

The Impact of Religious Tourism on The Economic and Socio-Cultural Aspects of Palangka Raya City

I Made Puspe¹, I Putu Anom², I Nyoman Sunarta³, I Wayan Suardana⁴
^{1,2,3,4}Udayana University, Indonesia



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine the economic and socio-cultural impacts of religious tourism in the multi-cultural city of Palangka Raya, focusing on its effects on local community welfare, the preservation of social identity, and the protection of sacred heritage from commercialization. **Method:** A qualitative case study design was employed, using in-depth interviews with religious leaders, tourism officials, business actors, and community members, supplemented by participant observation and document review. **Results:** The findings indicate that religious tourism positively impacts the local economy by creating livelihood opportunities, fostering small trade, and enhancing the cultural craft industry. Socially, it encourages cultural rejuvenation and inter-faith solidarity, although challenges related to infrastructure development, stakeholder collaboration, and cultural sensitivity remain. **Novelty:** This paper provides a unique perspective on religious tourism within a multi-faith Bornean context, highlighting its potential for holistic development when supported by comprehensive planning and local involvement. It contributes to the academic understanding of religious tourism in emerging destinations, offering nuanced insights into tourism dynamics in diverse religious settings.

INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism has developed into one of the fastest growing sectors in the global tourism market that promotes regional development and, at the same time, has a significant impact on regional social cultural systems. In an era of societies' mobility and pan-theism, religious travel be it pilgrimage, sacred site visit, cultural ritual join, or spiritual retreats has become a factor shaping the regional development and facilitating the retention of cultural identity [1]. With its rich diversity of religions and strong spiritual heritage, in Indonesia religious tourism has become an element of strategic planning at regional level. Palangka Raya City in Central Kalimantan is an interesting case with the mix of Dayak culture, Christian landmark and Islamic tradition creates multilayer religious landscape which inspiring visitors [2]. This variety brings in new lead that Palangka Raya is a potential area for religious tourism.

Although it is a rich cultural city, Palangka Raya has not fully utilized its Religious Tourism Potential. There are a number of sacred and religiously important sites including sandung burial houses, Kaharingan sacred spaces, major churches, and pesantren Islams but systematic development, promotion or integration into regional tourism strategies is still lacking [3]. The root cause for this condition is attributed to the incomplete comprehension from local government about how religious tourism influences city's economic and socio-cultural. In the absence of substantial empirical support, policy makers and tourism managers find it difficult to develop strategies that

can lead to economic benefits without compromising cultural integrity. This is because the analysis required is bound to take into consideration both economic and socio-cultural points of view.

What is special about this study is that it focuses on Palangka Raya as a potential religious tourism destination, rather than an established destination. Most works on religious tourism in Indonesia have concentrated on the known sites, such as Islamic tourism in Lombok, Hindu temples in Bali or Christian pilgrimage centres in Java [4]. Studies of Kalimantan and especially Central Kalimantan is meagre. Still there are very few studies that explore the dynamics between economic development and societies in transition concerning religious tourism from this part of India. Therefore this current research provides a new perspective to the theme by investigating how religious tourism affects material and immaterial dimensions of urban life in cross-cultural city such as Palangka Raya.

The literature reviewed so far generally approached religious tourism from only one point of view. Work on economic tools. For the case of economic Impact, it mainly focus on local income, employment and regional entrepreneurship [5]. The other studies in socio-cultural are related to cultural conservation, community involvement, and religious harmony [6]. However, very few have tried to bring these two dimensions in one comprehensive framework, in particular vis-à-vis Borneo's indigenous religious traditions and recent urban developments. This absence of a comparative examination leaves a large scholarly void. They also tend to ignore how religious tourism carries implications for intercultural relationships, serving either a bonding nature or an economic (culture) commodification (consequently, the objective of this research is to close this lacuna of knowledge by offering a more interdisciplinary analysis.

The aims of this research are threefold. First, the study intends to identify the economic effects of (religious) tourism on local income growth, small businesses and employment in Palangka Raya City. Second, it will interrogate the socio-cultural implications of religious pilgrimage involving cultural heritage preservation, inter-religious tolerance as well as community involvement. Third, it plans to examine how these economic and socio-cultural dimensions intersect and affect sustainable development of tourism in the city. Through the knowledge of these interrelationships, city planners and policy makers, those involved in tourism and community leaders can enhance city tourists strategies that are economically viable as well as culturally rewarding.

