacity to transform these resources into authentic tourism experiences rooted in local knowledge, cultural practices, and collective participation.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal a recurring pattern across the three villages in which community participation remains stronger at the operational than at the strategic level. Although local residents actively manage culinary production, tourism services, and cultural activities, major decisions regarding tourism planning, infrastructure development, promotional strategies, and policy direction continue to be largely coordinated by village governments and other institutional stakeholders. Interviews with community representatives further indicated that local participation in formal decision-making processes is often consultative rather than decisive. This empirical pattern reflects the distinction between participation and empowerment discussed by Tosun (2000) and Scheyvens & Watt (2021), demonstrating that involvement in tourism activities does not automatically translate into authority over tourism governance or resource management. Accordingly, the findings highlight the need to strengthen community empowerment through greater participation in planning, institutional capacity building, and more inclusive governance arrangements that enable local communities to influence the long-term development of rural tourism destinations.

The cross-case comparison further indicates that villages exhibiting stronger collaboration among village governments, desa adat, Pokdarwis, producer groups, and local enterprises were better able to integrate culinary resources, cultural heritage, and tourism experiences into coherent destination products. Rather than functioning solely as labour providers or service operators, community members acted as custodians of culinary

knowledge, local traditions, and destination narratives that differentiated each village from competing destinations. These findings reinforce previous studies demonstrating that community-led tourism enhances visitor trust, engagement, and destination loyalty by creating more authentic interactions between tourists and host communities (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Scheyvens & Watt, 2021). These findings indicate that culinary authenticity should be understood not only as an experiential outcome perceived by tourists but also as a community-based governance process through which local communities retain authority over the production, representation, and transmission of culinary heritage while adapting to changing tourism markets.

3.3 Sustainability Tensions: Between Growth, Inclusion, and Environmental Limits

The empirical evidence across the three tourism villages demonstrates that culinary tourism has generated significant economic and socio-cultural benefits while simultaneously exposing important sustainability challenges. In Serangan, seafood-based tourism has created new income opportunities for fishers, culinary entrepreneurs, and local tourism businesses by strengthening the connection between fisheries and tourism activities. However, participants also highlighted concerns regarding marine waste, increasing plastic use from food packaging, and the need to better manage coastal environmental quality as visitor numbers continue to grow. In Sebatu, the integration of local coffee production, agriculture, and culinary tourism has diversified household livelihoods and reinforced the value of traditional farming practices. Nevertheless, stakeholders acknowledged continuing challenges related to product innovation, marketing capacity, and maintaining agricultural sustainability amid changing tourism demand. In Aan, the preservation of traditional Balinese snacks has strengthened cultural identity and created additional economic opportunities for local micro-enterprises and women's groups, although limited promotion, human resource capacity, and institutional coordination continue to constrain tourism development. Across the three cases, respondents consistently perceived culinary tourism as an important mechanism for improving local livelihoods and preserving cultural heritage, while recognizing that long-term sustainability requires stronger institutional capacity and more effective environmental management. As one community representative explained, "The community should not only be involved when tourism activities are implemented; we need to be involved from the beginning when plans and decisions about the future of the tourism village are discussed." This statement highlights that local participation is perceived not merely as operational involvement but as a prerequisite for ensuring that tourism development reflects community aspirations and long-term sustainability objectives.

The cross-case analysis further reveals that the sustainability of rural culinary tourism depends less on tourism growth itself than on the ability of communities to utilize local resources through collaborative governance and inclusive participation. Despite differences in local products and tourism characteristics, all three villages relied on locally sourced

ingredients, traditional culinary knowledge, and community participation to create authentic tourism experiences while retaining economic benefits within the local economy. These recurring patterns suggest that community participation and local resource utilization are fundamental mechanisms linking economic development with cultural preservation and social inclusion. This finding supports previous studies demonstrating that community empowerment enhances residents' well-being, strengthens local ownership, and promotes more inclusive destination governance (Lee, 2013; Okazaki, 2008; Scheyvens & Watt, 2021; Tosun, 2000). At the same time, the three cases consistently identified limited human resource capacity, insufficient product innovation, fragmented institutional coordination, and weak environmental management as continuing barriers to the long-term sustainability of community-based culinary tourism, reinforcing challenges reported in previous studies of developing tourism destinations (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Scheyvens & Watt, 2021; UN Tourism, 2024).

A further cross-case finding concerns the relatively limited integration of environmental sustainability within destination management. While economic and socio-cultural objectives were consistently prioritized across the three villages, environmental practices, including food waste reduction, plastic management, resource efficiency, and circular food systems, were generally implemented on a limited or fragmented basis. This finding suggests that environmental sustainability remains the least developed dimension of rural culinary tourism despite growing visitor demand and expanding tourism activities. The empirical evidence therefore supports the broader argument that sustainable gastronomic tourism requires a more balanced integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives (Sánchez-Sánchez et al., 2025; UNWTO, 2019). It also resonates with the concept of circular gastronomy, which emphasizes local sourcing, resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable food systems as foundations for resilient tourism development (Gossling et al., 2018). Building upon these perspectives, the findings indicate that the long-term sustainability of rural culinary tourism depends not only on environmental protection but also on governance arrangements integrating community empowerment, collaborative institutions, and environmental innovation.

