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Liwetan, The Boardroom for Managing Horizontal Conflicts in Tourism Village Sustainability

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ABSTRACT: In the tourism development and sustainability literature, conflicts among local communities, i.e. horizontal conflicts, about community-based tourism have been found to be detrimental to the sustainability of their village. This qualitative study aims to counter that perception. In-depth interviews were conducted with the village's communities, including local community group members and local authorities. The findings revealed that the 'responsible manner of local communities' is the best practice to mitigate horizontal conflicts. Specifically, we discovered that local community groups in the tourism village are aware that their collaborations may potentially lead to conflicts; therefore, they preemptively prepared themselves with a platform that enables them to discuss intrapersonal, intragroup, and intergroup matters in a manner that avoids and minimizes horizontal conflicts. This platform emerged through their ancestral tradition called *liwetan*. Although *liwetan* is not a new concept, using it in the management of tourism villages is not a common practice. We thus suggest that the approach discussed in this study be replicated and applied in other tourism villages all over Indonesia, given that the *liwetan* tradition can be found in many villages, albeit with different names.

KEYWORDS: tourism village; sustainability; horizontal conflicts; *liwetan*; local tradition

Introduction

As the wave of confusion caused by the Covid-19 pandemic starts to recede, some countries – Indonesia being one of them – have commenced their tourism activities. This includes the re-emergence of promotions for community-based tourism (CBT). In Indonesia, the tourism village concept, which focuses on the participation of local people, is one form of CBT. The activities conducted at a tourism village are regarded as rural tourism. In many parts of Asia, especially in Southeast Asia, rural tourism is linked to CBT and poverty reduction (Nair et al., 2015). The main principle of CBT- approaches in most developing countries is collaboration (Stone, 2015). CBT is indeed beneficial in empowering local communities, mostly by strengthening locals' capacities, cooperation, and collaboration – regardless of the complex and uncertain intra-community power dynamics it creates between private, public, and community stakeholders (Dolezal & Novelli, 2020). Many studies have recognized CBT as a suitable development model to maximize the socio-economic benefits of tourism and

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minimize its negative impacts on the environment (Tolkach & King, 2015). CBT, however, is not a heal-all medicine, because along with the development of CBT comes problems pertaining to how communities operate within the system of multilevel tourism players (Tolkach & King, 2015), unequal power dynamics (Stone, 2015), and ineffective collaboration processes (Plichta, 2019). The activities of rural tourism must thus innovatively encourage local communities to engage in every phase of development, including planning, developing, and managing the business side of tourism activities. The value of CBT as an ideal instrument to promote sustainable rural tourism by establishing smart partnerships between all tourism-related stakeholders (Nair et al., 2015) justifies the need to study CBT as a space in which power relations between community members can lead to community members' (dis)empowerment.

In Indonesia, CBT is often represented by desa wisata (tourism village), defined as village areas that have an authentic atmosphere reflecting the localities of the village in terms of social and cultural activities, daily customs and traditions, traditional buildings, and use of space; at the same time, these villages are able to produce the infrastructure, attractions, catering, and accommodation needed by visitors (Picard, 2006). The tourism village thus connects intangible cultural heritage (ICH) to destination-based tourism (Sotiriadis, 2017). Although tourism villages have existed since the early 2000s, the official tourism village program initiative in Indonesia was established in 2017 by three collaborating ministries: The Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration, The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, and The Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs. In 2010, the launch of 2000 tourism villages was announced, targeted to be completed in 2014 in line with the nation's goal of 20 million inbound tourists by 2020. However, all these targets were disrupted when the Covid-19 pandemic struck all countries in the world, forcing suddenly unemployed workers to return to their villages. With their villages being promoted as tourism destinations under the tourism village program, tourism villages are displaced employees' only hope to find job opportunities back home instead of becoming additional burdens to their villages and communities.