In addition, the study is likely to offer several practical and academic contributions. In practical terms, it presents an EBM agenda to encourage local governments in the formulation of tourism policies as well as for developing cultural programs and community-based tourism projects. Culture The investigation provides an understanding how religious tourism contributes to social cohesion with an ethnic and religious diversity in the city. Scholarly, this study adds to the limited local and international literatures by providing a case in an area that is seldom addressed in national or international scholarship. The originality of Palangka Raya's religious

landscape in which local religions, Christianity, and Islam co-exist is a significant contribution to comparative literature on religious tourism in pluralistic societies [7]. The results are anticipated to show the prospects and constraints of organizing religious tourism in regional development. The research's aims to be able to establish the foundation of sustainable tourism development that will respect cultural identity, improve economic well being and enrich social harmony in Palangka Raya City.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used the qualitative approach to investigate the economic and socio-cultural implications on religious tourism in Palangka Raya City. A qualitative approach was preferred, as it enables the researcher to explore social realities, meaning and experiences in depth within natural setting context, particularly religious related activities and interactions with the community [8]. The research design adopts a case study framework which will provide in-depth and context sensitive examination of religious tourism sites and host communities. The data was obtained from various sources such as in-depth interviews of key informants including tourism officers, religious leaders, community and local business agents. In selected religious tourism sites, participant observation was also employed in order to gather real-time practices, cultural rituals and tourist behaviors. Document review (government tourism reports, cultural archive, and other prior publications) was used to increase the credibility of the findings [9].

The study's data is also drawn from primary data, collected directly through interviews and observations, as well as secondary data (written documents, reports, academic literature). The sampling method employed was purposive sampling technique, where the informants met the criteria and have good knowledge on the developments of religious tourism in Palangka Raya. This method is used so the participants can offer a wide range of information on economic benefit, cultural dynamic and community involvement [10]. While in the field, the researcher recorded interactions and observations through field notes, audio recording and visual records with special emphasis on capturing as much context information for post-analysis.

The data were analyzed through the lens of an "interactive model of qualitative analysis, with three major phases: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification" by Miles et al [11]. Initial reduction of the raw data for this project was done with coding of themes (economic effects, cultural habits, religious practice and community attitudes). Themes were presented visually in matrices and narrative formats to aid interpretation. Triangulation was done in the analysis process by cross checking interview findings with observers' notes and documents to establish credibility of results [12]. This systematic procedure also enabled the researcher to form an integrated perspective of how religious tourism influences economic and socio-cultural in Palangka Raya City.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the results of this study, it is known that religious tourism activities in Palangka Raya City have become one of the factors for the development of a region's economy. The role of pilgrimage business actors, street vendors, and souvenir shops Interviews with local business acts Street vendor s and souvenir shop owner show that visitor inflow (mainly during big religious events and pilgrim seasons) increase sales, visibility of local product sand also generate incomes for locally-based entrepreneurs. Especially for Weekends and festive times, there is increased business reported from the small scale and micro units located in the proximity of Religious places. In addition, the influx of pilgrims has also led to the expansion of other types of economic ventures including guesthouses, transportation services, foodstalls and local handicraft. But those economic impacts are not uniform – it is in the most accessible and well-serviced parts of the city that growth tends to be most beneficial, underlining the importance of securing more equitable spatial development for all London.

In addition to its economic returns, the research also reveals significant socio-cultural impacts that have occurred as a result of religious tourism. Religious tourists frequent the area, and as such the community has grown prouder of its cultural and spiritual legacy. Local traditions, especially Dayak Kaharingan practices and Christian holidays are more publicly observed in several areas and often openly displayed for visitors. It is this greater exposure that has led to local grassroots initiatives in conservation and re-energizing traditions which were once in decline. For the most part, parents now play an increasingly proactive role in ensuring that younger generations engage with traditional ceremonies, storytelling, dance and maintenance of sacred areas. However, there remained some section of the society which feared that they were commodifying certain rituals to match tourist expectations and subsequently diluting the authenticity and sanctity.

