

Young Generation Participation in Encouraging Sustainable Tourism in Kotagede Heritage Area

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the forms, roles, and challenges of young generation participation in encouraging sustainable tourism practices in the heritage area of Kotagede, Yogyakarta. As one of the historical sites with high cultural value, Kotagede faces challenges in maintaining the preservation of cultural heritage while developing sustainable tourism potential. The young generation, as agents of change, plays an important role in innovation, digital promotion, cultural preservation, and educational activities for tourists and local communities. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Data analysis techniques are carried out through the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (1994) which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study show that the young generation plays an active role through various activities such as digital campaigns, heritage tour guides, management of arts and culture activities, and development of local creative products. However, their participation still faces challenges in the form of limited resources, lack of policy support, and knowledge gaps between generations (Pitana, 2019). This study concludes that empowerment and involvement of the young generation in a structured manner are the keys to realizing sustainable tourism in heritage areas. Research recommendations include strengthening training, collaboration between stakeholders, and developing community-based participatory models.

Keywords: Young generation, Participation, Sustainable tourism, Heritage, Kotagede

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Sustainable tourism has become a major paradigm in global destination development that focuses not only on economic growth but also on cultural and environmental preservation. This model requires the involvement of all parties, including the young generation as adaptive and dynamic social agents. The active participation of the young generation is important to create positive transformation because they are close to technology and sustainability values (Askani et al., 2021). This argument is reinforced by the fact that changes in tourist behavior and destination promotion models are now heavily influenced by social media dominated by the young generation.

The young generation has great potential in strengthening tourism sustainability through local innovation, digital promotion, and community empowerment. They are not only economic actors but also cultural agents who are able to adapt traditional values into more contextual and modern formats. Studies by (Adinugraha et al., 2024) and (Kusumawardani & Prasetyo, 2023) prove that youth involvement in tourism village management programs has improved the quality of services, cultural appeal, and environmental awareness of the community. This argument shows that youth can no longer be positioned only as successors, but as pioneers of social and cultural change in the tourism sector.

Heritage areas such as Kotagede in Yogyakarta are real examples of destinations that require holistic sustainability interventions. Known for its rich architecture, silver history, and Javanese culture, Kotagede faces pressures from urbanization, commercialization, and shifting generational values. Therefore, a preservation strategy is needed that touches the roots of the community, especially the young generation. According to (Anurogo et al., 2017) and (KT Yogyakarta, 2018), strengthening youth participation in preserving Kotagede is a crucial step to revive cultural heritage while maintaining the competitiveness of the destination.

The argument is that if the young generation is not actively and purposefully involved, preservation efforts will lose continuity between generations. Although several studies have examined the role of youth in tourism promotion (Diwyarthi, 2023), tourism village development (Pradini et al., 2023), and preservation of customs and the environment (Ambo-Rappe et al., 2020; Wanudyastuti et al., 2025), there are still very few studies that specifically review the contribution of the young generation in the context of urban heritage areas such as Kotagede. To fill the research gap, previous research has focused more on tourism villages, nature conservation, or the role of youth in the creative economy sector in general but has not explored how the young generation articulates their participation in historical areas that face the challenges of cultural preservation and tourism commercialization simultaneously.

This study presents its novelty through a comprehensive analysis of the forms, roles, and challenges of young generation participation in supporting sustainable tourism in the heritage area of Kotagede. This approach not only traces youth activities in a casuistic manner but also links them to the agenda of preserving urban culture, the use of digital media as a tool for empowerment, and intergenerational dynamics in local tourism governance. This study is expected to be a conceptual and practical reference in developing a relevant community-based participatory model for heritage areas in other cities in Indonesia.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Strategic Role of the Young Generation in Encouraging Sustainable Tourism

The young generation plays an important role in innovation, digital promotion, and cultural preservation in the context of sustainable tourism. Research done by (Kusumawardani & Prasetyo's, 2023) shows that innovation from the community, especially young people, is the main driver in achieving sustainable tourism villages. In a similar context, (Adinugraha et al., 2024) explains how millennial youth become important actors in the transformation of religious-based tourism villages into a more inclusive and adaptive format to contemporary values. In heritage areas, the participation of the young generation is not only seen from physical involvement, but also through creative approaches such as arts and culture and tour guides. (Nidianita & Puspitasari, 2017) strengthen this by highlighting the role of Kotagede youth in preserving the silver industry as a cultural heritage as well as a source of creative economy. This proves that the young generation is able to bridge the aspects of conservation and local economic development.