A tourism village, like any other business, has to be managed effectively in order for it to be sustainable. As tourism villages support rural tourism activities and the local economy, there is a naturally growing need to maintain sustainability and learn from previous mistakes. Towards this end, many tourism villages in Indonesia have attempted to develop responsible innovations for their village management after years of trial and error, with varying degrees of success. Consequently, sustainability remains the main concern as tourism villages continue to develop in many provinces in Indonesia, particularly regarding the horizontal conflicts among local communities.

While most studies have accused community members of not taking initiative to manage their horizontal conflicts despite being the main players in a tourism village, this study adopted the viewpoint that emerging conflicts are completely understood by the communities and that they do indeed attempt to develop platforms to minimize potential conflicts before they arise or escalate. It is important to understand and learn from such best practices in successful villages to enhance the responsible management of tourism villages for their sustainability.

Therefore, in light of the significance of horizontal conflict management in tourism village management, this study sought to explore the reason community members deem it necessary to revert to the ancestral tradition of coming together for *liwetan*. In the following sections, this paper explains the study's objectives, events, results, and implications.

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Objectives

Through a deep understanding of community groups' different perceptions, this study's objective was to examine why village communities chose their ancestors' tradition of *liwetan* as the platform for community group members to peacefully sit together to discuss their village's development and growth. What does this platform have that enables it to facilitate the comprehension of the complex interactions between groups? Even though the current study undertook a narrative explanation of specific geographic study areas, the results form a basis for the understanding and identification of conflicts in tourism villages, which have valuable implications for minimizing horizontal conflicts and improving the sustainability of these villages.

Events

Tourism villages in Indonesia involve various community groups, each with its own role and goals. If not managed accordingly, a group's goal might collide with that of the village. Unlike previous village locals, current community members know that they are part of their village's development and should be included in managing the tourism destination that has developed in their village (Lekaota, 2015). The participation of community members should encompass involvement in decision-making at any stage of a tourism program, such as defining objectives, formulating policies, planning and implementing programs, and controlling ownership of tourism activities and resources. The participation level of community members should thus be considered when evaluating the success or failure of any community-based tourism journey (Lekaota, 2015). Engaging all local community group members in every step of planning, developing, and managing a tourism village would bring significant benefits to rural tourism's sustainable development by minimizing conflicts. Hence, to promote sustainable rural tourism, it is important to build mutual understanding and partnerships among all tourism-related community group members (Lekaota, 2015).

The concept of conflict

Conflict dimensions, presented in Table 1, were used to identify the conflicts that emerged in the study area. The three main dimensions of conflict in this study were qualitative differences in conflict types, the relative positions of conflicting community members, and the level of conflict manifestation (Lama & Becker, 2019). These dimensions were then used to categorize the conflicts prevalent in the villages. Some conflicts depicted here were 'old', as stated by the respondents. They occurred when the village started to establish itself when the knowledge and understanding of the community members were still lacking. They also occurred before the communities had found the right platform for members to discuss and address their problems peacefully.

Under qualitative differences in conflict types, end conflict is a type of conflict dealing with the divergence of village goals among community groups. The second type is means conflict, which are conflicts that surface when community groups chase the same goals in adapting to complex changes. This leads to the collision between the means or instruments applied, compromising at least one group's ability to achieve their goal. The third type of conflict is norm conflict. Norm conflict is not directly related to village goals like previous conflict types but is based on contradictory norms and values among groups that define what is approved by and aspired to by them. The fourth and final type of conflict is attribution conflicts, which has less to do with norms and values, and more to do with blaming other

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groups for negative results. Even though it does not entail specific conflicts related to goals or values, attribution conflict arises over accusations of who is to blame for the slow development of a village's tourism activities.

Table 1: Conflict dimensions

Dimensions	Description
Qualitative differences in conflict types	End conflict
	Means conflict
	Norm conflict
	Attribution conflict
Relative positions of conflicting community members	Intrapersonal conflict
	Intragroup conflict
	Horizontal intergroup conflict
	Vertical intergroup conflict
Level of manifestation	Latent conflict
	Perceived conflict
	Manifest conflict

There are four categories of conflicts that fall under the 'relative positions of conflicting community members' dimension: intrapersonal, intragroup, horizontal intergroup, and vertical intergroup (Lama & Becker, 2019). Vertical conflicts, such as between communities and the government, were not discussed in this study. Instead, we only examined intrapersonal, interpersonal, and horizontal conflicts among the relevant groups. Horizontal conflicts among community groups are typified as intergroup due to the "otherness" aspect in groups' roles in a village's development.

