Challenging Inequality in Ecotourism Governance: A Local Perspective from Ciletuh Geopark

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

This article examines how power and inequality are reproduced and contested in ecotourism governance from the perspective of local communities in the Ciletuh–Palabuhanratu UNESCO Global Geopark (CPUGG), Indonesia. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach that combines participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, the study explores how local actors experience exclusion in decision-making, benefit distribution, and cultural representation. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality and Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the research demonstrates that governance operates not only through formal institutions but also through symbolic and everyday practices that shape inclusion and control. Furthermore, by integrating Arturo Escobar's post-development critique and James C. Scott's notion of everyday resistance, the analysis reveals how communities mobilize social capital, kinship, and cultural values to negotiate power and reclaim agency within global tourism structures. The findings show that while state authorities and private investors dominate ecotourism planning and benefits, local communities respond through micro-level self-organization—such as cooperative homestay networks, boat-sharing systems, and cultural performance groups—that embody governmentality from below. This study contributes to the political anthropology of tourism by showing how everyday resistance redefines local agency in the context of global ecotourism governance. It advances an understanding of ecotourism governance not merely as policy management but as a field of struggle over meaning, identity, and justice—highlighting the need for inclusive deliberation, recognition of local knowledge, and equitable distribution of benefits in sustainable tourism governance.

A. INTRODUCTION

In the Ciletuh-Palabuhanratu UNESCO Global Geopark (CPUGG) area, governance inequality is seen through the dominance of state actors and private investors in strategic decision-making. Local communities' access to deliberative space tends to be limited, often only symbolic. Previous findings indicate that the tourism planning and zoning process is more often coordinated by bureaucratic and elite networks, while community votes are primarily used for formal legitimacy (Hermawati et al., 2024; Irawati et al., 2024). Land control and tourism promotion by external parties also hinder residents' initiatives. In some cases, local cultures rich in spiritual values, such as the myth of Kunti Island, are commodified into a horror spectacle in promotional narratives without community participation, indicating a reduction in meaning and the dominance of external representation (Hermawati et al., 2024). This is in line with the criticism of Community-Based

Tourism (CBT), which in practice often reproduces power inequality instead of strengthening local autonomy (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Nunkoo, 2017).

Sustainable tourism development depends not only on ecological management, but also on fair and inclusive governance. Governance, in this context, refers to a set of institutions, mechanisms, and social relationships through which various stakeholders negotiate interests, exercise authority, and distribute benefits (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Siakwah et al., 2020; Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). In ecotourism, governance is not just a technical or administrative issue, but a political process embedded in unequal power relations. Thus, the discussion of sustainability must inevitably turn to the question of power—who governs, who benefits, and whose knowledge defines what sustainability means in practice. While sustainability is often promoted as an inclusive framework for balancing development and conservation, in practice it frequently conceals structural inequalities and elite interests that determine who benefits from ecotourism. When local communities are excluded from decision-making, sustainability promises become mere rhetoric, perpetuating structural inequalities under the guise of environmental conservation (Zhao & Timothy, 2015; Prasiasa, 2022).

In heritage-based ecotourism such as geoparks, local communities play a crucial role as guardians of natural and cultural heritage (Andjanie et al., 2023). However, their participation is often symbolic, limited to the legitimacy of decisions taken by state agencies or private investors. This condition reflects what Michel Foucault (1979) referred to as governmentality—a form of power that operates through subtle mechanisms of control, normalization, and participation, rather than through direct coercion. In tourism governance, governmentality is seen in bureaucratic procedures, zoning systems, and empowerment programs that appear inclusive but actually maintain a hierarchical relationship between authority and community.

