



Beyond Success and Failure: Explaining Community-Based Tourism Stagnation through Institutional Voids

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors that explain the stagnation of community-based tourism (CBT) in Sambeng Village, part of the Balai Ekonomi Desa (Balkondes) program in Indonesia's Borobudur super-priority tourism destination. Adopting a qualitative single-case study design, the research draws on 22 semi-structured interviews with villagers, local elites, government officials, and external stakeholders, complemented by field observations and document analysis. Findings indicate that stagnation is not the result of a single determinant but rather an interplay of interrelated conditions. Four key factors emerged: tokenistic participation that reduced villagers to symbolic roles, the absence of empowerment across economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions, institutional voids that left the Balkondes without governance anchors, and incompatibility between tourism initiatives and agrarian livelihoods. Elite competition further generated institutional inertia, leading to what this study conceptualizes as "elite paralysis," a condition preventing both capture and mobilization. The research contributes to CBT scholarship by expanding the typology of outcomes beyond success and failure to include non-emergence under institutional voids. Empirically, it offers new insights from a neglected case in a flagship national program. Practically, it highlights the risks of infrastructure-first approaches and underscores the need for institution-building, leadership development, and trust formation to foster sustainable CBT.

INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has, over the past three decades, developed into one of the most prominent paradigms in contemporary tourism studies. Born in the late twentieth century as a reaction against the social and ecological costs of mass tourism, CBT presents a fundamentally different vision of development. Instead of positioning communities as passive recipients of tourism, community-based tourism (CBT) emphasizes their role as active participants who seek to preserve cultural traditions, protect natural landscapes, and improve local livelihoods, as seen in the case of the Kamoro people in Papua, Indonesia, who engage with tourism on their own terms while facing significant social, economic, and institutional challenges (Anindhita et al., 2024). As demonstrated by community-driven ecotourism models that support livelihoods while preserving the environment and cultural heritage, the paradigm shift from top-down tourism planning toward community-driven development has been hailed for its capacity to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability and cultural preservation.

The multidimensional promise of CBT explains its global prominence. Economically, it is expected to generate more equitable benefit distribution and provide poverty alleviation in rural and peripheral areas. Socially, CBT projects are credited with strengthening trust, solidarity, and cooperation among residents. Culturally, they are framed as mechanisms for revitalizing indigenous traditions and protecting fragile heritage, transforming culture from a liability into an asset. Community-based tourism (CBT) has also been recognized for its ability to create both commercial and social value by strengthening local businesses and resident well-being, offering immersive cultural experiences for tourists, and promoting sustainable practices that reduce economic leakages, enhances local economic

development, and safeguard environmental carrying capacities. The comprehensive scope of these benefits has elevated CBT into a central position not only in academic scholarship but also in policy agendas across the Global South. CBT has emerged as a strategic response to rural depopulation by mobilizing community members and their resources, strengthening social relations, and promoting resilience and collective well-being beyond its role as an economic alternative.

Despite these promises, however, CBT outcomes have been strikingly uneven. A large body of research highlights cases of success, where tourism has indeed empowered communities, fostered resilience, and generated sustainable benefits. Mae Kampong in Thailand, for example, is widely cited as a case where cohesive leadership, strong institutions, and cultural authenticity have enabled sustainability (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). In Indonesia, Candirejo Village near Borobudur represents a long-standing case of CBT resilience, rooted in cooperatives established in the late 1990s that facilitated meaningful community ownership of tourism activities (Mitchell & Reid, 2001). In Latin America, indigenous communities in Peru and Bolivia have used communitarian tourism to strengthen cultural identity and generate new income streams, further demonstrating the transformative potential of CBT (Zorn & Farthing, 2007).

The literature celebrating these cases has been invaluable in demonstrating that CBT can deliver on its promises when conditions are favorable. However, it also creates a strong success bias. The predominance of positive narratives risks producing an overly optimistic impression that CBT is universally replicable, when in fact its performance is deeply context-specific (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). Three limitations are particularly evident. First, the overrepresentation of exemplary

cases creates an illusion of universal applicability. Second, there is a geographical skew, research is concentrated on poorer nations, while regions like Eastern Europe and Indigenous North America are noticeably underrepresented (Tuyen et al., 2025). Third, fragile, stagnated, or non-emergent CBT cases remain neglected. The lack of defined frameworks to guide development and adverse socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions have caused numerous projects to fail to produce the intended advantages (Zielinski et al., 2021).

Recent reviews of CBT scholarship reinforce this imbalance. Research output has expanded dramatically since the early 2000, with sharp growth after 2010 as global policy discourse shifted toward sustainable tourism and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Much of this expansion is concentrated in Asia and Latin America, particularly in Thailand, Indonesia, and Peru, while African contexts remain comparatively underrepresented. Within this growing body of literature, three thematic orientations dominate: sustainability and empowerment, participation and governance, and cultural heritage and identity (López-Guzmán et al., 2011; Scheyvens, 1999). Yet, crucial issues such as stagnation, non-emergence, and institutional voids occupy only a marginal position, seldom examined in depth or theorized as distinct trajectories. This confirms earlier critiques that CBT research privileges thriving cases while overlooking dormant or stagnated initiatives.

The neglect of stagnation also reflects limitations in the theoretical tools commonly applied in CBT studies. The participation approach remains central, identification of barriers in developing countries. However, many studies assume that even tokenistic participation can eventually lead to deeper involvement. Evidence from stagnated contexts demonstrates the opposite: tokenism may entrench disengagement and reinforce distrust. Similarly, the empowerment framework introduced emphasizes the need for economic, social, psychological, and political empowerment. Yet, while empowerment is often analyzed dimension by dimension, stagnated projects show the consequences of comprehensive absence, alienation rather than resilience (Tosun, 2000).

