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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Ginting, N., Revita, I., Santoso, E. B., & Michaela, M. (2024). Sustainable governance in traditional village tourism: a study of post revitalisation project in Huta Siallagan, Indonesia. *Journal of Urban and Regional Analysis*, 16(1), 149-176. <https://doi.org/10.37043/JURA.2024.16.1.6>

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# SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE IN TRADITIONAL VILLAGE TOURISM: A STUDY OF POST REVITALISATION PROJECT IN HUTA SIALLAGAN, INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** The Indonesian government has allocated 30 billion rupiahs in 2020 to revitalise Huta Siallagan, a traditional village on the borderline of Lake Toba, in order to support the national development agenda. The revitalisation is carried out to increase the attractiveness of the destination by reorganising the area and improving the facilities. Traditional villages in Lake Toba are typically acres of land owned and lived on by a single-family clan, which manages tourism activities through family members. As Huta Siallagan receives significant attention from the government, this study seeks to examine the managerial modifications and adjustments following the finished revitalisation project. This study employs a sustainable tourism framework from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The findings are juxtaposed with the model of sustainable traditional village revitalisation that has been widely used as the basis for integrating rural tourism into tourism growth. The result of this study provides knowledge in the sustainable tourism literature, particularly in the context of village revitalisation for tourism purposes. It also highlights, from a practical standpoint, the subsequent challenges that arise in traditional village revitalisation projects. The study then identifies solutions to minimise internal and external conflicts in tourism governance.

## Keywords:

traditional village;  
top-down approach;  
post-revitalisation;  
sustainable  
governance

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Initial submission: 15.12.2022; Revised submission: 20.02.2023; Final acceptance: 10.03.2023

## Introduction

The Lake Toba area is part of the government program of the National Tourism Strategic Area and it has been designated as a super-priority destination in the country. In order to build world-class tourism destinations and the creative industries as a pillar of the future economy, Lake Toba and its surroundings are receiving more attention and assistance due to the designation as a super-priority destination (KPPIP 2017). Lake Toba and the other nine priority destinations are expected to contribute 30 billion to the country's foreign exchange with an expectation of 350-400 million trips and the arrival of 22.3 million foreign tourists in 2024 (Secretariat of Cabinet Deputy for Economic Affairs 2020). So, in its development, it is essential to apply the concept of sustainable tourism considering the long-term goals (Ginting and Ferani 2019). The development, revitalisation, and promotion of Lake Toba, which has been ongoing for at least five years, has hastened the program to achieve those goals.

The traditional village's uniqueness makes it highly valued as a tourist destination. Many traditional villages worldwide and in Indonesia have utilised this tourism function, such as Yuanjia village in Shaanxi province, China, and Pentingsari village in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (Gao and Wu 2017, Aji 2020). Huta Siallagan itself is a traditional village with a closed settlement, governed and managed by the local wisdom of the villagers descended from the second son of the indigenous leader Raja Batak, named Raja Isumbaon (Kennedy 2022, Siregar et al. 2022). Traditional villages such as Huta Siallagan have the potential for tourist attractions in terms of the physical, social, and cultural aspects (Gao and Wu 2017, Kaelafaoui et al. 2021). The renewal of traditional villages is expected to highlight the existing potential. However, any renewal or revitalisation to increase tourism value must be balanced with proper governance, especially in the scope of traditional villages that involve many local stakeholders who still use local wisdom in the government hierarchy and daily basis (Saxena et al. 2007, Setijanti et al. 2015, Zhang 2020). A sustainable destination must also meet requirements set forth by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC 2022), which are categorized into four groups: management, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental sustainability.

In the previous research, Tavakolinia and Shams Pouya (2022) discovered that the local stakeholders and community have taken a significant role in the succession of local sustainable development in rural tourism areas, especially in terms of mental participation. Although acting as a strategic tool in sustainable development, the tourism and recreation ecosystem could also bring pressures and conflicts if done without thorough consideration (Schwab et al. 2022). In a case of major revitalisation, such as in Huta Siallagan, the revitalisation has been done in a top-down approach and left the local stakeholders and community in the aftermath that needs to be understood and dealt with. Thus, this study aims to find the aftermath of revitalisation that has occurred within the material, social and spiritual levels through the sustainable

management perspective from the GSTC (2022). Furthermore, the findings of this study will provide valuable insights into planning future traditional village revitalisation projects and avoiding internal conflict that may arise.