Representation also plays a key role in maintaining these relationships. Following Stuart Hall (1997), representation is not a neutral reflection of culture, but rather a political action that shapes meaning and identity. In the case of Ciletuh-Palabuhanratu UNESCO Global Geopark (CPUGG), local culture and myths—such as the myth of Kunti Island or Putri Kadita—are selectively exhibited in the tourism promotion narrative. These representations often separate culture from the context of its life, turning it into a consumable symbol. Therefore, power in ecotourism is structural and symbolic: it controls through regulation and through meaning. Cross-sectoral collaboration involving the state, the private sector, academia, the community, and the media is indeed idealized in ecotourism management, but in practice, power relations remain the main determinant of development direction and control (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Although Foucault and Hall helped uncover the mechanisms of control and representation, the post-development critic Escobar (1995) expanded this understanding by revealing how the discourse of "development" reconstructs local knowledge under the Western paradigm of progress. Ecotourism, although marketed as community-based and sustainable, is often another manifestation of the rationality of development that prioritizes technocratic control over local autonomy. However, as Scott (1985) argues in his concept of everyday resistance, the community is never completely dominated. Through subtle tactics—cooperation, silence, and reinterpretation—they resist, negotiate, and reshape the power relations that govern their lives.

This phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia. International studies have noted a similar pattern: in Brazil, regional tourism organizations have created exclusions against certain groups (Conceição et al., 2019); in Vietnam and Nepal, local leaders with political connections dominate community representation; in South Africa, community tourism projects trigger fragmentation and internal conflict (Spenceley, 2008). This indicates that the failure of representation and power inequality in CBT is a global issue, necessitating a structural and justice-based governance redesign.

This study asks: how do local actors in the Ciletuh–Palabuhanratu UNESCO Global Geopark (CPUGG) experience, interpret, and respond to power and representation in everyday ecotourism governance? To address this question, the research is positioned within the political anthropology of tourism, exploring how inequalities in ecotourism governance are experienced and negotiated at the local level. Drawing on Foucault's concept of governmentality, Hall's theory of representation, and the insights of Escobar and Scott, this study examines how power operates through structural mechanisms and symbolic practices, and how communities respond through subtle, everyday forms of resistance. It highlights how local actors mobilize kinship, cooperation, and cultural practices not only to sustain livelihoods but also to reclaim meaning, visibility, and agency within global ecotourism governance.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach within the framework of political anthropology, emphasizing how power relations, representation, and local resistance were embedded in ecotourism governance. The research was conducted as an ethnographic case study in the Ciletuh-Palabuhanratu UNESCO Global Geopark (CPUGG), focusing on Ciwaru Village, one of the most active community-based tourism areas. The case was chosen purposively because it represented the intersection between local agency, bureaucratic regulation, and market-driven tourism development, making it a critical site for observing the dynamics of power and participation.

Data were collected through participatory and non-participatory observations, as well as in-depth interviews with a total of 15 informants. These consisted of four government officials (from the Tourism Office, Cultural Office, CPUGG Management Agency, and Ciwaru Village Government) and eleven community members, including local tourism community leaders, youth representatives active in community initiatives, and local

entrepreneurs managing homestays or guiding services. Informants were selected using a combination of purposive, snowball, and opportunistic techniques, focusing on individuals who possessed in-depth knowledge of local tourism governance and were directly involved in decision-making or daily operational practices. The selection logic prioritized variation in institutional roles and positions rather than demographic representation, ensuring analytical depth while avoiding redundancy in participant profiles.

Fieldwork was conducted by residing in Ciwaru Village from 15 to 23 June 2025, as part of a longitudinal study that began in September 2023. Secondary data were obtained from village documents, official reports, and relevant literature, then cross-checked with primary data through triangulation to strengthen validity. All participants were informed that their involvement was part of an academic research project on ecotourism governance. Before each interview, participants received a clear explanation of the research objectives, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Verbal informed consent was obtained, and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity.