The last dimension of conflicts pertains to the manifestation level of the conflict. In the latent stage, community members are not yet aware of the conflict. Next, perceived conflict manifestation is the stage of conflict awareness that does not necessarily involve any action towards other groups. Finally, manifest conflict is the most observable level of conflict, where community group members have voiced problems repeatedly and eventually had to stop.

Liwetan

Liwetan refers to the practice of eating meals communally with family, relatives, and friends from the same serving dish (Adiakurnia, 2017). Two terminologies have been used interchangeably to describe this practice, *liwetan* and *bancakan. Bancakan* refers to the act of eating itself, wherein all items on a menu are placed on one big banana leaf. The rice served on this occasion is called *nasi liwet*, which means traditionally cooked Javanese rice; hence the term *liwetan*. The word *liwet* is also mentioned in several Javanese manuscripts discussing traditional foods, notably Serat Centhini and Serat Goenandrija.

Having begun during the expansion of Islamic influence to the Java island, the *liwetan* tradition cannot be separated from Javanese and Islamic traditions. It started from the eating

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practice of Islamic scholars at the time inside boarding schools or *pesantren*. The way the scholars sat with their teachers symbolized the same level of the hierarchy, with no discrimination of economic, social, or academic backgrounds. Since then, *liwetan* has become closely related to ritualistic ceremonies and symbols of local wisdom in the Javanese community.
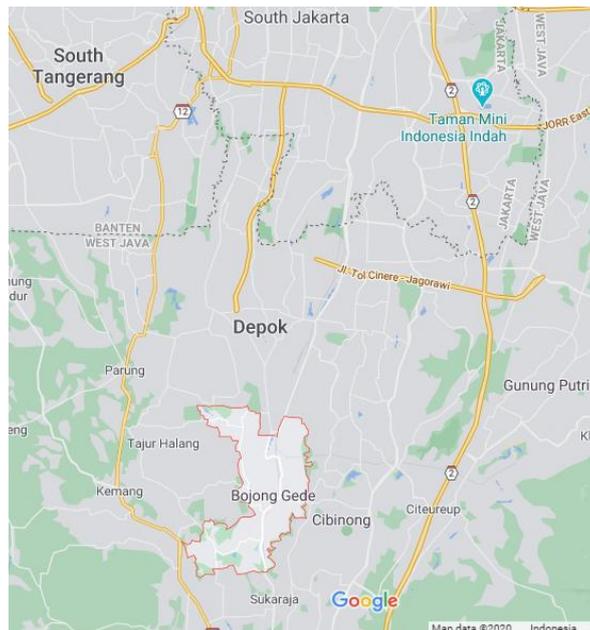

Figure 1: *Liwetan*
Source: https://www.beautynesia.id/berita-food/

In ritual ceremonies, traditional food functions to forge social bonds, sow harmony between residents, strengthen brotherhood, and cultivate the mutual spirit. At the same time, traditional food has symbolic and spiritual values for the community. In line with these claims of social and spiritual unity, *liwetan* involves no plates or separate food containers. Instead, the main dish, *liwet* rice, and other side dishes are arranged horizontally on a big banana leaf as a symbol of togetherness. Nowadays, *liwetan* is not limited to traditional Javanese rituals; rather, it is practiced in various social groups as an avenue for bonding between community groups. The *liwetan* tradition is considered to have social value in strengthening friendship and brotherhood, as all those who participate in this tradition consume the same food from the same container, regardless of their economic, social, or academic status.