## **Traditional village revitalisation**

Traditional villages naturally have an attraction from its settlement and natural environment, the social community that formed them, to the culture and habits that have been carried out for generations (Gao and Wu 2017, Aji 2020, Zhang 2020). Therefore, the tourism approach to traditional villages is very effective in helping to develop the economy and the quality of life of the local community (Gao and Wu 2017, Aji 2020, Wiweka et al. 2021). The revitalisation strategy is also a systematic and comprehensive initiative to strengthen the rural economy although generally done in a top-down approach (Yang et al. 2021). Rural tourism not only offers the chance for better profits but also supports the restoration of agriculture and the repopulation of rural areas, as well as the employment of young people. Seasonality is also one of the key factors influencing demand, for example, the spring season in Croatia is the most alluring season for tourism activity because it is when nature awakens and becomes more beautiful (Grgić et al. 2017). On the one hand, tourism has notably improved the quality of life of the people in the destination and brought physical infrastructure development (Ginting et al. 2017). On the other hand, the tourism industry can harm the environment and society if being carried out exploitatively (Zhang 2020, Sitikarn 2021, Wiweka et al. 2021). Therefore, tourism development should uphold the values of sustainability so it can benefit the environment, economy, society, and culture and it can be passed down from generation to generation or, in other words, it has the nature of sustainability (Sitikarn 2021, GSTC 2022, Rasoolimanesh et al. 2023).

The development of the function of traditional villages as tourist destinations is driven by the search for unique and memorable experiences in particular settings (Sheresheva and Kopiski 2016, Kastenholz et al. 2018, Purnomo et al. 2020). Changes in the habits and behaviour of post-modern society, which are increasingly distant from their roots or origins, create a need for recreation that can show noble values and distinctiveness (Ginting and Wahid 2017, Purnomo et al. 2020). Rural areas not only function in the production of commodities but they also have additional functions as tourism and recreational destinations (Saxena et al. 2007, Wang and Yatsumoto 2019, Purnomo et al. 2020).

Tourism in traditional villages supports the realisation of equitable development in disadvantaged areas (Wang and Yatsumoto 2019, Fleischer and Felesenstein 2000), which is globally stated in the vision and mission of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In essence, the development of traditional village tourism helps employ local communities, and it also regenerates and reassess the existing potential and

infrastructure in traditional village tourism destinations (Lane and Kastenholtz 2015, Kelfaoui et al. 2021, Rosalina et al. 2021, Jia et al. 2023). The existence of traditional village tourism also conserves and maintains the sustainability of traditional communities and the customs that apply to them (Lane and Kastenholtz 2015, Zhang 2020, Jia et al. 2023). In modern practice, proper, fair, and efficient governance is essential for the multi-stakeholders involved in it, both from local and external parties (Gao and Wu 2017, Roxas et al. 2020, Jia et al. 2023). Moreover, governing tourism through direct investment in a less developed area can help to reduce high unemployment (Crețan et al. 2005). With its advantages in national economic growth, government intervention is needed to promote the growing demand of tourism by providing the required facilities and other supplementary factors that could boost the tourism industry (Khoshnevis Yazdi et al. 2017).

In its sustainable approach, tourism must pay attention to environmental, economic, and sociocultural components, as well as its governance which includes multi-stakeholders (Blancas et al. 2011, Gao and Wu 2017, Guo et al. 2019). The previous research in the Danube Delta, Romania, has shown the environmental degradation as a result of tourism chaotic growth which further led to the proposal of slow visits as a tourism brand of the destination (Schwab et al. 2022). Hence, the regulations and political work in domestic tourism development planning are the most crucial in order to protect the assets in a tourist destination that are vulnerable to tourist pressure in the long term (Schwab et al. 2022, Tavakolinia and Shams Pouya 2022). Governance in a tourist destination is responsible for coordinating the approach to sustainable tourism in a tourist destination (Guo et al. 2019, GSTC 2022).

The existence of coordination between multi-stakeholders in sustainable tourism management in tourist destinations in the form of traditional villages requires a particular approach, namely community participation (Canavan 2017, Saito and Ruhanen 2017, Aji 2020, Zhang 2020, Jia et al. 2023). Community participation can realise sustainable tourism growth in traditional villages by establishing good relations between local and outside parties (Curcija et al. 2019, Aji 2020, Jia et al. 2023). The involvement of local communities in the revitalisation process is vital because they are the ones who live and influence the area (Gao and Wu 2017, Curcija et al. 2019).