Religious coexistence has also softened, beefed up by greater socializing between different factions. Religious tourism promotes encounters between people belonging to different faith traditions, which are conducive of curiosity, respect and dialogue. Islamic, Christian and Kaharingan religious leaders said they had been more active in shared events, inter-faith dialogue and initiatives to make outsiders feel welcome. These cross-contacts has led to a much tighter social fabric, where tolerance and respect of one another is a part of the everyday community life. And the existence of visitors can prompt local residents to act as they want others to see them: as welcoming people who get along well together. Yet the results also indicate that this congruence is in large part achieved by people working together and it depends on ongoing help from local authorities to be sustained.

Another interesting discovery is religious tourism's capacity to alter identity and self-perception of the community. As indigenous places gain visibility beyond the immediate landscape, people also see themselves as custodians of culture in having a role in preserving the spirituality and history of their environment. This identity change has resulted in a more elevated sense of ownership and duty to the survival of culture.

Meanwhile, tourism has opened up new community functions including the role of culture guides, ritual assisting team organizer, event organizer and craft worker trainer that allow people (especially young people) to play a vital role in supporting cultural sustainability. Such emerging roles have led to greater community involvement in tourism-related activities and the widening of local leadership as well, within cultural and religious institutions.

The results also reflect some issues and weaknesses that may threaten the sustainability of religious tourism in Palangka Raya. Poor infrastructure, in particular access to transport, signage, proximity of accommodation to sacred sites and sanitation policy would often mean restricted visitor movement and a less interesting tourist experience. Some places of worship remain in a state of disrepair due to lack of funds or incompetence in managing a religious building. The interviews with government officials also suggest that there was not enough effective coordination among the tourists industry, the religious organizations and local community groups regarding planning and promotion. Without consolidated policy packages, the potential for religious tourism to be harnessed for wider regional development is unlikely to be achieved.

However, the research reveals that there is strong willingness of the community to participate in religious tourism development activities in future. Several interviewees put a special premium on governmental facilitation, in particular with respect to training programs and community-based tourism development, as well as helping document culture. Local leaders were also interested in partnering higher learning institutions to undertake cultural mapping, digital storytelling and heritage maintenance programs. These dreams indicate that Palangka Raya with sufficient support has an opportunity to be a mature religious tourism with the harmony between economic growth and socio-cultural conservation.

These findings have an implication that religious tourism contributes to the development of economic, maintaining cultural heritage and preserving inter-religious harmonious in Palangka Raya City. Despite obstacles, especially in terms of infrastructure and policy synchronization, the zeal from community participation and cultural diversity contributes sound basis for sustainable development. Tourism, culture (local wisdom) and spirituality relationship is a very potential model for regional development that makes Palangkaraya as one of RSUD yahukimo the center growth region of religion and culture in Central Kalimantan.

Table 1. Summary of Economic and Socio-Cultural Impacts of Religious Tourism

Impact Dimension	Positive Impacts	Challenges/Limitations
Economic	Increased income for local vendors, growth of small businesses, rise in cultural craft production, new job opportunities.	Uneven economic distribution, limited infrastructure, weak promotional strategies.

Impact Dimension	Positive Impacts	Challenges/Limitations
Socio-Cultural	Cultural revitalization, strengthened interfaith harmony, increased cultural pride and identity preservation.	Risk of cultural commodification, limited community training, need for stronger institutional support.
Community Participation	Greater engagement in guiding, performing rituals, craft-making, managing events.	Lack of capacity-building programs, inconsistent stakeholder coordination.
Tourism Development	Growing visitor interest, emerging religious sites as cultural attractions.	Inadequate facilities, insufficient investment, and fragmented policy planning.

Summary This table 1 presents the major findings, which were organized according to the importance of religious tourism impacts in Palangka Raya City by being grouped into four dimensions: economic impact, socio-cultural impact, community participation and tourism development. There are, however, both positive rewards and challenges in each dimension. They show that religious tourism can play positive roles in leading growth of economy, consolidation of cultural identity and interreligious dialogue. They also, however, raise awareness around key gaps that need to be addressed in terms of infrastructure and stakeholder coordination and managing cultural authenticity. Table 5.10 This table serves to demonstrate that, even whilst religious tourism provides opportunities for sustainable development, pro-active planning and community taking charge are essential to make the most of such potential and to maintain cultural integrity in the long term.