The data analysis process followed an iterative and interpretive approach typical of ethnographic research. All interview transcripts and field notes were transcribed verbatim and coded manually using thematic analysis. The first cycle of coding identified descriptive themes related to governance structure, representation, and community participation, while the second cycle developed analytical categories such as "symbolic participation," "micro-power," and "everyday resistance," derived from the theoretical framework of Foucault, Hall, Escobar, and Scott. Constant comparison was used throughout the process to refine categories and ensure consistency between empirical patterns and conceptual insights. Data triangulation between interviews, observations, and documents further enhanced the credibility of interpretations. Reflexive memos were written after each coding cycle to trace how meanings and analytical decisions evolved during interpretation, ensuring transparency in connecting field data with theoretical reasoning.

As an outsider to the local administration but someone with prior familiarity with the community through earlier field visits, I found that access to information depended largely on trust-building with key local figures. My academic background and affiliation with a public university helped establish credibility but also shaped informants' expectations, particularly regarding potential policy implications of the research. Recognizing that my academic role influenced the dynamics of data collection and interpretation, I engaged reflexively to balance insider–outsider perspectives and ensure interpretive integrity. Prolonged engagement, informal dialogue, and participatory observation in daily activities such as tourism events and community meetings facilitated a deeper understanding of how local actors experienced governance within existing power relations. At the same time, my previous field experience, while helpful in fostering trust, occasionally created expectations that my work would align with community aspirations or institutional agendas. To address this, I continuously reflected on my positionality through detailed field notes, ongoing dialogue, and iterative data interpretation. This reflexive practice maintained ethical sensitivity and analytical transparency, ensuring that the findings represented not only the community's perspectives but also the relational process through which knowledge was collaboratively constructed during fieldwork.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Governance Inequality

a. Unequal Access and Symbolic Participation

In the practice of tourism management within CPUGG, a clear disparity emerged between local and external actors in access to decision-making. Residents in Ciwaru Village often stated they were unaware of who prepared tourism agendas or determined planning directions. Information about policy changes, such as the closure of Kunti Island, often arrived without adequate consultation. The Regional Government, through the Tourism Office, continued to dominate decision-making, and although community representatives were formally involved, participation was mostly symbolic. As one informant explained, those invited to meetings were *"people who share the same agenda or interests as the government."*

Large-scale tourism projects, such as villas and resorts, were controlled by external investors, including former officials and political elites, while small local entrepreneurs struggled to obtain permits or support. Many villagers felt excluded from influencing tourism trajectories: *"We're just watching, not deciding,"* said one respondent. Training and assistance programs were also perceived as unequal—information often circulated within bureaucratic networks, and follow-up was minimal. A mango chip workshop, for instance, was never monitored afterward, reinforcing the impression of ceremonial rather than empowering development.

These empirical patterns highlight how the formal structure of participation rarely translated into actual decision-making power. Local actors remained at the margins of institutional processes, with community consultation serving primarily as a formality rather than a channel for genuine dialogue.

From an analytical perspective, these findings illustrate how bureaucratic dominance and elite patronage shaped CPUGG's governance, creating structural inequalities in decision-making and benefit distribution. Despite formal claims of inclusivity, participatory mechanisms often legitimized pre-decided agendas rather than enabling genuine deliberation. Local actors, particularly small entrepreneurs and homestay owners, remained on the margins of tourism's digital and institutional infrastructures, highlighting the gap between rhetoric and practice in sustainable tourism governance.

b. Cultural Representation and Everyday Responses

Local communities in CPUGG were frequently portrayed in promotional materials as symbols of authenticity—depicted farming, crafting, or performing rituals—yet they were rarely consulted in constructing these images. As one elder noted, *"younger generations now learn more about local legends from YouTube than from their grandparents."* This disjunction between lived culture and external narratives illustrates how representation becomes a site of power. Following Hall, meaning is constructed through selective visibility, often privileging external perspectives.

This separation between representation and lived culture illustrates how meaning becomes a terrain of contestation. Following Hall, representation in tourism functions not merely as reflection but as a mechanism of control through selective visibility. The dominance of external perspectives in defining what counts as 'authentic' reinforces symbolic inequality within governance structures.

c. Collective Adaptation and Everyday Resistance

To negotiate these asymmetrical relations, local actors developed collective strategies. The homestay community in Ciwaru regulated room rates, shared guest information, and minimized harmful competition. Similarly, boat operators at Palangpang Beach created a rotation system ensuring fair income distribution. Cultural and artistic groups also mediated between tradition and tourism demand, performing adaptations that balanced authenticity and appeal. Rituals like Labuh Saji were simplified, and myths such as Nyi Roro Kidul reframed as tourism icons.