Revitalisation is designated in this study as a process of cultural manifestation. Thus, to comprehend, from a cultural standpoint, the underlying morphology of the upper layers is represented by the physical environment and the things that can be seen visually. Social structure, such as the inhabitants, creates the interlayer, in terms of varieties of behaviour and local productivity. Then, the deeper depth layer is cultural inheritance, which includes local laws and customs (Gao and Wu 2017, Page and Connell 2020). Cultural manifestation is understood as movable or immovable items that have been preserved from the past and it allows the identification of particular

stages in social development, for example, the importance of cultural monuments in a desirable tourist destination (Grgić et al. 2017).

The first level of revitalisation requires the village's physical space to be correctly rebuilt based on local history and culture. The physical elements should reflect the locality as a complex phenomenological feature formed by connections between the perception of social immediacy, the mechanisms of contact, and the relevance of setups in contrast to a gated community (Kozorog 2011, Page and Connell 2020). For the second level, a sustainable tourism destination revitalisation should sustainably enhance the local's quality of life and result in sustainable development through the viewpoints of governance (Tao and Wall 2009, Gao and Wu 2017, Su et al. 2019). Physical revitalisation and proper governance will then enhance people's idea of place identity, community, and local dignity, resulting in the revitalisation's spiritual or cultural aspect as the third level. A successful sustainable traditional village revitalisation would result from accomplishing all these three level objectives (Saxena and Ilbery 2010, García-Delgado et al. 2020, Świdzińska and Witkowska-Dąbrowska 2021), which are integrated (Figure 1).

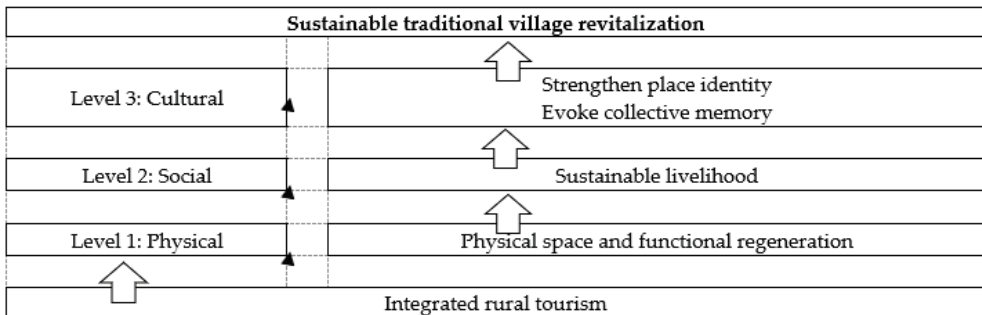


Figure 1. A sustainable traditional village revitalisation model. Source: Gao and Wu (2017)

## Sustainable governance for sustainable tourist destinations

According to the World Economic Forum (Schwab 2013), one of the keys to a destination's competitiveness lies in its sustainability. However, it is not easy for a destination to apply the concept of sustainable tourism since there is a vague definition that makes it challenging to be generally accepted (Boluk et al. 2019, Passafaro 2020). The Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria (GSTC 2022) establishes collective goals that all tourism destinations should intend to achieve. However, by embracing sustainable tourism, specific criteria for sustainable destination accreditation may be applied. Any tourist destination management organisation must adhere to the GSTC Destination Criteria (GSTC 2022) as an essential requirement to coordinate the destination's sustainable tourism strategy. Sustainability in local governance is

addressed by the management structure and framework, stakeholder management, and readiness to handle pressure and change within the tourist ecosystem (Canavan 2017, GSTC 2022). These three criteria are then broken down into eleven sub-criteria that determine the sustainability of a destination's management (Table 1).