Results

This study was based on a case study conducted in a *desa* (village) located in the Bogor Regency of the West Java Province, Indonesia. This village is located less than 50 km from Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. Less than an hour's drive from the city, the village has the benefit of accessibility. There is a freeway passing nearby and a train station that connects the village to Jakarta and several West Java towns.

This study was part of our larger research project in the village. For this study, only data on *liwetan* was extracted from the project's overall data. Moreover, though the larger study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, we used only qualitative data for this paper. As such, this study involved primary data from structured in-depth interviews that were conducted with the local community. As shown in Table 2, respondents who participated in the interviews were representatives of various community groups. They comprised Komunitas Pangkas Rambut, Usaha Mikro, Kecil dan Menengah (UMKM), Badan Usaha Milik Desa (BUMDes), Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis), restaurant owners, homestay owners, and Karang Taruna.

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Figure 2: Location of study area
Source: https://www.google.com/maps/place/Bojong+Gede,+Bogor,+West+Java/

Table 2: Local community groups in the tourism village

Community Group	Description
Badan Usaha Milik Desa (BUMDes)	Village-owned enterprise
Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis)	Tourism awareness group
Karang Taruna	Youth organization
Usaha Mikro, Kecil dan Menengah (UMKM)	Middle, small, and micro-enterprise (MSME)
Komunitas Pangkas Rambut	Barbershop owner
Pemilik Penginapan	Homestay owner
Pemilik Rumah Makan	Restaurant owner

To collect narrative responses from the respondents, a set of structured interview questions were prepared within the scope of the interaction among community group members, and how they developed platforms to cope with horizontal conflict. The interviews were conducted several times from September 2020 to November 2020, both formally and informally, physically and virtually (via an online platform, telephone calls, and text messages). Due to the pandemic condition, we couldn't interview a large number of people at the same time. Thus needed several visits to interview the respondents. At times, we visited the village and participated in the respondents' daily activities, asking questions in between to elicit deeper and more authentic expressions. In this manner, participant observation gave us the ability to observe and better understand verbal and non-verbal interactions. Questions were asked in Bahasa Indonesia and Sundanese languages to build more rapport with the respondents, although most respondents spoke Bahasa well.

Respondents were interviewed about their personal and professional encounters as part of the community. Their personal life stories and experiences served as a tool to explain their emergent issues, such as changes in income, community closeness, and kinship. All interviews were recorded and then translated into English before being transcribed into interview scripts. The data was then analyzed and interpreted using content analysis via the

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NVIVO software. First, the transcribed narratives underwent the process of coding to understand conditions, environments, intervening conditions, and outcomes. The next step was classifying the data based on the coding process. Taking our comments, notes, and past literature into account, the results helped us reach generalized conclusions on the dimensions of conflict addressed in this study (Bowen, 2006). One of the challenges met during data classifying and analyzing for cross-language research is the language barrier (Esfehani & Walters, 2018). We came across some terminologies which is a culturally-based language. These terms include specific concepts that are not easy to transfer into English or having an equal translation. One particular example of this point from this study is the term *liwetan* which refers to the concept explained in the previous section. However, the English translation does not carry justice to the core meaning and especially the cultural role of *liwetan* completely. Therefore, in this study, some original terms in the original language are still used. The analysis results are presented in the next section.

Table 3: List of respondents

Community Groups	Total number of respondents
Badan Usaha Milik Desa (BUMDes)	3
Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis)	2
Karang Taruna	4
UMKM	6
Komunitas Pangkas Rambut	4
Homestay Owners	3
Pemilik Rumah Makan	3

Managing conflicts

Qualitative differences in types of conflicts

In this tourism village, ends conflict is the least prevalent conflict type because all community group members have the same goal, which is to achieve sustainability in their village's growth. Most respondents described this as their hope that their village will become more resilient towards crises.

Means conflict was indicated by one of the respondents (a homestay owner) as a lack of training facilities in their field compared to other groups. A member of Karang Taruna also stated that the lack of digital technology skills is delaying them from achieving the village's goal. Although norm conflict is common in other areas, this conflict type is not significant in the village. It is because the village members share a common traditional background and values, given that most of them are native to the area or have lived there for a long time. Specifically, the villagers are mostly Sundanese (one of the ethnic groups in Java) and Muslim, which suggests religious and cultural homogeneity.