These initiatives reflect what Foucault conceptualized as micro-power—power circulating through everyday social relations rather than imposed hierarchically. Such grassroots organization demonstrates how communities generate self-regulation mechanisms within unequal systems. Meanwhile, Hall's notion of counter-representation is evident as locals selectively reinterpret cultural symbols to reclaim agency in defining their heritage.

Everyday resistance, as Scott described, appeared in acts of quiet defiance: maintaining taboos, preserving ritual costumes, or limiting modernization. Through these subtle negotiations, communities transform adaptation into a form of resistance, redefining authenticity while safeguarding moral and cultural boundaries.

2. Power, Representation, and Cultural Negotiation

a. External Representation and Local Voices

Local communities in CPUGG are frequently portrayed in tourism promotion materials as symbols of local hospitality and authenticity. Images of residents in traditional attire, farming, or crafting circulate widely across brochures and social media platforms. However, according to several informants, they were never consulted in determining these narratives or visual depictions (Sripun et al., 2017). A community elder remarked that younger generations now *"learn more about local legends from YouTube or TV shows than from their grandparents,"* reflecting how the transmission of culture is increasingly mediated by external tourism narratives rather than by lived experience.

These accounts show that while residents become visual subjects of tourism, they are excluded from the process of narrative construction. This gap between representation and participation reveals how tourism communication selectively displays culture without involving its practitioners.

This disjuncture between everyday life and public representation illustrates the symbolic power imbalance described by Stuart Hall, where meaning is not merely reflected but actively constructed through selective representation that privileges external perspectives over local interpretation. Representation, in this context, becomes a field of power that shapes what is seen, remembered, and valued in the collective imagination of tourism.

b. Collective Organization and Local Negotiation

Faced with these asymmetrical relations, local actors have developed strategies to negotiate their position within the expanding tourism system. One notable example is the homestay community in Ciwaru, which collectively regulates room rates, shares guest information, and discourages excessive competition that could harm mutual trust. The network originated from the Ciletuh Geopark Festival (CGF), when the local government appointed a coordinator to mobilize residents to host guests. Over time, this initiative evolved into a permanent community organization that continues to coordinate tourism-related activities and communication with government agencies. While this self-organization exemplifies a bottom-up form of governance, several non-member homestay owners felt excluded, noting that *"those who get help are people who are close to the community."*

These testimonies highlight that collective structures can empower local coordination but also risk reproducing internal exclusion. Local organization, while participatory in form, remains intertwined with social proximity and informal hierarchies (dos Anjos & Kennell, 2019).

Such practices demonstrate what Michel Foucault conceptualizes as micro-power, where power circulates through dispersed and relational mechanisms rather than top-down control. In the case of the homestay and boat communities, local residents govern themselves through shared norms, informal rules, and moral discipline, embodying a form of governmentality from below. However, the fragility of these systems under economic and environmental pressures shows that local solidarity operates within constrained spaces of autonomy.

c. Cultural Mediation and Transformation

Parallel to these economic practices, local art and cultural groups in Ciwaru and neighboring villages play a crucial role in preserving cultural narratives within tourism

development (Azwar et al., 2023). These communities curate performances that balance traditional values with tourist appeal, positioning themselves as mediators between cultural continuity and commercial adaptation. Beyond their artistic functions, they serve as spaces of reflection where residents renegotiate meanings of authenticity and identity.