Institutional perspectives add further nuance. Described institutions as the “rules of the game” shaping collective action, while highlighted processes of institutional layering and drift. In strong institutional contexts, externally induced projects may be absorbed into existing structures. In weak contexts, however, external interventions produce institutional voids: infrastructure without governance anchors. This study advances the debate by proposing “elite paralysis” as a novel condition, where competition among elites blocks both collective mobilization and elite capture, leaving projects dormant (Hendrikse, 2022).

Indonesia provides a particularly strategic context to examine this neglected trajectory. Tourism has been promoted nationally as a driver of inclusive growth, poverty alleviation, and cultural revitalization (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2020). Five Super-Priority Tourism Destinations (SPTDs) were designated: Borobudur, Lake Toba, Mandalika, Labuan Bajo, and Likupang. Borobudur, in particular, stands out as both a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a national icon, attracting millions of visitors annually.

To distribute tourism benefits beyond the Borobudur temple precinct, the government launched the Balai Ekonomi Desa (Balkondes) program in 2017. Funded by CSR budgets of State-Owned Enterprises, Balkondes facilities were designed as multifunctional CBT hubs, with guesthouses, meeting halls, and

product exhibition spaces. Symbolically, they embodied the vision of participatory development. Nevertheless, their outcomes diverged: Karangrejo experienced fragile success followed by decline, Candirejo absorbed the Balkondes without major change, and Sambeng stagnated despite infrastructure, becoming what villagers called “a dead building.”

Fieldwork shows that stagnation in Sambeng arises from fragmented leadership, weak networks, and a lack of legitimacy. Elites competed for symbolic authority but failed to mobilize collective action. Villagers perceived the facility as imposed from above, “a project from Jakarta,” rather than a community-owned initiative. The result was institutional inertia: neither elite capture nor collective ownership, but elite paralysis. Sambeng thus exemplifies the paradox of infrastructure-first development: physical presence without social life.

This study, therefore, asks: What are the critical factors that explain why community-based tourism does not take off in Sambeng Village, Borobudur? Addressing this question contributes to scholarship in several ways. The novelty lies in conceptualizing stagnation as a third trajectory of CBT outcomes, distinct from success and failure. Sambeng illustrates that stagnation is not an anomaly but a predictable outcome under conditions of institutional voids, absent empowerment, and livelihood incompatibility.

The significance of this research is threefold. Theoretically, it expands the typology of CBT outcomes and introduces elite paralysis as a novel explanatory category. Empirically, it enriches scholarship by documenting a neglected case from Indonesia's flagship tourism program, counterbalancing celebratory narratives. Practically, it warns policymakers of the risks of infrastructure-first approaches and emphasizes the need for institution-building, leadership development, and trust formation as preconditions for sustainable CBT.

Beyond Indonesia, this study situates Sambeng within broader international debates. Stagnation has been observed in Peru, yet these have rarely been theorized as non-emergence trajectories. By foregrounding Sambeng, this research demonstrates that stagnation is not an Indonesian anomaly but a recurrent challenge across the Global South. It thus enhances international relevance, offering conceptual and practical insights for sustainable tourism in diverse contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in introducing stagnation and elite paralysis into the conceptual vocabulary of CBT. While much of the literature highlights empowerment and participation as drivers of success and elite capture as a cause of failure, Sambeng reveals a different dynamic: projects can remain dormant when elites block each other and when empowerment is absent across all dimensions. By theorizing stagnation as a distinct trajectory, this research fills a critical gap in the literature.

Empirically, Sambeng provides evidence from Indonesia's Balkondes program, a flagship yet underexplored initiative in global scholarship. Practically, it demonstrates that infrastructure-driven interventions without governance anchoring are prone to failure, reinforcing the lesson that governance must precede construction. Thus, the study contributes to theory, evidence, and policy by showing that sustainable CBT requires not just physical facilities but also institution-building, leadership, and trust.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion.

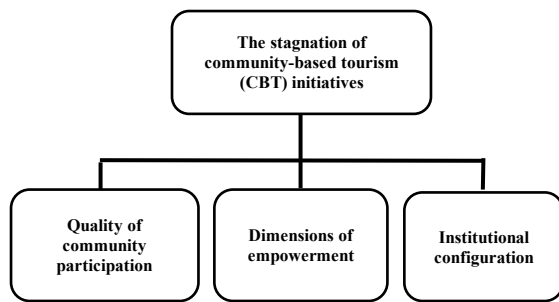


Figure 1. Theoretical framework
Source: Authors' construct, 2025

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to capture an in-depth understanding of the conditions underlying the stagnation of community-based tourism (CBT) in Sambeng Village. Following (Yin, 2018), a single case study approach was adopted because Sambeng represents a critical case of CBT non-emergence: a formally designated site with full infrastructure but no functional outcomes. The choice of a single-case design was justified to generate rich contextual insights and advance theoretical discussions on institutional voids and stagnation pathways in CBT development (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Sambeng was selected based on three criteria. First, it is located within the Borobudur Super-Priority Tourism Destination, where government investment in rural tourism is significant. Second, unlike neighboring villages such as Candirejo and Karangrejo, Sambeng has failed to develop sustainable CBT practices despite comparable infrastructure support from the Balai Ekonomi Desa (Balkondes) program. Third, Sambeng illustrates a trajectory of stagnation that allows meaningful comparison with more successful and failed cases in the same policy environment.