Table 1. Sustainable Destination Criteria

No	Criteria	Sub-criteria
1.	Management structure and framework	a. Destination management responsibility b. Destination management strategy and action plan c. Monitoring and reporting
2.	Stakeholder engagement	a. Enterprise engagement and sustainability standards b. Resident engagement and feedback c. Visitor engagement and feedback d. Promotion and information
3.	Managing pressure and change	a. Managing visitor volumes and activities b. Planning regulations and development control c. Climate change adaptation d. Risk and crisis management

### Sustainable governance approach in traditional village revitalisation

A few criteria must be established to achieve sustainable governance in a tourist destination. The values built upon the management structure and framework, the stakeholder engagement, and the pressure and change management are the trifectas needed to sustain a tourism business within a destination (Hall et al. 2020, Deng et al. 2021, Liburd et al. 2022). The shifting nature of tourism trends highlights the value of local tourism planning and the need for the local government to take an increasingly active role in the creation and execution of tourism policy and planning (Light et al. 2020). Moreover, a sustainable governance approach in a tourist destination is especially important in a traditional society with a particular hierarchy and way of life (Deng et al. 2021). The aspects of sustainable governance can be seen physically, socially, and culturally in a community structure (Figure 2).

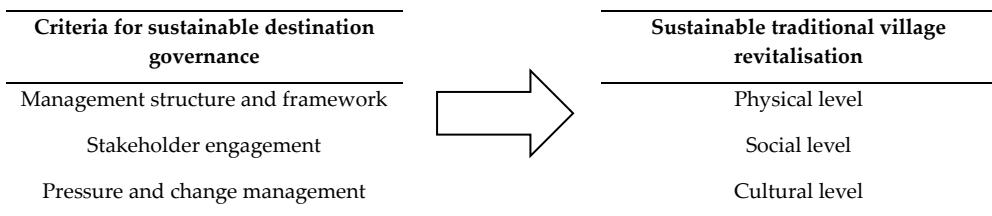


Figure 2. Sustainable governance approach in traditional village revitalisation

## Methodology

### Study area

This research was carried out after the revitalisation project implemented in the traditional village of Huta Siallagan (Figure 3), as a part priority zone for achieving the development agenda of the Integrated Tourism Master Plan (Regional Infrastructure Development Agency 2018). Huta Siallagan is located on the borderline of Lake Toba in the North Sumatra Province of Indonesia on an area of 11 thousand square metres.