The negotiation between power and culture also manifests in the transformation of local traditions into marketable forms. Sacred sites such as Kunti Island, once approached with reverence, are now promoted as mystical attractions, while the myth of Nyi Roro Kidul has been reframed as a tourism icon adorning hotels and festival imagery. Similarly, rituals such as Labuh Saji have been modified to fit tourist sensibilities by replacing animal offerings with symbolic gestures. As one dancer explained, *"If you do a hamlet event, sometimes there is no budget. But if there are tourists, they are immediately excited to be told to appear."*

These field accounts show how cultural practices evolve through selective adaptation. Tourism encourages residents to repackage rituals, performances, and myths to align with visitor expectations while maintaining a sense of continuity with tradition.

This creative mediation reflects Hall's notion of counter-representation—a process in which local actors rearticulate cultural meanings from within, rather than allowing them to be defined solely by state or market institutions. Through such acts of reinterpretation, representation transforms from an instrument of domination into a platform for self-definition and agency. Yet, these same practices reveal the double-edged nature of commodification, where adaptation simultaneously preserves and alters the essence of tradition.

d. Material Adaptation and Aesthetic Adjustment

Commodification also extends into the material and domestic spheres. Activities such as farming, fishing, bamboo craft-making, and cooking have been incorporated into curated "village life" packages. At Kampung MKJ, residents adjust their daily routines to accommodate guests, even redesigning their homes to fit tourist expectations. *"I don't know what the carvings mean,"* admitted one homestay owner, *"but they said guests like it this way."*

These descriptions reveal the everyday material consequences of tourism aesthetics—how domestic and livelihood spaces are redesigned to perform "authenticity" for visitors.

This aesthetic adaptation reveals how government-led training programs institutionalize certain visual markers of "local authenticity," often detached from their original cultural meanings. Within Foucault's framework, this process reflects a regime of visibility, wherein power operates by privileging what can be seen and valued—defining authenticity through selective exposure.

e. Subtle Resistance and Cultural Boundaries

Nevertheless, power in CPUGG's tourism landscape is never absolute. Communities continue to assert their agency through subtle forms of negotiation and resistance. The continued observance of taboos around Kunti Island, the refusal to modernize certain ritual costumes, and the preservation of spiritual dimensions in Labuh Saji exemplify what James Scott calls everyday resistance: the quiet acts through which marginalized groups protect moral and cultural boundaries without direct confrontation.

These gestures reflect how adaptation itself can be a form of resistance—strategically accommodating change while preserving the ethical essence of tradition. Such practices demonstrate that power, representation, and culture are intertwined in dynamic ways, where resistance does not always manifest as opposition but as continuity within constraint.

The interplay between representation, power, and local agency. While communities are visually celebrated as symbols of CPUGG's authenticity, their role in shaping these narratives remains limited. Yet through homestay associations, boat cooperatives, and cultural groups, residents reclaim micro-spaces of control, producing their own systems of meaning and governance. These initiatives embody both Foucault's notion of micro-power—where governance emerges from everyday social relations—and Hall's counter-representation—where culture becomes a field of negotiation rather than subjugation.

Ultimately, the commodification of culture in CPUGG is not merely an economic transformation but also a reconfiguration of cultural authority. Younger generations increasingly struggle to distinguish between inherited traditions and performances designed for tourism, signaling a deeper epistemic shift from culture as a way of life to culture as a spectacle. This transformation raises fundamental questions about who holds the power to define authenticity and how local identities are reproduced within global ecotourism discourse. The communities' ongoing efforts to reinterpret, adapt, and sustain their cultural values within these constraints demonstrate that resistance does not always emerge in opposition—it often resides in the subtle, everyday practices of living, creating, and remembering (Azwar et al., 2023).

3. Social Capital Resistance

a. Kinship-Based Economic Networks

Amid complex tourism dynamics, local communities in CPUGG derive strength from solidarity and kinship networks that underpin their economic and social organization. Homestays, food stalls, boat services, and handicraft enterprises are interconnected through familial and neighborly relations. In one extended family, for instance, a household operates a homestay, a sibling provides catering, and a son works as a local tour guide. This structure enables efficient coordination, fair income distribution, and mutual reliance, reflecting how kinship remains a foundational mode of organization in community-based tourism.