The study relied on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews and observations, while secondary data included policy documents, project reports, and media coverage. Using purposive sampling, 22 informants were selected to ensure representation from multiple stakeholder categories: community actors (village leaders, elites, ordinary villagers), external actors (tourism operators, NGOs, academic experts), and bureaucratic actors (district and sub-district officials, SOE representatives). This multi-actor design enhanced the validity of findings through triangulation (Bungin, 2022).

Table 1. List of Informants

Category	Position/Role	Number of Informants
Community actors	Village head & staff	2
	Local elites (farmer leaders, elders)	3
	Ordinary villagers (youth, women)	5
External actors	Local tourism operators	2
	NGO representatives	2
	Academic/experts on CBT	2
Bureaucratic actors	Sub-district officials	2
	District tourism office staff	2
	Representatives from SOEs (CSR)	2
Total		22

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Source: Primary Data, 2025

Data collection involved three complementary techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in Sambeng and via online platforms (Zoom and WhatsApp), lasting 45–60 minutes each. All interviews were conducted with informed consent and continued until data saturation was achieved. Second, field observations were carried out to assess the physical use of Balkondes' facilities, community interactions, and tourism-related activities. Third, document analysis provided a contextual understanding of official policies, CSR reports, and media discourses that shaped the program.

All data were processed using qualitative content analysis, supported by NVivo 12. The analysis followed three stages: (1) descriptive coding of interview transcripts and field notes to capture issues such as participation, empowerment, and institutional support; (2) clustering of codes into broader themes such as leadership fragmentation, weak legitimacy, and institutional voids; and (3) theoretical interpretation using participation theory, empowerment frameworks, institutional theory, and diffusion of innovation (Allsop et al., 2022). Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents ensured reliability and validity, while reflexivity was maintained to account for the researcher's positionality.

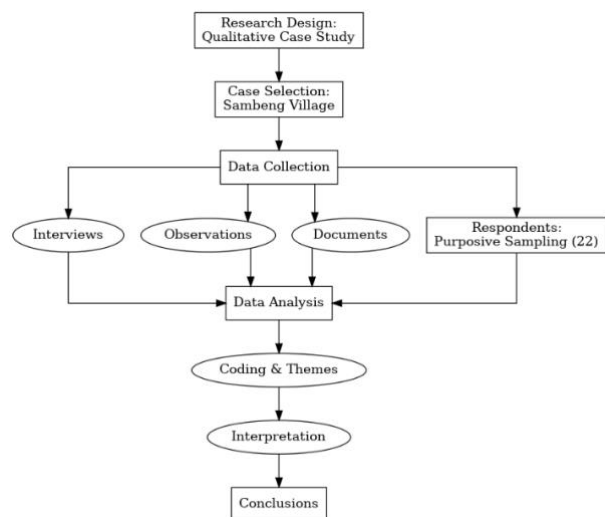


Figure 2. Research Methodology Flowchart
Source: Authors' construct, 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research identifies several key determinants that explain the stagnation of community-based tourism (CBT) in Sambeng Village. These determinants are categorized into three major themes: community participation, empowerment, and institutional-contextual configuration, as illustrated in Figure 1. Each theme reveals the sequential-causal conditions that prevented Sambeng from transforming its Balkondes facility into a functioning CBT hub.

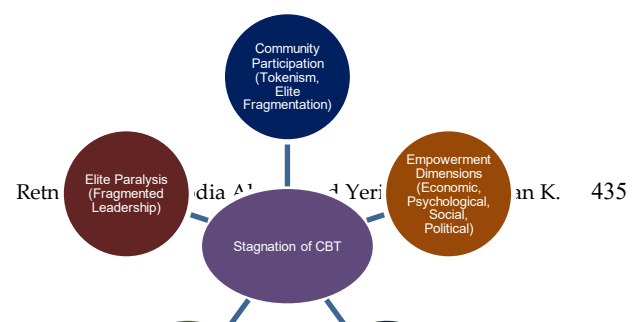


Figure 3. Determinants of stagnation in Sambeng Village

Table 2. Determinants of CBT Stagnation in Sambeng Village

Determinants of CBT Stagnation	Sub-Categories	Informants ^a	References ^b
Community Participation	(1) Tokenistic involvement in planning	12 (54.5%)	31 (14.7%)
	(2) Leadership fragmentation	9 (40.9%)	26 (12.3%)
	(3) Elite domination & competition	6 (27.3%)	18 (8.5%)
Empowerment	(1) Economic benefits absent	10 (45.5%)	28 (13.2%)
	(2) Weak cultural/psychological pride	7 (31.8%)	21 (9.9%)
	(3) Fragmented social ties	6 (27.3%)	17 (8.0%)
Institutional-Contextual	(4) Lack of political influence	5 (22.7%)	14 (6.6%)
	(1) Institutional voids (no governance anchors)	13 (59.1%)	35 (16.5%)
	(2) External project misfit	11 (50%)	29 (13.6%)
	(3) Low compatibility with agrarian livelihood	9 (40.9%)	25 (11.7%)
	(4) Lack of external networks/market access	8 (36.4%)	23 (10.8%)
Total		22 (100%)	212 (100%)

Note(s):

^a Percent frequency for the informants corresponds to the count of themes reported in the category/subcategory over the total of 22 informants in the research.

^b Percent frequency for the references corresponds to the count of references over the total of 212 references coded in NVivo 12. References include the themes informed by the informants.