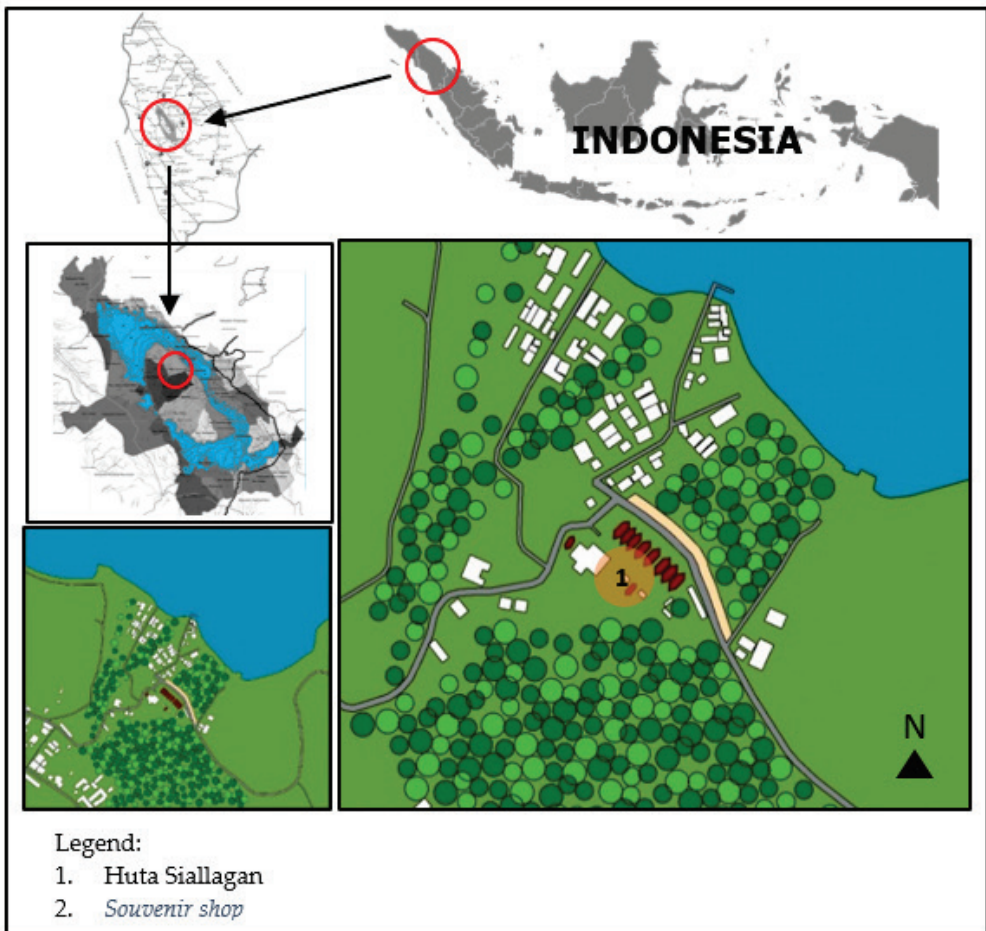


Figure 3. Research key area

Huta Siallagan is a traditional village inhabited by the Siallagan clan family from the Batak King's second son named King Isumbaon. The village is specifically located on Samosir Island, in the centre of Lake Toba region of North Sumatra, Indonesia and it is also identified as one of the geo-sites in the Toba Caldera Geopark. The traditional



village has been famous with the authentic Batak settlement typology and the site of The Stone Chair of King Siallagan where the King and his council adjudicated upon the criminals and spies, and also held important meetings. This site began law enforcement civilization in Samosir, eventually becoming a cultural tourism village (Tobing et al. 2020).

“Huta” refers to a traditionally built settlement so one tight community could expand. The person who established the settlement became the Huta's chief (*raja ni Huta*), and his descendants would manage its governance and future growth. All families living in the Huta must be from the same clan and bloodline, so in Huta Siallagan, all the residents are from the Siallagan clan of the same lineage.

Based on data from the Indonesian Ministry of Public Works and Housing, the revitalisation of Huta Siallagan has been carried out during 2020-2021 with 30-billion-rupiah spendings (KPPIP 2017). The project includes some scopes, starting from the revitalisation of the roof of the traditional houses called Bolon houses, construction of new traditional bolon houses, public toilets, kiosk buildings, amphitheatres, plazas, the neighbourhood pathways, signages, communal wastewater treatment instalment, parking areas, and information centres.

### **Sustainable tourism governance analysis**

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology by the nature of the social sciences and humanities in tourism management, emphasising quality. Desktop research is the first phase in the data collection procedure to retrieve available information regarding the Huta Siallagan restructuring and revitalisation project. Literature research was then conducted to comprehend the many theoretical analyses of sustainable tourism, particularly on governance.

Sustainable tourism governance standards according to UNWTO recommendations were reviewed as the basis for research variables. Meanwhile, primary data was gathered through five days of fieldwork in Huta Siallagan and interviews with multi-stakeholders involved. International agencies, the central government, businesses, local governments, communities, and visitors are the primary stakeholders in sustainable tourism governance (Roxas et al., 2020). Interviewees were selected using the purposive sampling, where the sample group is targeted to have specific attributes (Apostolopoulos and Liargovas 2016). Following this principle, the researchers interviewed the groups closely related to the village revitalisation – both those who participated in the planning activities directly and those who were knowledgeable about the project. The village committee, or group of leaders in the village, was first approached, and relevant local information was collected. This village committee was further interviewed to grasp the fundamentals of tourism development, planning and governance, village transformations and the authorities' attitudes toward them, recent

challenges and concerns at the village level, and the leaders' long-term aims.

The village was then attentively observed, for each building and the surrounding area. Completing the data collection, structured interviews with 36 stakeholders were conducted, including the representatives from the central government, the local government, the Samosir Regency Tourism Agency, tourism managers, tourism business owners, the village elders, tribe leaders, local communities, and Huta Siallagan visitors to fully comprehend the point of views of these diverse groups and the growth of rural tourism in the village (Table 2). Questions developed from the sustainable tourism criteria from GSTC (2022) were asked to the interviewees. The criteria had three different angles, accordingly: (1) destination management structure and framework, including destination management responsibility, management strategy and action plan, and monitoring and reporting; (2) stakeholder engagement, including engagement and feedback from enterprises, residents, and visitors; and (3) managing pressure and change, including planning regulations and development control.