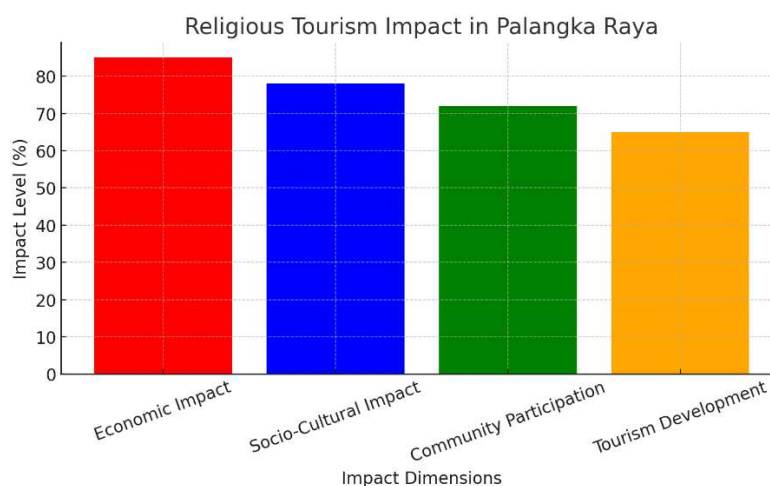


Figure 1. Religious tourism Impact in Palangka Raya City

It is observed from the bar chart that Economic Impact, Socio-Cultural Impact, Community Participation, and Tourism Development are the four major dimensions of religious tourism impact in Palangka Raya. The pleasingly colored bars make it simple to compare the relative importance of each dimension. Economic Impact is the best

contributing indicator, due to the great amount of money that pilgrims add to local economy and business activity. Both Socio-Cultural Impact and Community Participation also rank high, indicating that tourism can contribute to cultural revival and community engagement. Tourism Development has a lower value, although still being positive, as it is hindered by the limited infrastructure and weak marketing. On the whole, the visual illustrates that religious tourism to the city shapes its destiny in various ways: points of strengths emerge as well as challenges suggesting directions for improvement.

This study has shown that religious tourism significantly affects local economy in Palangka Raya City, supports the previous literature about the importance of tourism in improving income and facing small business as well as regional economic resilience. Han and Yu, as well as Setiawan have also in the same way found out that religious tourism is an economic stimulus to inflow of visitors' spending which helps to create more openings for micro-enterprises and cultural product markets [13], [14]. The experiences of small vendors, homestay owners, and artisans in Palangka Raya confirm these observations from earlier research, demonstrating that the 'story' of tourism-facilitated economic progress is not simply a rhetorical device but an urbanist structure pre-programmed within the semi-urban environment. As per the Tourism Multiplier Effect Theory, Tourist spending has a direct and indirect effect on local economy through job creation and spreading money within community [15]. In this context, the results in Palangka Raya confirm such approach and show how religious tourists during ritual events create multiple economic gains.

Socio-culturally, this study also adds to previous research that highlights the ambivalence of religious tourism in maintaining and commercializing culture. Earlier studies of Wijaya and Harahap revealed that the inflow of tourists who seek religious ceremony drives communities to reinvigorate declining traditional performances [16]. This is clear in Palangka Raya, where Dayak Kaharingan rituals and Christian ritual features are again visible in public space. The implications are consistent with the Cultural Revitalization Theory that external cultural interest such as tourism can enhance internal community identity and facilitate transmission of culture between generations [17]. This study, however, also notes a worry that the cultural might have been distorted or perverted duringtification, as it is also expressed in Lestari's warning about the excessive touristic interpretation to result on ritual simplification or to turn it towards performance-oriented kind of practices [18]. It is therefore argued that, although the religious tourism product contributes to conservation, quality control must be maintained to preserve authenticity and ritualistic aspect.