Community Participation

Community participation has long been regarded as the cornerstone of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), providing legitimacy, ownership, and sustainability to initiatives that would otherwise remain externally imposed (Blackstock, 2005; Scheyvens, 1999). In Sambeng Village, however, participation stalled at a symbolic level and never progressed into meaningful involvement. Field data reveal that villagers attended meetings, signed attendance lists, and contributed labor during the construction of the Balai Ekonomi Desa (Balkondes). Nevertheless, they were excluded from planning, decision-making, and management. This finding resonates with Arnstein (2021) notion of “tokenism” but extends it by demonstrating tokenism as an endpoint rather than a transitional stage. As Informant 7 (June 14, 2024) explained: “We were asked to attend the meetings and sign our names, but we were never invited to discuss how the Balkondes should actually operate.”

This dynamic reflects a broader critique in CBT research: state-led initiatives often prioritize procedural compliance over substantive engagement (Ho et al., 2023; Niitamo, 2020). More importantly, Sambeng illustrates how tokenism can entrench disengagement. Once villagers realized their voices had no weight, they withdrew entirely, reinforcing perceptions of the Balkondes as an externally owned facility rather than a community project. As Informant 11 (June 21, 2024) noted: “For us,

the Balkondes is a government building, not something that belongs to our village.”

This withdrawal highlights the fragility of participatory claims in CBT. While Novelli et al., (2024) emphasize how frequent exclusion causes participation weariness and disengagement, Ahenkan et al., (2021) demonstrate how symbolic involvement reproduces elite rule. From an institutional perspective, Scheyvens & van der Watt (2021) contend that in the absence of structural support, involvement stays procedural and serves to deepen distrust rather than to empower. Thus, Sambeng's situation exemplifies a larger trend in CBT where tokenism reinforces disengagement rather than encouraging closer cooperation.

Participation was further undermined by leadership fragmentation. Unlike Candirejo, where cooperatives provided continuity, Sambeng lacked an institutional backbone to mediate between state investment and community practices. Local elites including former officials, wealthy farmers, and small entrepreneurs, competed for symbolic authority but consistently failed to cooperate. Village meetings became arenas of contestation rather than collaboration. As Informant 14 (June 25, 2024) recounted: “Every time we held a meeting, the discussion turned into arguments about who should be the leader. In the end, nothing was ever implemented.”

This pattern reflects what Tosun (2000) described as “structural barriers” to participation: centralized power combined with elite rivalries prevents communities from establishing functional governance arrangements. Comparative evidence reinforces this point. In Thailand, cohesive leadership has been decisive in sustaining CBT projects (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). In Vietnam, Huong et al. (2025) emphasize that sustainable leadership practices rooted in ethical decision-making and community trust are critical, and their absence leaves projects vulnerable to collapse. Sambeng contributes to this debate by showing that fragmentation in contexts of externally imposed infrastructure does not merely weaken coordination but produces outright paralysis.

Whereas earlier studies framed leadership weakness as reducing efficiency, Sambeng reveals that rivalry can create a governance vacuum. Villagers expected elites to act as intermediaries with the state, but their inability to cooperate left the Balkondes without legitimate authority. Informant 5 (June 27, 2024) summarized: “Nobody here really feels responsible for the Balkondes, because from the beginning it was never our idea.”

The third determinant of Sambeng's participation trap was elite domination and competition. Several informants noted that local elites sought to control the Balkondes but failed to translate their authority into tangible outcomes. Informant 9 (July 1, 2024) explained: “A few wealthy people tried to dominate the project, but in the end, nothing happened. They were only competing for recognition, not actually running any programs.”

This finding echoes global debates on elite capture in CBT, where powerful actors monopolize benefits at the expense of broader community interests (dos Santos et al., 2024; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Matiku et al., 2020;)

However, Sambeng provides a critical twist: in contexts where tourism never truly takes off, elite domination results not in capture but in paralysis. A dynamic also discussed in comparative governance studies (Ratiner et al., 2021). Unlike in Bali or Latin American villages, where elites consolidate control over tourism rents (Zorn & Farthing, 2007). Sambeng elites

competed only for symbolic authority, given the absence of substantive benefits. The result was a stalemate: elites blocked others from assuming leadership while simultaneously failing to mobilize collective action.

This dynamic, which can be termed “elite paralysis,” expands the vocabulary of CBT outcomes. It demonstrates that elite power can prevent institutionalization even in the absence of tangible rents, leading to empty structures and unused facilities. Sambeng, therefore, pushes the literature beyond the binary of elite capture versus community empowerment.

Table 3. Community Participation Dynamics in Sambeng

Determinant	Sambeng Evidence
Tokenism	Attendance lists, labor, no decision-making
Leadership Fragmentation	Rival elites, contested meetings, no institution
Elite Competition	Symbolic authority, no resource control

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Synthesizing these findings, Sambeng reveals a ‘participation trap’ in which tokenism eroded legitimacy, leadership fragmentation blocked institution-building, and elite competition generated paralysis. These forces were mutually reinforcing: tokenism delegitimized the project, fragmentation prevented cohesive leadership, and elite rivalries deepened mistrust. The combined effect was stagnation, with the Balkondes consistently described as a ‘dead building’ (Informants 7, 9, 11, 14, 15; June–July 2024).

International comparisons underscore the global relevance of this trap. Empirical work in Nepal shows that CBT/homestay initiatives can stagnate when local committees lack formal authority, resources or legitimacy to manage tourism activities effectively (Ghimire & Neupane, 2022; Rabindra Sapkota, 2020). Dahal et al. (2024) further documents how such institutional weaknesses impede recovery and reinforce stagnation after external shocks. In Peru, Zorn & Farthing (2007) described elite rivalries that hollowed out communitarian tourism. Sambeng resonates with these findings but extends them by showing how elite paralysis, not merely elite capture, shapes outcomes in contexts of non-emergence.