These observations reveal that family-based collaboration is central to sustaining local livelihoods, allowing communities to manage tourism collectively without formal bureaucratic intervention.

b.   Collective Regulation and Cooperative Mechanisms

The lodging community serves as a focal point of this solidarity. Members meet regularly to discuss room rates, manage guest allocation, and design joint promotional strategies. When one homestay reaches full capacity, the owner refers guests to others within the network. A similar arrangement exists among tourist boat operators, who employ a rotation system to prevent dominance and ensure stable earnings among members. These practices demonstrate collective regulation mechanisms rooted in trust and reciprocity rather than formal governance.

In several villages, such as Kampung T, a daily life–based tourism model has emerged, where guests not only stay overnight but also participate in communal activities like cooking, farming, and crafting. Coordination, cleanliness, and profit-sharing are managed collectively under a cooperative ethos. As a homestay host explained, this shared labor *"helps everyone feel part of the process,"* embodying how social capital functions as a community's internal mechanism to sustain equity in a competitive tourism market.

A striking example of collective initiative is found in the Cimarinjung Waterfall area, where residents formed a joint working group to build and manage facilities such as toilets, parking, and food stalls. Management operates on a rotation system that includes multiple families. During periods of heavy visitation, residents coordinate through WhatsApp groups to share responsibilities and distribute income. This arrangement ensures that all households benefit from tourism, translating solidarity into tangible economic resilience.

These empirical examples illustrate how cooperation and informal coordination produce effective self-regulation. Rather than relying on external management, communities create trust-based systems that ensure equitable access to tourism benefits.

c.   Individual Agency and Collective Empowerment

Another narrative of empowerment comes from a former migrant worker in Ciwaru Village who invested her overseas savings to build a homestay. Upon returning, she encouraged neighbors to open similar businesses and offered informal training for local women on hospitality and cleanliness. Acting as a liaison between local hosts and external travel agents, she bridged community-based tourism networks with broader markets.

At Palangpang Beach, the boat operator community exhibits one of the most visible manifestations of social solidarity: a voluntary "guest-sharing" system on weekends. When tourist numbers surge, boat drivers who already have customers redirect new visitors to colleagues awaiting their turn. *"There's no booking system,"* one driver explained, *"only trust between us."* In one case, a driver even transferred a group of guests to a colleague who had recently recovered from illness and had earned nothing for a week.

These stories highlight how individual initiatives—particularly those of women and returning migrants—can enhance community capacity. Simultaneously, moral obligations and social empathy guide economic interactions, transforming tourism into a shared rather than competitive endeavor.

d.   Cultural Cooperation and Everyday Social Engagement

Collective participation also extends into cultural performances. Around homestays, residents organize small-scale events—music performances by village youth or local culinary showcases prepared by mothers—whenever there are guests. A homestay owner in Cimarinjung Traditional Village shared, *"If there are foreign guests or student groups, I ask neighbors to help with simple performances, and we share the pay afterward."* These practices illustrate that cultural activities are not merely for entertainment but serve as mechanisms to reinforce cooperation and community belonging, blending economic purpose with cultural expression.

In anthropological terms, social capital in CPUGG functions as more than an economic safety net—it represents a subtle yet powerful form of resistance to external control. These community-driven structures exemplify what Foucault calls micro-power tactics: dispersed, everyday forms of governance where communities exercise control within limited but socially meaningful spaces. Through norms of reciprocity, trust, and kinship, residents establish governmentality from below—a self-organized system of regulation that redistributes power horizontally rather than hierarchically.

Strategies such as guest rotation, revenue-sharing, and voluntary cooperation illustrate autonomous systems that operate outside the formal jurisdiction of the state or corporate actors. They reflect lateral forms of power sustained by social norms rather than legal frameworks. From this perspective, the moral economy of solidarity constitutes a localized resistance to the encroachment of market rationality, showing how power can be reappropriated through community-based regulation and mutual care.