Table 2. List of interviewees

Interviewee	Numbers
Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia	1
Regional Development Planning Agency of Samosir Regency	5
Samosir Tourism Board	5
Attraction Manager (Huta Siallagan)	2
Attraction Manager (Batu Panghampuran, near Huta Siallagan)	1
Business Owner (Locals)	3
Business Owner and employees (Outsiders)	2
Tour Guide	2
Tourist	10
Local Residents	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>

Data analysis was then conducted. Firstly, the records from interviews were transcribed. The findings were objectively evaluated by correlating the results of observations, interviews, and relevant project evaluations with the hypotheses from the previous literature studies. The framework for the data analysis follows the sustainable traditional village revitalisation model developed by Gao and Wu (2017), which includes the physical, social, and cultural levels through the perspective of sustainable management from the GSTC (2022).

## Results

The revitalisation of Huta Siallagan is included in the Master Plan for Priority Tourism Destinations of Lake Toba for 2020-2045, which states that Huta Siallagan and the

surrounding area are included as cultural heritage sites. Huta Siallagan is a traditional closed settlement and it has been functioning in tourism under an internal management scale since 1970. A tourist attraction, including Huta Siallagan, is part of the Lake Toba tourism development plan, specifically in the Ambarita region. The program aims to develop a tourist attraction in the form of this traditional village as a tourism icon in the Simanindo district (Regional Infrastructure Development Agency 2018). This vision was then embodied through the arrangement of commercial areas and tourism support facilities, improving the quality of the physical environment, and supporting infrastructures in and around the village area, such as structuring the port area, adding service functions, urban areas, pedestrian path improvement, traffic and parking arrangements. In the 2018 Regional Spatial Plan of Samosir Regency, Huta Siallagan is also designated as a cultural heritage site along with the Old Tomb of King Sidabutar, cultural tourism performances of Sigale-gale, Huta Bolon, and the Pagar Batu Site.

Cultural heritage sites are products of high-value human culture in the form of historical relics, archaeological buildings, monuments, and structures and they are beneficial for knowledge and science (Regional Infrastructure Development Agency 2018). In line with that, in the master plan for the integration of Lake Toba tourism designed by the National Development Planning Agency, Huta Siallagan was assigned to Cluster 1 or in the top priority level of Simanindo's priority development zone of cultural tourism. Huta Siallagan is also included as the main cultural tourism attraction and the entrance to the Samosir Island tourism area (KPPIP 2017).

Based on the action plan for structuring the Huta Siallagan area, the Huta Siallagan revitalisation project covered a private property area of 11,000 square metres and it was carried out during 2020-2021. This project covers the construction of new traditional houses, public toilets, souvenir centres, amphitheatres, plazas, neighbourhood areas, signage, communal sewage treatment installation, a parking area, and an information centre (Figure 4). The revitalisation was carried out directly by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing by involving local craftsmen to train local communities to maintain the sustainability of traditions and skills and improve the local economy during the COVID-19 pandemic (Public Communications Bureau of PUPR Ministry 2022).



Figure 4. Huta Siallagan pre-revitalisation and post-revitalisation

The traditional village of Huta Siallagan has a typical Batak village layout, consisting of two rows of traditional Batak houses. At the centre of the settlement, a fig tree or, in the local language, hariara, can be found side by side with the famous icon of Huta Siallagan, the Stone Chair of King Siallagan. And the execution stone is located at the back of the village. The revitalisation plan looks neat, and it is shown in the post-revitalisation physical embodiment, although it looks very different from the previous Huta Siallagan condition.

The most apparent improvement and revitalisation can be seen in installing paving blocks in all village areas, starting from the entrance gate to the exit. Revitalisation in the area also includes rebuilding some of the existing modern houses into three new traditional houses. For the existing traditional houses, improvements are made by changing the roofing material previously made of ijuk (palm fibre) or tin roof into sirap (shingle) imported directly from Kalimantan, then renovating the houses' extension. The extension is a part of adaptation concerning the shifting needs of humans living there. This extension section consists of the 'modern' layout for living and the service areas for traditional houses that previously did not have such a function (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Traditional house extension from inside and outside perspective

The extension houses use concrete and marble contrasting with the original materials of wood and stone used in the traditional custom, similarly like the roofing substitution to shingles roofing from Kalimantan. The main reason for the material substitution is the better fire resistance quality compared to flammable fibres. However, these changes bring some concerns about the internal management of Huta Siallagan, who also serves as the inheritor of the village, as stated by an interviewee:

*Several dimensions do not match traditional buildings' long-standing requirements of traditional buildings... I am afraid that people who are not critical enough will think that this is the original form of our cultural and traditional heritage. This error is because they didn't do the cultural research thoroughly, maybe because this project was also pursued by the deadline.*

Furthermore, the observations show that there is no significant change regarding the village layout. Visitors entering the Huta Siallagan area are marked by passing through the entrance gate, which is only wide enough to be through by a buffalo or two adults, and then directed to the information centre or counter to purchase entrance tickets and to hire local guide services. At this point, visitors can already see the appearance of the traditional village. There are two rows of traditional Batak houses, consisting of houses of ordinary people and kings, and a hariara tree in the centre of the village, side by side with the stone chair of King Siallagan. A platform containing three additional traditional houses, sopo anting, a plaza, amphitheatres, and the king's burial area at the end faces the row of traditional houses. Visitors will generally be offered to watch the Sigale-gale performance and to join the tor-tor dance. The platform section also serves as a stage for holding festivals. The execution stone is located at the back of Huta Siallagan then the sequence ends with a souvenir shopping centre area, toilets, and a cafe (Figure 6):

*Visitors to Huta Siallagan came because of stories about traditional Batak villages, which are full of culture and myths. Therefore, tour guides will usually help visitors in small or large groups to tour this traditional village and hear the origins of Huta Siallagan and the legend of the Stone Chair of King Siallagan. Then visitors can also enjoy the Sigale-gale performance and perform the tor-tor dance together. Visitors can see and buy the island's souvenirs at the end of the visit (Key person: local guide).*



Figure 6. Sequence in Huta Siallagan

The Siallagan family arranges the activity flow to manage this tourist destination. However, based on interviews with residents and merchants outside the gate, this flow

only benefits the management because the Huta Siallagan area has become a one-stop destination. The concept of a one-stop destination is contradictory between visitors and residents in the village, who tend to be satisfied; on the contrary, the residents, and merchants outside the gate do not get the benefits of tourism.

### **Sustainable livelihood**

The main tourist attraction in Huta Siallagan is the story about the Stone Chair of King Siallagan and the cannibalism story that has been legendary worldwide. Therefore, the selling point served during the visit by tourists is a village tour accompanied by a local tour guide who is also a native of Huta Siallagan. While the other residents still rely on agriculture as their livelihood. In addition, the existence of a souvenir centre at every tourist attraction is a common thing to find. The souvenir centre consists of two buildings: inside the village, and outside the village gate, lined up to the Siallagan pier.

Revitalising the souvenir shopping centre was also done by updating old, shabby stalls and adding new kiosks, bringing the total number of booths inside the village area to 65. These stalls were built in the Huta Siallagan area, which is run by independent management of the Siallagan family with the lineage of King Isumbaon. The management of merchants in the village is also under family management. The merchants who rent booths in the village area are residents of Siallagan Village (both in the Huta Siallagan area and its surroundings) with close family relationships and they are selected according to the assessment of the traditional chief of Huta Siallagan. This selection causes internal friction between the residents of Huta Siallagan and the residents of Huta Siallagan and the neighbourhood residents because the criteria for merchants who can rent in the village area are considered too subjective and not in the favour of the community around the tourist attraction. In addition, the profit of renting the booth is entirely owned by the chief, thus creating a conflict of interest that benefits the established chief from tourism in Huta Siallagan. As the project only covers booths in the village area, people who have kiosks around tourist attraction areas feel an imbalance in development, mainly because they are in a very close and interconnected range. The residents and merchants outside the gate are experiencing inequality development, which also appears because of the close distance.

Due to the issue, the ministry did a simple fix on the facades of the neighbourhood's booth. However, the outside gate community still believes that development is carried out by unfair selection because the restoration is only done on the surface while the inside still looks shabby, especially the stalls located along the road to the pier, which have not been revitalised at all (Figure 7). Attractions at Huta Siallagan also rely on legends and the tangible existence of traditional houses and the stone chair of King Siallagan. Great potential based on local communities can be developed to enrich tourism activities around Huta Siallagan.