3.4 Toward an Integrative Model: Culinary Tourism, Empowerment, and Sustainability

The Integrated Community-Based Culinary Tourism Framework for Sustainable Rural Tourism Development was developed through the synthesis of the empirical findings from the three tourism villages and relevant theoretical perspectives. The framework illustrates how local resources, community empowerment, culinary authenticity, and integrated food value chains interact to generate sustainable rural tourism outcomes. Rather than portraying culinary tourism solely as a tourism attraction, the framework conceptualises it as a community-based development system in which food serves as the medium for creating economic, social, cultural, and experiential value. Community Empowerment Theory

provides the principal theoretical foundation (Saarinen, 2021; Scheyvens, 1999), while Value Chain Theory explains the mechanisms through which local resources are transformed into value-added tourism products (Mitchell & Ashley, 2009). Sustainable Development Theory provides the overarching framework for understanding how these processes contribute to long-term economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability (UN Tourism, 2024).

The framework begins with three interrelated foundational elements: theoretical foundations, local resources, and enabling factors. Local food resources, traditional gastronomy, agricultural resources, cultural heritage, community knowledge, social capital, local SMEs, governance support, public policy, collaboration, and market demand collectively represent the assets that enable culinary tourism development. Previous studies have shown that local food, cultural heritage, and community assets constitute strategic resources for destination differentiation and rural tourism competitiveness (Aulet, 2021; Hall & Sharples, 2002; Richards, 2021). The empirical findings from Serangan, Sebatu, and Aan further demonstrate that although each village possesses different culinary resources, successful tourism development depends on the ability of local communities to transform these assets into distinctive visitor experiences through collaboration, local leadership, and community participation. These enabling factors therefore provide the foundation upon which community-based culinary tourism is developed.

At the centre of the framework is the integrated value creation mechanism, where community empowerment, culinary authenticity, and the food value chain operate as mutually reinforcing processes. Community empowerment strengthens local capacity through participation, entrepreneurship, leadership, and resource control, enabling communities to influence tourism development beyond operational activities (Saarinen, 2021; Scheyvens, 1999). Culinary authenticity preserves local identity by integrating traditional knowledge, gastronomic heritage, and cultural interpretation into visitor experiences (Ellis et al., 2018; Richards, 2021). These two components support the food value chain, encompassing food production, processing, culinary innovation, authentic tourist experiences, marketing, and destination governance, thereby creating greater local value throughout the tourism system (Mitchell & Ashley, 2009; Turčinović et al., 2025). The interaction among these elements facilitates value co-creation, whereby communities, tourism enterprises, government institutions, and visitors jointly generate economic, social, cultural, experiential, and destination value while reinforcing local identity and destination competitiveness.

The framework further demonstrates that value co-creation produces multidimensional outcomes, including economic, social, cultural, experiential value, and destination competitiveness, which subsequently contribute to broader sustainability outcomes encompassing economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability. These sustainability outcomes ultimately support inclusive local economic development, community well-being, cultural preservation, and the long-term competitiveness of rural tourism destinations. The feedback loop represented by adaptive governance, innovation, and continuous learning highlights that community-based culinary tourism is a dynamic and adaptive development process requiring continuous institutional learning, stakeholder

collaboration, and product innovation to respond to changing market conditions and sustainability challenges (Saarinen, 2021; UN Tourism, 2024). Accordingly, the framework proposed in this study demonstrates that sustainable rural tourism is achieved not through culinary attractions alone but through the continuous interaction between empowered communities, integrated food value chains, culinary authenticity, collaborative governance, and adaptive learning systems.

4 Conclusion

This study investigated how culinary tourism is developed across Serangan, Sebatu, and Aan Tourism Villages, how local communities participate in the culinary tourism value chain, and how these experiences can be synthesised into an integrative model for sustainable rural tourism development. The findings demonstrate that each village has developed a distinctive culinary tourism model based on its local resources: seafood-based culinary experiences in Serangan, farm-to-table tourism in Sebatu, and traditional culinary heritage in Aan. Across the three cases, community participation was strongest in food production, culinary service delivery, and cultural interpretation, while involvement in strategic planning, destination branding, and tourism governance remained relatively limited. These findings indicate that culinary tourism contributes to sustainable rural tourism when local communities actively participate throughout the tourism value chain and local culinary resources are integrated into destination experiences.

Based on these empirical findings, this study makes three principal contributions. First, it demonstrates through comparative evidence from Serangan, Sebatu, and Aan that culinary tourism functions as an experiential and identity-based form of rural tourism rather than merely a food product. Second, it shows that community empowerment is strengthened when local communities participate across the culinary tourism value chain, although their involvement in strategic planning and destination governance remains limited. Third, it develops the Integrated Community-Based Culinary Tourism Framework for Sustainable Rural Tourism Development, which synthesises empirical findings with community empowerment, value chain, and sustainable tourism perspectives. The framework provides an empirically grounded explanation of how community empowerment links culinary tourism with sustainable rural tourism outcomes through more integrated value creation and governance.

The findings also provide several practical implications. Local governments should establish formal mechanisms that enable community representatives to participate in tourism planning and decision-making processes. Tourism village managers should develop transparent systems for monitoring community participation and the distribution of tourism benefits. Culinary MSMEs should be supported through continuous training in product standardisation, food safety, packaging, storytelling, and digital marketing to strengthen destination competitiveness. In addition, tourism villages should adopt practical sustainability indicators, including reducing food waste and single-use plastics, improving water-use efficiency, and increasing the utilisation of locally sourced ingredients throughout the culinary tourism value chain.

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on only three tourism villages in Bali, limiting the transferability of the findings to other destination contexts. Second, the qualitative multiple-case study design emphasises contextual understanding rather than statistical generalisation. Third, the number of key informants was relatively limited, although data saturation was achieved through interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis. Fourth, the three tourism villages represent different stages of tourism development, which may influence the observed patterns of community participation and culinary tourism practices. Finally, the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework have not yet been empirically tested. Future research is therefore encouraged to validate the framework using quantitative or mixed-method approaches across a broader range of tourism villages and regional contexts.

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