In Stuart Hall's framework, these collaborative practices also produce counter-representations of tourism. Instead of being mere objects of the tourist gaze, local actors curate and stage experiences grounded in their own rhythms of life—farming, cooking, performing arts—thus challenging the exoticized and passive images constructed by external promoters. By producing their own tourism narratives, communities reclaim representational authority and redefine what "local culture" means within ecotourism discourse.

Furthermore, social capital acts as a medium for negotiating access and recognition within hierarchical tourism systems. Networks of kinship and cooperation help local actors retain influence amid external investment and bureaucratic dominance. For instance, the entrepreneurial initiative of the former migrant worker demonstrates how local women utilize social capital to extend their agency, transforming personal experiences into collective empowerment. These practices blur the boundary between individual initiative and collective resistance, reinforcing Escobar's argument that local

knowledge and social ties can subvert the technocratic logic of development.

However, this solidarity is not immune to pressure. Digitalization, formal bureaucracy, and intensified competition increasingly challenge traditional patterns of cooperation. Some informants observed that economic pressures and generational change have weakened collective ties, indicating that community-based governance is a dynamic, continuously negotiated process rather than a static structure. Power relations within communities evolve alongside market expansion, demanding ongoing adaptation and reflexive reorganization of values and practices.

Ultimately, social capital in CPUGG embodies an alternative mode of power—one that arises from below through collective labor, moral commitment, and the shared production of meaning. Within a governance system still dominated by external elites, local communities continue to carve spaces of autonomy, reorganize benefit distribution, and sustain a distinct moral economy anchored in cooperation and mutual care. Their practices reveal that even in unequal ecotourism systems, power does not flow in a single direction but circulates through the everyday acts of solidarity that keep communities alive and self-determined.

Figure 1. Theoretical Interaction among Power, Representation, and Community Resistance in Ecotourism Governance at CPUGG (Adapted from Foucault, Hall, and Scott).
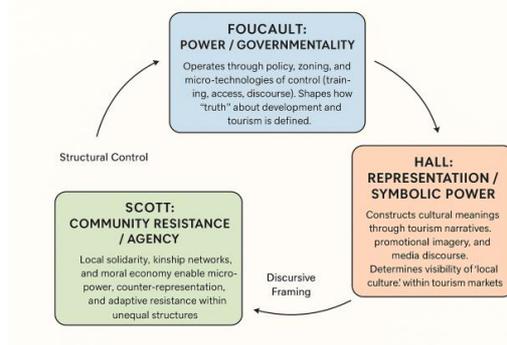
The dynamics of ecotourism governance in CPUGG reveal the complexity of power relations among state authorities, private investors, and local communities. Inequality in decision-making access, control over strategic land, and the community's exclusion from tourism planning reflect the operation of structural power as theorized by Michel Foucault. Power in this context is not solely exercised through formal policies and regulations but is also embedded in everyday mechanisms that appear routine and neutral, such as the selection of training participants, the allocation of promotional access, or the production of official tourism narratives. These mechanisms embody what Foucault describes as governmentality, a subtle form of governance that shapes conduct and consent without overt coercion. Through this system, local communities are not only administratively subordinated but also discursively constrained, excluded from the spaces where meanings and development agendas are defined.

The representational dimension of power reinforces this inequality. As Stuart Hall emphasizes, representation is a site where meaning and ideology are constructed, not merely reflected. In CPUGG, tourism promotion selectively frames cultural elements such as the myths of Kunti Island and Putri Kadita or rituals like Labuh Saji as visual spectacles of mysticism and exoticism. These narratives are produced externally by state and market institutions, transforming local spirituality and historical depth into consumable imagery. Such symbolic practices not only aestheticize but also depoliticize local culture, reducing community knowledge to a performance of authenticity aligned with the expectations of the tourist gaze. Hence, representation becomes another instrument of control, what Foucault would describe as a regime of visibility that determines which forms of culture are allowed to be seen and celebrated.