Digital Innovation and Promotion as an Instrument of Participation

The use of social media as a promotional tool has become a common practice for the young generation in supporting tourist destinations, including heritage areas. (Diwyarthi's, 2023) emphasized that proper use of social media can increase the visibility of tourist villages and attract wider public involvement. (Syafirin et al., 2023) also support this by stating that information technology-based tourism management accelerates the dissemination of information and destination promotion. Digital campaign activities carried out by youth communities such as *Karang Taruna* or heritage communities is a real form of the role of the young generation in supporting sustainable promotion. This kind of promotion also helps build a positive image of heritage areas that can compete with modern destinations.

Educational and Cultural Activities in Sustainable Tourism

The role of the young generation is not limited to promotion, but also in organizing educational and cultural activities for tourists. (Andini's, 2024) revealed that agro-edutourism destinations are able to shape the environmental awareness of the young generation while providing learning experiences to tourists. This reflects the importance of involving young people in the design and implementation of educational tourism programs. Likewise, performing arts activities, historical tour guides, and development of local cultural products are part of the activities of the young generation in heritage areas such as Kotagede, as exemplified in the report of (Pradini et al., 2023) who examined the contribution of Karang Taruna in managing community-based tourism.

Challenges of Young Generation Participation in Heritage Areas

Despite its strategic role, the participation of the young generation still faces challenges such as limited resources, lack of access to training, and minimal policy support. (Fasa et al., 2022) through PESTEL analysis showed that institutional and policy factors often inhibit community initiatives, especially young people, in developing sustainable tourism. In addition, (Askani et al., 2021) emphasized that the character of young people who care about the environment needs to be built in a planned manner through activities that are oriented towards education and social values. (Wanudyastuti et al., 2025) also highlighted the need to preserve local values by strengthening the young generation as the successors of the traditional cultural system.

Contextual Study of Kotagede Heritage Area

Kotagede, as a heritage area with high cultural value, has great potential to be developed through the involvement of the young generation. (Anurogo et al., 2017) stated that the resilience of heritage tourism areas such as Kotagede is highly dependent on the strength of the community and the participation of its citizens. (Adhelia et al., 2015) also emphasized the importance of synergy between components (government, community, and youth) in forming sustainable cultural tourism. Studies on Kotagede in general have discussed the preservation of areas and community activities, but studies that specifically evaluate the forms, roles, and challenges of young generation participation in urban heritage areas such as Kotagede are still limited.

Research Gap and Novelty

The majority of previous studies have focused on tourism villages, the environment, and digital promotion in general, and have not comprehensively integrated the three main aspects that are the focus of this study: forms of participation, challenges faced, and the contribution of the young generation in preserving heritage areas. Thus, this research presents novelty through an integrative and contextual approach that focuses on urban heritage areas, as well as the use of field data to deeply understand the dynamics of the young generation in sustainable tourism practices in Kotagede.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the participation of the young generation in encouraging sustainable tourism practices in the heritage area of Kotagede, Yogyakarta. This approach was chosen because it is considered capable of revealing the meaning, motivation, and form of social participation carried out by the young generation in the context of cultural preservation and local tourism development. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews with key informants such as members of the youth community, tourism actors, community leaders, and local business actors in Kotagede. In addition, participant observation was used to record the real activities of young people in tourism activities such as heritage guiding, cultural performances, and digital promotions on social media. Researchers also documented visual archives, social media uploads, and relevant creative products of the youth community. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles & Huberman (1994) interactive analysis model which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. Data reduction is carried out to summarize and filter important information from interviews and observations. Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of thematic narratives and direct quotes from informants to strengthen interpretation. Drawing conclusions is done repeatedly through data triangulation and validation with sources to ensure the validity of the information. Data validity is also maintained through credibility, dependability, and confirmability techniques by cross-checking between informants and reviewing the analysis results by experts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and field documentation, the main findings were that the young generation in the Kotagede heritage area has significant participation in encouraging sustainable tourism practices. This participation is manifested in various forms of activities that lead to cultural preservation, digital promotion, education, and cross-sector collaboration.