The results have also demonstrated that religious tourism promote inter-religion harmony in Palangka Raya, reinforcing previous works stressing the function of tourism as a mediator for interracial conversation and cohesion. Mansur et al, shared tourist places can often foster interaction and prejudice reduction between groups, especially in multi-faith societies [7], [10]. Consistent with Contact Theory, which postulates that increasing contact among groups would lead to tolerance and mutual understanding,

this study shows an example of how religious tourism facilitates positive inter-group encounters between Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Kaharingan in the city. Interfaith leaders in Palangka Raya cited such increased cooperation on cultural events, religious celebrations and community festivals intended to attract visitors. This shows a social cohesion environment is formed and that tourism, instead of conflict, can be by an instrument for peace-building.

Nonetheless, the limitations in Palangka Raya are also similar with the ones observed through previous research especially related to infrastructure constraints, tourism governance, and policy coordination. In their comparative investigation Rahman and Idris, found that the developing world is faced with such challenges as limited transportation access, lack of system promotion, Poor stakeholder cooperation all which diminish the growth and expansion in tourism industry. These limitations are in line with the research reported in this paper: primary religious sites at Palangka Raya still lack clear information, sanitation and facilities. From the TALC Theory, Palangka Raya is reportedly in the early involvement stage, which means that growth is evident but structural support remains lacking [2], [4]. Without comprehensive planning, the city may lose vitality and fail to sustain long-term tourism expansion.

The study also validates theoretical views of the role of local community participation in tourism development. According to Community-Based Tourism Theory, local resident's involvement is required in order for the tourism benefits and cultural heritage are conserved [12], [14]. In this study, there is community strong incentive to engage in religious tourism development, particularly through cultural guide service, ritual performance/services and craft production. The participation is also in line with the findings of Ardiansyah and Chandra, who asserted that local involvement leads to ownership and responsibility of cultural tourism. However, the case of Palangka Raya also suggests the importance of continuous empowerment programs, training and government facilitation for improving managerial capacity in communities—a phenomenon that was also found in Nugroho and Prasetyo study who discovered training is inadequate to direct community involvement [15], [17].

In general, the results of this study suggest that spiritual tourism on economic and socio-cultural in palangka Raya reflects a contemporary theoretical model well as previous research models. However, the city is unique in that it has latitudinal aspects of indigenous spirituality, Christian heritage and Islamic traditions blending together to present a rich and multicultural milieu not widely studied in Indonesian tourism studies. The blending of these facets indicates how religious tourism may link economic growth with heritage conservation as well as instill feelings of social unity. Consistent with Cross-Cultural Tourism Theory, tourism in these settings is often a conduit for deep cultural interaction and identity construction processes [18]. Therefore, the results of this survey from Palangka Raya also contribute to understanding about religious tourism for multiethnic and multireligion societies.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This study reveals that religious tourism in Palangka Raya significantly contributes to local income generation, small business entrepreneurship, cultural restoration, and interfaith harmony. However, these benefits are hindered by infrastructure constraints, fragmented stakeholder engagement, and concerns over cultural commodification. **Implication** : The findings suggest that religious tourism holds considerable potential for regional development, but its success relies on effective implementation, inclusive planning, and community-based cultural conservation to ensure sustainable outcomes. **Limitation** : The study's reliance on qualitative data limits its generalizability and excludes quantitative measures such as economic valuation and statistical descriptions of tourist behavior. Furthermore, the research is geographically confined to Palangka Raya, preventing broader comparisons with other regions in Central Kalimantan. **Future Research** : Future studies should incorporate mixed-methods approaches, including economic impact analyses, visitor perception surveys, and longitudinal studies of cultural change. Comparative research in other Bornean cities or Indonesian pluralist areas would further enhance understanding of the diverse impacts of religious tourism in varying social-religious contexts, providing valuable insights for policymakers to develop culturally sustainable tourism systems.

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***Made Puspe (Corresponding Author)**

Udayana University, Indonesia
Email: Madepuspe2@gmail.com

I Putu Anom

Udayana University, Indonesia
Email: putuanom@unud.ac.id

I Nyoman Sunarta

Udayana University, Indonesia
Email: cairns54@yahoo.com

I Wayan Suardana

Udayana University, Indonesia
Email: suar.dana@yahoo.com