Figure 4. Participation Trap in Sambeng Village

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Theoretically, this case contributes three advances. First, it confirms long-standing critiques that meaningful participation is rare in state-led CBT interventions constrained by structural barriers (Arnstein, 2019; Tosun, 2000). Second, it complements evidence from cohesive cases such as Candirejo and Mae Kampong, which demonstrate resilience through strong leadership and deep participation, by offering the inverse: fragmentation leads to paralysis. Third, it introduces ‘elite paralysis’ as a distinct outcome, expanding CBT typologies beyond success and failure to include stagnation.

Recent scholarship further highlights the value of this contribution. Osuna et al. (2025) emphasize that institutional innovation at regional and destination levels shapes whether

participation becomes substantive. Similarly, the study of the institutional environment and tourism by Yue et al. (2024) reveals that weak formal institutions or health system deficits undermine trust and dampen engagement. Sambeng provides empirical confirmation that, in the absence of institutions, participation can regress into disengagement. Comparatively, Suyatna et al. (2024) show that in Nglanggeran, government authorities’ interventions coupled with elite capture limit the capacity for collective agency, reinforcing institutional voids in practice. By conceptualizing stagnation as predictable under such voids, this study strengthens emerging theoretical debates.

From a practical perspective, the Sambeng case illustrates the dangers of infrastructure-first development. By constructing Balkondes’ facilities without embedding participatory processes or cultivating leadership, external actors institutionalized tokenism and mistrust. This finding aligns with Hall (2019) warning that infrastructure-driven projects often create ‘white elephants’ in tourism development.

Policy implications are clear: before investing in infrastructure, governments and donors must diagnose the quality of local participation and leadership. Where fragmentation and mistrust prevail, the priority should be institution-building, cooperative strengthening, and trust formation rather than physical construction. Otherwise, as Sambeng demonstrates, projects risk producing what villagers themselves call a ‘dead building.’

The Sambeng case shows that stagnation was not accidental but predictable. Tokenism entrenched disengagement, leadership fragmentation produced paralysis, and elite competition prevented mobilization. Together, these dynamics created a participation trap that delegitimized the project and blocked institutionalization. By situating Sambeng within broader CBT debates, this study not only confirms existing theories but also contributes a new conceptual category, elite paralysis in non-emergent contexts. Sambeng underscores that CBT cannot thrive without genuine participation. Infrastructure alone is insufficient; without legitimacy, cohesion, and empowerment, projects remain dormant.

Empowerment Dimensions

The second determinant shaping Sambeng’s stagnation concerns the absence of empowerment across all four dimensions articulated by Scheyvens (1999): economic, psychological, social, and political. In successful CBT cases such as Candirejo in Central Java or Mae Kampong in Thailand, empowerment across these four dimensions has been shown to reinforce resilience and sustainability. In Sambeng, however, none of these dimensions materialized, creating a profound vacuum that prevented the institutionalization of CBT and entrenched stagnation.

Economic empowerment was minimal, sporadic, and highly uneven. A handful of villagers occasionally benefited from providing catering or selling handicrafts during official visits. However, these opportunities were rare, selective, and dependent on government-organized events rather than a steady flow of tourists. Informant 12 (July 3, 2024) explained: “Only certain people could sell food or handicrafts when government guests came; for everyone else, there was nothing.”

This lack of inclusion meant that the majority of households saw no tangible income from tourism-related activities. The Balkondes, intended as a catalyst for local livelihoods, instead reinforced perceptions of economic irrelevance. It confirms existing research that equitable distribution of benefits is crucial to sustain CBT. Sambeng, however, adds nuance: selective distribution

without continuous demand not only limits economic outcomes but also actively erodes collective motivation to participate. International comparisons reinforce this point. In Botswana, for instance (Miller et al., 2024), found that community trust declined sharply when a small elite monopolized tourism benefits. Similarly, in Tanzania, documented that without fair revenue-sharing, residents disengaged from CBT, viewing it as externally owned. Sambeng echoes these experiences but pushes further: economic exclusion here was not about monopolized benefits but about the complete absence of sustained demand, leaving villagers disillusioned (Mkonyi, 2018).

Psychological empowerment, understood as pride, identity, and self-confidence linked to tourism, was completely absent. Unlike in Candirejo, where tourism strengthened cultural pride and fostered appreciation for local traditions, Sambeng villagers never connected the Balkondes with heritage or identity. Agriculture remained the central marker of dignity, while tourism was perceived as marginal and externally imposed. Informant 8 (June 30, 2024) stated: *"We feel proud when we harvest rice or corn, but tourism here has nothing to do with who we are."*

This aligns with recent empirical and conceptual work showing that psychological empowerment among residents emerges when tourism resonates with local values and narratives (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021). Sambeng demonstrates the inverse: when tourism feels imposed, irrelevant, and detached from cultural narratives, it generates indifference rather than pride.

Globally, similar patterns have been observed. In Peru, Zorn & Farthing (2007) noted that communities disconnected from tourism identity rarely developed strong ownership over CBT projects. In Nepal, Shinde (2021) found that Buddhist communities in Lumbini resisted tourism initiatives that commodified sacred spaces, revealing the tensions between spiritual meanings and external tourism narratives. Sambeng enriches this literature by illustrating how psychological disempowerment is not simply the absence of pride but an active assertion of alternative identity, in this case, agriculture over tourism.