The fourth conflict is the attribution conflict. This conflict type is existent in the village in terms of the community blaming BUMDes for not being responsive to the needs of other groups for skill training. Although it is arguable that BUMDes is ignorant of the community's demand for training to upskill their capabilities, the vast majority of community groups accuse them of such because they see BUMDes as the motor that moves community groups in the village. Similarly, respondents attribute the problem of parking management in the village to the activities of the barbershop group. Other community groups believe that

barbershop visitors create traffic and parking problems because these shops are located by roadsides. Visitors' cars and motorcycles are often parked in front of the shops, creating traffic jams.

Relative positions of conflicting community groups

Intrapersonal conflicts stem from the community group members themselves, such as concerns over the ability to start a business. The respondents confessed that it is a lack of self-confidence that holds them back from starting a business. It is their perception that launching a business in the tourism sector requires a good amount of capital and time.

The other example of intrapersonal conflict is individuals' time constraints in dedicating themselves to the group. This potentially creates conflicts in terms of task distribution and time availability. Except for business owners who can dedicate most of their time, other community group members, such as Karang Taruna members, have full-time careers in other companies. This makes them struggle to allocate spare time to their group's activities and tasks. Respondent #8 (male, Karang Taruna) described how time management is somewhat a problem among members: "It is because most members have their own side job or even main job, that the obligations and tasks in the community groups are put into second priority."

In reality, insufficient time spared by other members was reported to be a substantial cause of interpersonal conflict among group members. "People do as they feel like it, or some say let me do it, what should we do about it. If this empty promise keeps on going, then sustainability will not be there," said one respondent (female, UMKM). Another interpersonal conflict emerged in the earlier stages of the tourism village when the members of UMKM were collecting information and stories on the village's history. This required long hours of searching and talking to village elders, as two respondents (#10 and #11, female, UMKM) described: "This task was not an easy one; thus, not many people were willing to do it. We had to walk and talk for hours to our elders, then transcribe all the stories told by them. We also needed to find scientific data to match the story which was also our big challenge because very little was found."

Similarly, intergroup or horizontal conflict arose when other community groups considered that the choice of their village's brand name was because of the barbershop owners' (Komunitas Pangkas Rambut) majority contribution. They thought that the village is well-known regionally in surroundings of West Java and Jakarta area, and nationally in Indonesia, solely due to the Komunitas Pangkas Rambut's role.

Level of conflict manifestation

Perceived conflict arose in the earlier stage of development when some community members perceived that building a business and incorporating it into the village's tourism activities is difficult. However, respondent #24 (female, restaurant owner) found that: "I didn't know that I can start with what I had. We have a local flower here that we made into local drinks. Once I leisurely took pictures of it and posted them on my daughter's Instagram account. In a matter of minutes, requests for it started to come in."

Respondent #11 (female, UMKM) explained: "Although there are some members that sell the same type of products – brownies, for example – we always encourage each other. We never feel any competitiveness regarding sales and income. We help to promote each other's products, either through offline or online promotion." Indeed, when asked the main cause of

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conflicts among community members, most did not view financial income as the problem. This is because despite being close to a metropolitan city like Jakarta, village communities still maintain their religious ways. They believe that financial income is arranged by God, so there is no need for jealousy or envy among them. An excerpt from respondent #16 (male, barbershop owner) reads: "All of us understand that financial sustenance comes from Allah, each one is already destined to receive certain value. This leaves us with no room to be jealous of others." This shows that for the religious villagers, their financial income is already destined by the Almighty. However, inequality of financial income and profit-sharing of the village's income could be latent conflicts, as the more the village grows, the more revenues it will receive. In the future, community members may have to address these latent conflicts to avoid them from creating division among members.