Yet, within these asymmetrical structures, power never operates unilaterally. Local communities actively develop counter-strategies that challenge and reinterpret these dominant narratives. Through homestay associations, boat cooperatives, and cultural performance groups, residents generate alternative forms of governance rooted in kinship, trust, and reciprocity. These practices exemplify Foucault's concept of micro-power as dispersed and relational forces that emerge from everyday interactions. By organizing guest rotation systems, managing resources collectively, and producing tourism narratives based on daily life, communities perform what can be understood as governmentality from below. They govern themselves according to shared norms rather than external regulation, thereby reclaiming limited but meaningful autonomy within the broader system.

This everyday negotiation aligns with James Scott's notion of *everyday resistance*, where subordinate actors resist domination not through open rebellion but through subtle practices of adaptation and appropriation. The continuation of symbolic prohibitions, the selective modification of rituals, and the collaborative control of tourism flows illustrate resistance embedded within compliance. Rather than rejecting tourism outright, communities manipulate its mechanisms to preserve local ethics and redistribute benefits according to communal values. These acts represent a politics of survival, what Scott terms the art of the weak, through which marginalized groups assert agency in constrained conditions.

The discussion also resonates with Arturo Escobar's post-development critique, which views modern development and ecotourism as discourses that produce new forms of dependency under the guise of empowerment. In CPUGG, the language of sustainability and heritage conservation often conceals unequal resource control and the marginalization of local voices. However, the community's creation of self-managed tourism networks and cultural cooperatives demonstrates a form of alternative development rooted in local knowledge systems and collective ethics rather than neoliberal rationality. These practices suggest that communities are not passive recipients of policy but active producers of

meaning and livelihood strategies that reimagine development on their own terms.

Synthesizing these perspectives reveals that ecotourism governance in CPUGG operates through three interlocking dimensions of power. The first is structural power, which determines access and control through bureaucratic and economic hierarchies. The second is symbolic power, which governs meaning through representation and visibility. The third is social power from below, which emerges through solidarity, reciprocity, and everyday acts of negotiation. The interplay among these dimensions demonstrates that power is not a fixed possession but a circulating force, constantly contested and redefined within social relations.

In this light, the local communities of CPUGG embody what might be called situated agency, a mode of acting within rather than outside systems of domination. Their micro-political practices, whether in the regulation of tourism, the reinterpretation of rituals, or the management of cultural labor, constitute a living example of how resistance and adaptation coexist within power. This synthesis of Foucault, Hall, Scott, and Escobar extends the discussion beyond governance and participation, framing ecotourism as a field of struggle over meaning, visibility, and autonomy. Ultimately, the anthropological significance of these findings lies in demonstrating how communities, even within unequal structures, continue to exercise agency by transforming constraint into opportunity and surveillance into self-organization.

E. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that ecotourism governance in CPUGG is deeply embedded in asymmetrical power relations among state institutions, private investors, and local communities. Power is not confined to formal regulation but extends into discursive and symbolic domains, operating through narratives of culture, authenticity, and participation. While exclusion and commodification persist, local actors mobilize social capital and kinship networks to construct micro-spaces of resistance and reclaim agency within unequal governance systems.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the political anthropology of ecotourism by integrating Foucault's concept of governmentality, Hall's theory of representation, and Scott's notion of everyday resistance to explain how power circulates and is reinterpreted at the community level. By bridging ethnographic evidence with these frameworks, the study highlights how local agency emerges not from opposition alone but through adaptive, relational, and meaning-making practices that contest dominant governance discourses.

From a policy perspective, inclusive and sustainable ecotourism development requires

redistributing power through participatory mechanisms that recognize local knowledge and autonomy. Strengthening deliberative spaces, ensuring equitable benefit distribution, and valuing culture as a living heritage are crucial to transform sustainability from a technocratic discourse into a socially just practice. In doing so, ecotourism can evolve beyond economic utility toward reinforcing community identity, resilience, and collective dignity.

D. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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