Forms of Young Generation Participation

The young generation is involved in various roles, such as being a heritage tour guide, cultural event manager, local heritage-based creative product craftsman, and content creator for tourism promotion through social media. They are also active in communities such as Kotagede Heritage Youth, Karang Taruna, and local youth creative forums.

"Guiding and cultural promotion activities are now mostly handled by young people because they understand better how to communicate on social media," (Interview, March 6, 2024, Head of the Kotagede Heritage Youth Community).

The participation of the young generation in the Kotagede heritage area shows a shift in strategic roles in developing more inclusive and sustainable tourism. Their involvement in activities such as becoming tour guides, cultural event managers, local creative product craftsmen, and digital content creators indicates that the young generation is not just a supporting actor, but also the main driving force behind tourist destinations. Activities as tour guides demonstrate the ability of the young generation to bridge local cultural values to tourists with a communicative and relevant approach, especially through social media. As conveyed by the Head of the Kotagede Heritage Youth Community (Interview, March 6, 2024), the young generation understands visual language and digital narratives better, which makes cultural promotion more attractive and easily accepted by domestic and foreign tourists, especially from millennials and Gen Z. Their involvement in communities such as Karang Taruna and other creative forums also strengthens the community-based tourism (CBT) approach, where collaboration between local community members is key to tourism sustainability. This is in line with the findings of Kusumawardani & Prasetyo (2023), which emphasize the importance of strengthening the innovation capacity of the community, including the young generation, in realizing socially, culturally, and economically sustainable tourism destinations. With these various roles, the young generation not only maintains the continuity of cultural values but also contributes to the transformation of Kotagede as a dynamic and adaptive tourist destination to changing times. This shows that the form of participation of the young generation is very important in creating an innovative, community-based, and future-oriented tourism ecosystem.

The Role of the Young Generation in Cultural Preservation

Young people play a role in revitalizing cultural activities such as local art performances, making silver crafts, and archiving oral histories from senior citizens. They not only maintain the continuity of traditions, but also innovate to be relevant to the tastes of young tourists.

We learned silver making techniques from our parents, then tried to redesign them to be more modern but still typical of Kotagede. (Interview, March 9, 2024, Member of the Kotagede Creative Silver Studio)

The role of the young generation in preserving culture in the Kotagede heritage area confirms their position as conservation agents who not only preserve but also transform cultural heritage to remain relevant amidst changing times. Their activities in revitalizing local art performances, producing silver crafts, and documenting oral history from the older generation are concrete forms of active involvement in maintaining the sustainability of local cultural identity. One real example is the involvement of young people in creative communities such as Sanggar Perak Kotagede, where they learn traditional silver making techniques from their parents, then develop new, more modern designs in accordance with today's market tastes. The statement of one of the community members above shows a regenerative approach that combines the values of tradition and innovation. This finding is in line with the research of Nidianita & Puspitasari (2017) which states that the regeneration of creative business actors based on culture in Kotagede is highly dependent on the role of the young generation in continuing and renewing local cultural practices. This kind of approach is important to maintain the appeal of culture-based tourism, because today's tourists are not only looking for authenticity, but also uniqueness and relevance to contemporary trends. Furthermore, the involvement of young people in the archiving of oral history from community leaders shows that cultural preservation is not only physical or performing but also includes narratives and collective memories that are the foundation of a community's identity.

This reinforces the idea that cultural sustainability is not only about preserving heritage, but also about how culture is actively and adaptively inherited by the next generation.

Challenges in Engaging the Young Generation

Some of the challenges of participation found include limited access to training, minimal funding support, and lack of synergy between stakeholders. In addition, there is a generation gap in the transfer of knowledge between senior cultural actors and youth.