Returning to ancestral wisdom for village sustainability

We discovered that the decision to choose *liwetan* did not come easily, because it was not thought of at first. Local community groups initially followed common practices and used formal platforms for discussions and meetings at the village's head office building. Respondent #3 (male, BUMDes) explained that the local authority, in this case, the *kepala desa* (head of the village) showed support by lending the groups a room in his office building: "This meeting room was used by us for several months for routine meetings. But maybe because of the 'formal' situation, most meetings were very formal with visible gaps between community members." Such formality divided the members, either financially, socially, or academically. This brought such discomfort to the members that meeting participants began to decrease in number, as stated by respondent #5 (male, Pokdarwis): "We started to feel things that should not be there. Like, why does this person sound arrogant, or why does this person act like he is the boss."

At this point, the groups were all aware of their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup conflicts. A community that is socially empowered is characterized by the equality of its communities, as well as collaboration, a sense of belonging to the village, and strong community stakeholders. On the other hand, disempowerment is seen through competition, envy, and conflicts among village communities. Therefore, the unfavorable situation was fortunately realized by some key members, who then suggested that the communities employ other platforms as their 'boardroom'. Since it was and is their mutual goal to see their village grow as a tourism village and thereby improve the locals' economic condition, they began discussing, at this early stage, the platform to be used as their 'boardroom' to deliberate matters related to the village's development (Dolezal & Novelli, 2020).

Respondent #4 (male, Pokdarwis), one of the village residents and a professor in communication, proactively requested group discussions "to return our management (including conflict management) to religious practice that has been done by our ancestors." Following this suggestion, members compared various discussion platforms practiced by the village or by ancestors in the past. Some community members at the time were from religious backgrounds and were educated in the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*). They eventually came up with the idea of *liwetan* as the discussion platform instead of the formal meeting room. This attests to the fact that religion is a driving force in the display of human commitment and devotion in numerous forms (Rana & Malik, 2016).

Overall, the members unanimously concurred with the choice of *liwetan* as the platform for monthly community group meetings. This is not surprising, as the practice itself symbolizes the religious and cultural background of the village. We further found that the religious

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meaning behind *liwetan* hails from its historical practice by Islamic scholars, which is one of the reasons it is well accepted. Another reason is that it is a symbol of equality in society. This cultural significance comes from the fact that when having *liwetan*, all participants are sitting on the ground at the same level. Nobody sits higher than the others because the banana leaf and food items are all arranged on the ground as well, rather than a table. All participants are also required to eat from the same serving platter, the banana leaf, with neither fancy chinaware nor cutlery.

The *liwetan* platform has been used as the 'boardroom' of the community groups since September 2020. It takes place outdoors by the small creek in the village every month. Ever since then, the number of participants has increased, correspondingly leading to the growing tourism activities in the village. These CBT activities are likely to change the livelihoods of the communities (Lonn et al., 2018). For example, respondents said that they were able to establish their own small-scale businesses because it was not as difficult as they first thought to integrate a business in the village's activities. Many of them already had the skills or capital needed to be entrepreneurs with endeavors such as cooking, baking cakes and pastries, or opening grocery shops. As some respondents stated, they are experiencing higher financial income despite the negative impact of the pandemic. Though their earnings are better yet not significant in this situation, they again revert to their religious beliefs that it is all arranged by God.

The lesson learned from the village is that strategic management can come from local wisdom and village traditions. These findings enable future researchers to enrich the management of tourism villages by looking deeper into the perspective of local wisdom. Along with this study's results, we offer useful insights on local communities' perceptions of conflict. As far as the village's welfare is concerned, all the community members are conscious of the risks of conflict in their roles. These problems are not to be put aside, but must instead be addressed in accordance with the village's own unique traditions.

Implications

The practical implications of this study are related to the field of strategic conflict management. In managing horizontal conflicts, local communities can find effective solutions by applying their traditional or ancestral wisdom. Although *liwetan* is not a new concept, especially in the rural areas, using it in the management of tourism villages was not a common practice – till now. Our findings argue that *liwetan* could be replicated and applied in other tourism villages all over Indonesia, since this tradition exists in many villages, albeit with different names.

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