Social empowerment was not only weak but, in many respects, negative. Rather than creating solidarity and cooperation, the Balkondes exacerbated pre-existing divisions. Families aligned with certain elites sought to control the facility, while others disengaged entirely. Informant 15 (July 5, 2024) noted: *"Meetings often ended with fights about who should manage the Balkondes, and people stopped coming."*

Instead of strengthening trust, the Balkons became a symbol of division and mistrust. This finding challenges conventional assumptions in CBT literature, where tourism is often celebrated for building social capital (López-Guzmán et al., 2020; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). Sambeng demonstrates a novel trajectory: under weak institutions and elite rivalries, CBT can actually erode social cohesion, producing fragmentation rather than solidarity.

Comparative insights confirm the significance of this. In Mexico, according to Molinero & Alfonso (2020) & Santiago et al. (2022), externally directed cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) programs can exacerbate local rivalries and erode social cohesiveness when benefits are unclear or unequally dispersed. In Kenya empirical work likewise indicates that weakly institutionalized tourism projects exacerbate intergenerational tensions between youth and elders when governance structures fail to mediate access to benefits (Kihima & Musila, 2020; Odunga et al., 2024). Sambeng mirrors these outcomes, suggesting that

without transparent governance, CBT can catalyze conflict rather than cooperation.

Political empowerment, the capacity of communities to shape decisions and assert agency, was nonexistent. The village head and a small group of elites tightly controlled authority over the Balkondes. Ordinary villagers had no say in management or strategic choices. Informant 10 (June 28, 2024) recalled: *"The village head and his circle always made decisions about the Balkondes; ordinary villagers were never asked what we wanted."*

This finding confirms Scheyvens (1999) argument that political empowerment is indispensable for community ownership and aligns, who demonstrate that exclusion erodes legitimacy in Southeast Asian CBT projects. Sambeng provides empirical weight: when political exclusion coincides with absent economic and psychological benefits, there is no pathway for communities to reclaim control. Elsewhere, similar dynamics have been reported. In South Africa, Giampiccoli & Saayman (2018) note that political exclusion often leaves CBT projects as elite-driven ventures with little local legitimacy. Sambeng extends this evidence by showing that political exclusion, when combined with other disempowerments, produces a complete governance void.

Table 5. Empowerment Dimensions in Sambeng vs. Successful CBT Cases

Dimension	Sambeng Outcome	Comparative Success (e.g., Candirejo, Mae Kampong)
Economic	Minimal, selective, no sustained demand	Broad, equitable benefit distribution
Psychological	No pride, identity anchored in agriculture	Strong cultural pride, identity revitalization
Social	Division, mistrust, elite rivalry	Trust, cooperation, enhanced social capital
Political	Authority concentrated in elites	Broad-based decision-making and legitimacy

Source: Primary Data, 2025

A synthesized account from informants captured the collective experience: *"The Balkondes brought no income, no pride, no unity, and no voice for us. It was never our project, so we never felt it belonged to us."* (Informants 8, 10, 12, and 15; June 28–July 5, 2024). Taken together, Sambeng exemplifies the negative extreme of Scheyvens' empowerment framework. Instead of reinforcing resilience, the absence of empowerment across all dimensions created a vacuum in which CBT could not institutionalize.

Theoretically, this extends Scheyvens (1999) model by demonstrating how disempowerment is not merely the absence of empowerment but an active process that generates fragmentation, apathy, and alienation. Practically, it illustrates the danger of assuming that physical infrastructure can substitute for empowerment. Without mechanisms to ensure fair benefits, cultural resonance, social cooperation, and political agency, CBT projects risk becoming hollow institutions, what Sambeng villagers called "dead buildings."

In sum, Sambeng highlights how disempowerment across economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions converged to prevent CBT's emergence. Where successful cases like Candirejo thrived on multidimensional empowerment, Sambeng's Balkondes became a symbol of alienation. By theorizing this vacuum of empowerment, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of CBT outcomes. It underscores the need for

participatory, culturally grounded, and politically inclusive design in tourism development.

Institutional and Contextual Configuration

The third determinant shaping the stagnation of community-based tourism (CBT) in Sambeng concerns its institutional and contextual environment. This case illustrates with clarity what [Khanna & Palepu \(2010\)](#) call *institutional voids*: contexts where formal governance is absent, informal norms provide insufficient support, and external actors withdraw before local capacity can be consolidated. Unlike Candirejo, where a cooperative structure acted as an enduring anchor for CBT, Sambeng lacked any functioning community organization capable of managing the Balai Ekonomi Desa (Balkondes). As Informant 6 (June 20, 2024) put it: “There was no institution here to take care of the Balkondes. It was built, but no one was prepared to manage it.”

In Sambeng, the Balkondes represented what [Mahoney & Thelen \(2009\)](#) term *institutional layering*, an external structure superimposed on weak or absent local institutions. However, while layering can sometimes enrich governance (as in Candirejo, where cooperatives absorbed external facilities), in Sambeng, the absence of embedded mechanisms produced stagnation. Villagers repeatedly described the Balkondes as a “dead building,” not because of a lack of infrastructure but because of the absence of institutions to animate it. Earlier research emphasizes that institutional anchoring is vital to sustain CBT initiatives ([Goodwin & Santilli, 2009](#); [López-Guzmán et al., 2011](#)). In Sambeng, no cooperative, association, or formal body assumed stewardship. Informants consistently described the Balkondes as a structure without caretakers. Empirical studies confirm that institution-building is a prerequisite for community ownership in CBT ([Pasanchay & Schott, 2021](#); [Quang et al., 2023](#)).