The problem is not the interest of young people, but the lack of training support and recognition from the government. We need to be facilitated. (Interview, March 14, 2024, Local Cultural Conservation Volunteer)

The involvement of the young generation in supporting sustainable tourism in heritage areas such as Kotagede cannot be separated from a number of structural and social challenges. Based on field findings, the main obstacles faced by young people are limited access to tourism management training, minimal funding support, and lack of cross-sector synergy between communities, government, and other tourism actors. This problem was directly acknowledged by one of the cultural preservation volunteers, showing that the enthusiasm and potential of the young generation are often not balanced with adequate supporting policies or ecosystems. This is in line with the study of Fasa et al. (2022), which emphasizes that the success of developing sustainable tourism villages is highly dependent on collaborative governance between local actors and formal institutions. Without concrete support in the form of training, incentives, and participatory spaces, the contribution of the young generation tends to be incidental and unsustainable. In addition, the gap between generations is also an obstacle in the process of transferring cultural knowledge. Many senior cultural actors still use traditional methods and are less open to innovations brought by the young generation. This situation creates communication barriers and a lack of sustainability in the management of cultural heritage. If not immediately bridged through mentoring programs or cross-generational dialogue, the potential of young people as guardians of local cultural values can be hampered. Thus, these challenges need to be responded to strategically through structured empowerment policies, multi-sector involvement, and strengthening the capacity of the young generation as the main actors in the development of sustainable tourism.

Adaptive Strategy of Young Generation

To overcome these limitations, the young generation developed community-based strategies, such as utilizing digital platforms (Instagram, TikTok), community fundraising, and partnerships with academics and NGOs. This innovation encourages Kotagede tourism to be more inclusive and based on sustainable values.

We are now making heritage tour vlogs, the results can be used to help promote and fund community activities ourier New font type, 9 pt, single space. (Interview, March 17, 2024, Kotagede Tourism Content Creator)

In responding to various structural barriers such as lack of training and policy support, the young generation in the Kotagede heritage area demonstrates high adaptive capacity through community-based initiatives. They utilize digital technology, especially social media such as Instagram and TikTok, as a promotional tool as well as cultural education.

The results of interviews with content creators stated that this strategy is not only effective in reaching a wider audience, especially young people, but also strengthens local identity and increases the tourist appeal of Kotagede. This approach is in line with the findings of Diwyarthi (2023), who emphasized that the use of social media by the young generation has been proven to increase the visibility and selling value of tourist villages. In addition to digital promotion, another adaptive strategy is collaboration with academic institutions and NGOs. This collaboration is carried out in the form of training, preparing cultural preservation programs, and accessing alternative funding through community grant programs. Through this network, the young generation not only obtains resources, but also validation of their activities as strategic actors in tourism development. Community fundraising efforts are also a creative solution to limited operational funds. For example, proceeds from merchandise sales or online donations are used to support local arts and cultural activities. This approach shows a pattern of empowerment that does not rely entirely on external intervention but is based on social solidarity and community independence. Thus, the adaptive strategy of the young generation in Kotagede reflects the basic principles of sustainable tourism: collaborative, community-based, and prioritizing innovation without neglecting cultural values. This approach also indicates that digital technology is not just a communication tool, but also a space for active participation in the preservation and promotion of heritage destinations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the young generation has a significant contribution in encouraging the development of sustainable tourism in the Kotagede heritage area. Their involvement is not only participatory, but also strategic, covering various roles such as being a tour guide, cultural activity manager, local creative product craftsman, and digital promotional content creator. This role shows that the young generation is not just a supporting actor, but the main agent of change in the transformation of culture-based tourist destinations. In terms of cultural preservation, they not only maintain the sustainability of traditions through art performances and craft production but also innovate to remain relevant to the tastes of modern tourists. However, their participation still faces various challenges such as limited access to training, minimal funding support, and generation gaps in knowledge transfer. To overcome these obstacles, the young generation in Kotagede developed adaptive community-based strategies, such as utilizing social media, collective fundraising, and collaboration with academics and NGOs. This strategy not only strengthens tourist attractions but also forms a sustainable tourism development model that is innovative, inclusive, and based on local wisdom. Therefore, the involvement of the young generation in a structured and sustainable manner is very important to ensure the sustainability of cultural values and create tourism that is resilient to changes in the times.

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