Comparative examples reinforce this insight. In Botswana, [Miller et al., \(2024\)](#) observed that institutional weakness left CBT vulnerable to collapse once donor support ended. Sambeng contributes a novel insight: institutional layering on voids does not merely underperform but collapses entirely, producing complete stagnation rather than gradual decline. A second determinant concerns the misfit between external project design and local livelihoods. Tourism was widely perceived in Sambeng as incompatible with agrarian priorities. Informant 15 (July 5, 2024) explained: “We should work in the rice fields rather than guard an empty balcony.”

It reflects [Rogers \(2003\)](#) *diffusion of innovation theory*, which identifies compatibility, trialability, and relative advantage as determinants of adoption. The Balkondes failed on all three counts: it was incompatible with seasonal farming cycles, offered little observable advantage compared to agriculture, and was nearly impossible to trial given villagers' time constraints.

Prior studies confirm that livelihood compatibility is essential. Research on agritourism and diversifying rural livelihoods shows that tourism that is integrated into local food systems and agricultural methods has a higher chance of yielding long-term advantages ([Cavalleri et al., 2022](#); [Karampela et al., 2021](#)). Additionally, comparative data from Southeast Asia shows that hybrid livelihood methods supported community tourism activities and improved post-pandemic resilience ([Adams et al., 2021](#).) The Balkondes did not diversify livelihoods; they sidelined them.

The third dimension was institutional isolation, the absence of external partnerships. Sambeng lacked connections with tour operators, NGOs, or government marketing channels. Informant

13 (June 29, 2024) stated: “We never had contact with tour operators or NGOs, so the Balkondes was invisible to outsiders.” By contrast, Candirejo benefited from long-standing partnerships with universities, NGOs, and government agencies, which facilitated training, marketing, and trust-building. External networks have been shown to be crucial in providing not only market access but also legitimacy ([Stone & Stone, 2020](#)).

Global parallels exist. In Kenya, according to current field study, community projects that lack strong market connections or helpful NGO/tour operator ties find it difficult to draw tourists and turn local resources into long-term sources of income ([Odunga et al., 2024](#)). Studies of Oaxacan CBT initiatives demonstrate that donor withdrawal frequently leaves villages isolated and projects dormant unless local institutions and markets have been developed ([Foucat, 2002](#)). Sambeng exemplifies how institutional isolation interacts with institutional voids, creating a double disadvantage: internally weak and externally invisible.

Table 6. Institutional and Contextual Factors: Sambeng versus Candirejo

Dimension	Sambeng Outcome	Candirejo Outcome
Institutional Anchoring	No cooperative; no local governance	Strong cooperative sustained CBT
Livelihood Compatibility	Agriculture displaced tourism; seen as irrelevant	Hybrid integration of farming & tourism
External Linkages	No partnerships; isolated from markets & NGOs	Dense networks with NGOs & universities

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Synthesizing these findings, Sambeng fell into what can be termed an institutional and contextual trap. The Balkondes lacked internal anchoring, conflicted with agrarian livelihoods, and remained externally invisible. Informants summarized it as: “The Balkondes had no institution inside the village, no support from outside, and no link to our everyday work. That is why it remains empty.” (Informants 6, 13, 15; June–July 2024). This triad of weaknesses: voids, incompatibility, and isolation, interacted to produce stagnation. Infrastructure was present, but governance, legitimacy, and relevance were absent.

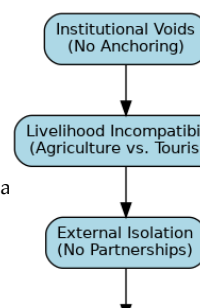


Figure 5. Institutional and Contextual Trap in Sambeng
Source: Primary Data, 2025

Theoretically, Sambeng's case advances CBT scholarship in three ways. First, it confirms the centrality of institutional anchoring. Without organizations, infrastructure remains hollow. Second, it refines diffusion theory, showing that livelihood incompatibility can block adoption entirely, not just delay it. Third, it highlights institutional isolation as an independent factor that magnifies stagnation when combined with voids. Practically, the case illustrates that tourism infrastructure cannot be parachuted into voids. Policymakers must first cultivate institutions, align tourism with local livelihoods, and build external partnerships. Otherwise, as Sambeng demonstrates, projects become "visible as infrastructure but invisible as institution."

Cross-Dimensional Synthesis: Explaining Stagnation in Sambeng

A single variable cannot explain the stagnation of community-based tourism (CBT) in Sambeng; rather, it is the product of interconnected dynamics that span community participation, empowerment, and institutional and contextual environments. Together, these dimensions created what may be described as a triple lock of stagnation, a situation in which tokenistic involvement, absent empowerment, and institutional voids reinforced one another to prevent the Balkondes project from becoming a living institution.

Participation formed the weakest foundation. From the outset, villagers were only superficially included in project activities. They were asked to attend consultation meetings, sign attendance lists, or contribute labor during construction, yet they were excluded from genuine decision-making processes. As villagers themselves described, the Balkondes was never perceived as a community-owned space but as a government building imposed from outside. Leadership fragmentation and elite competition further paralyzed collective action, creating an environment where no single institution could coordinate or represent the community.

This dynamic is consistent with Arnstein (2021) well-known concept of tokenism idea of structural barriers, both of which highlight how formal opportunities for participation often mask deeper exclusion. Sambeng thus confirms longstanding critiques of externally driven CBT projects while extending them with an empirical demonstration of how elite rivalry can create not elite capture of benefits but elite paralysis, a condition where nothing moves forward at all.

If weak participation undermined legitimacy, the absence of empowerment across all four of Scheyvens (1999) dimensions eliminated any prospect of sustainability. Economically, benefits were negligible and selectively distributed, generating frustration rather than motivation. Psychologically, villagers felt no pride in associating their identity with tourism; farming remained their dominant source of dignity, while the Balkondes was seen as

irrelevant. Socially, instead of cultivating cooperation, the project intensified village divisions, as families aligned with competing elites or disengaged entirely.

Politically, authority over the Balkondes remained concentrated in the hands of the village head and a small circle of elites, excluding ordinary villagers altogether. The vacuum created by this comprehensive absence of empowerment produced apathy and disinterest. Without income, pride, networks, or voice, villagers had neither the incentive nor the emotional attachment to invest their time in sustaining CBT. Sambeng thereby illustrates what recent scholars such as López-Guzmán et al., (2011) have emphasized: empowerment must be multidimensional and relational. However, the case also provides a new insight: the simultaneous absence of all dimensions not only prevents institutionalization but actively transforms a development project into a symbol of alienation.

The institutional and contextual environment further locked Sambeng into stagnation. The Balkondes was an instance of institutional layering (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009), an external structure introduced into a setting where no local institutions existed to anchor it. Unlike Candirejo, where cooperatives absorbed and adapted the Balkondes into pre-existing governance systems, Sambeng had no organizational platform capable of doing so. This institutional void left the facility without legitimate caretakers, confirming Khanna & Palepu, (2010) argument that institutional weakness in developing contexts often undermines market- or community-driven initiatives. Beyond institutional weakness, the Balkondes was perceived as incompatible with Sambeng's agrarian livelihood system. Villagers consistently explained that farming schedules, seasonal demands, and limited household labor left no time for tourism.

As one informant put it, it was always better to work in the fields than to guard an empty balcony. This perception resonates with Rogers (2003) diffusion of innovation theory, which holds that innovations unlikely to be perceived as advantageous, compatible, or observable will rarely be adopted. Sambeng represents a concrete illustration of how livelihood incompatibility can block adoption entirely. Finally, Sambeng remained institutionally isolated from external networks. Unlike Candirejo, which benefited from sustained partnerships with NGOs, academics, and government agencies, Sambeng lacked connections to tour operators, marketing bodies, or advocacy groups. This external invisibility compounded internal weakness, leaving the Balkondes without pathways for adaptation or recovery.

Taken together, the interplay between shallow participation, absent empowerment, and institutional-contextual misfits produced a reinforcing cycle of stagnation. Tokenism deprived the project of legitimacy; without legitimacy, empowerment could not emerge. The absence of empowerment meant villagers received no benefits or recognition, which further reduced their willingness to participate. Institutional voids ensured that even if limited participation or empowerment had been achieved, there was no organizational anchor to consolidate them. Incompatibility with agrarian livelihoods disincentivized experimentation, while the lack of external networks closed off opportunities for learning or integration into wider tourism circuits. These three dimensions formed a closed loop, a triple lock, that rendered the Balkon's social lifeless.

Practically, Sambeng's case warns policymakers of the limitations of infrastructure-first approaches. Building physical

facilities without embedding them into legitimate institutions, empowering communities, or aligning them with local livelihoods risks producing empty shells that symbolize disconnection rather than development. The Balkondes in Sambeng stands as a cautionary tale: investment without governance, participation, or legitimacy cannot generate sustainable tourism.

Thus, Sambeng illuminates the conditions under which CBT projects do not collapse after initial success but fail to take off altogether. Its stagnation was not accidental but the predictable outcome of structural misalignments across participation, empowerment, and institutional configuration. By highlighting this trajectory of non-emergence, the case contributes to rebalancing CBT scholarship, moving beyond its success bias to recognize stagnation as a critical yet overlooked outcome in tourism development.

CONCLUSION

The stagnation of community-based tourism (CBT) in Sambeng Village demonstrates that tourism projects can exist materially while remaining socially dormant. Unlike celebrated success stories such as Candirejo or Mae Kampong, Sambeng's Balkondes never evolved into a living institution. The findings show that stagnation emerged from four interrelated determinants: tokenistic participation, the absence of empowerment, institutional voids, and incompatibility with agrarian livelihoods. These dynamics reinforced one another, creating a participation trap and governance vacuum in which the Balkondes was perceived as externally imposed and ultimately irrelevant.

A distinctive insight from this case is the phenomenon of elite paralysis. While much of the CBT literature highlights elite capture, Sambeng reveals a different trajectory: elites competed for symbolic authority but failed to mobilize resources or consolidate control. This rivalry produced institutional inertia, leaving the facility unused, a "dead building" both physically and symbolically. Recognizing elite paralysis expands the analytical vocabulary of CBT outcomes and helps explain why some projects stagnate rather than succeed or fail outright.

The implications of these findings are threefold. Theoretically, they enrich tourism scholarship by identifying stagnation as a distinct trajectory beyond the conventional binary of success and failure. Empirically, they contribute new evidence from Sambeng, a neglected site within Indonesia's super-priority tourism destination of Borobudur, challenging policy narratives that equate infrastructure provision with community development. Practically, they caution policymakers against infrastructure-first approaches. Without investment in institution-building, leadership development, and trust formation, physical facilities risk becoming socially lifeless structures that fail to deliver inclusive benefits.

The study, however, is not without limitations. It is based on a single case, relies primarily on qualitative interviews and observations, and focuses on short- to medium-term trajectories. Future research should compare stagnated CBT initiatives across regions, explore whether dormant projects can be revitalized through partnerships or leadership renewal, and investigate parallels with other community development programs outside tourism.

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