Figure 7. Side by side, the souvenir shopping centre in Siallagan pier and Huta Siallagan's neighbourhood

## Place identity

The legendary site of the Stone Chair of King Siallagan and the cannibalism story had engaged the tourist in some anticipation even before visiting the place. This legacy in the form of stories or legends is one of Huta Siallagan's privileges. This potential is well captured by the Indonesian government, and it is one of the solid reasons for revitalisation. Based on interviews with local and foreign tourists, it was found that there were significant differences in perceptions related to revitalisation in Huta Siallagan. Most local tourists are satisfied and they think that the revitalisation has increased the value of this traditional village because of the neatness of the arrangement and the supporting facilities that are already very adequate compared to the condition of the village before the revitalisation. Meanwhile, foreign tourists feel that the revitalisation of Huta Siallagan is too polished (Figure 8) for the authenticity that the tourists seek:

*In my memory, Huta Siallagan used to have an exciting and tense vibe (the legend of the stone chair of Huta Siallagan), but now, everything reversed when I entered this area. Everything is so new... The authenticity of the traditional village seems to diminish when I set my foot on the surface of the paving block that used to be earth and soil... as well as on the stone chair which no longer makes me shudder because everyone is allowed to touch and sit on something that is supposed to be sacred (Key person: Tourist from Germany).*



Figure 8. Stone chair of Siallagan King

This creates a feel that it is too new and 'modern' for a traditional village that sells the value of local wisdom and sacredness as attraction.

Huta Siallagan is an exclusive traditional village run by private governance of its own and it follows the tradition of ulubalang. The local authority protects and organises the village. Therefore, some adjustments are needed to achieve sustainable management, including traditional community groups with external stakeholders such as the central government and the business actors around tourist attractions.

## Discussion

### Material level: physical and functional revitalisation

Huta Siallagan is mentioned and regulated in the Masterplan for the priority tourism destination of Lake Toba and the Regional Spatial Plan of Samosir Regency. This shows the importance of this destination in the tourism cycle in the Lake Toba region. In addition, the revitalisation project was also directly under the ministry of tourism, and it was then carried out by the Ministry of Public Works. The involvement of many parties in the development of the Huta Siallagan destination has led to overlapping roles between ministries and local governments, not to mention the traditional government, which is very thick with its traditional hierarchies (Hall et al. 2020, Deng et al. 2021, Liburd et al. 2022). This issue arose related to the responsibility for the maintenance of Huta Siallagan, especially after the physical revitalisation was completed. These overlapping roles will later lead to confusion in monitoring and reporting, which are essential to a destination's sustainability.

But Huta Siallagan is endowed with unique identities that reside within its residential area, the Stone chair of King Siallagan, and the execution stone. The uniqueness of a place makes it an identity or branding used as a strategic tool to differentiate itself from the competition. An area must create a positive image to attract visitors (Kotler et al. 2004, Pike et al. 2007, Baker and Cameron 2008, Marzano and Scott 2009, Anholt 2010, World Tourism Organization 2009, Jarratt et al. 2019). This uniqueness is certainly essential as a selling point for domestic and foreign tourists.

Although the post-revitalisation allows the village's appearance to be more immaculate than the previous state, it also diminishes some of its unique characteristics. For instance, the replacement of the roofing material from ijuk to sirap is somewhat contrast to the idea of sustainability that requires the utilisation of local materials. Similarly, the renovation of the extension of the traditional houses also uses the same approach. The traditional Batak house uses wood and stone materials, while after the revitalisation of the extension, the house uses concrete and marble. Using these materials does not have much influence on an environmental sustainability approach.



Even though the locals who inhabit the place feel satisfied and proud of the traditional houses composed to be more modern and functional, this finding shows a decrease in the cultural values reflected through local wisdom. Local pride in their cultural identity has been relegated. This phenomenon also applies to roofing substitution to shingles roofing from Kalimantan. The main reason for the material substitution is the better fire resistance quality compared to flammable fibres. However, the idea of maintaining traditional house roofs in the long term seems to be less explored. In the event of inevitable damage, it will be challenging for the locals to replace the damaged parts with similar materials that are locally produced.

The physical revitalisation of Huta Siallagan should also consider the pressure and change management. The premature design thinking will later lead to a much bigger issue, such as issues involving climate change and natural disasters. Tourism is significantly affected by the weather because it allows visitors to engage in various activities, impacts satisfaction, and financially impacts businesses. These worries will grow due to climate change and natural disasters, influencing how weather impacts tourism. Although if one cannot affect the weather or the climate, one may actively reduce vulnerability, limit unpleasant consequences, and prepare for likely changes (Becken et al. 2011).

In parallel with the architectural sequence paradigm, the tourist experiences the flow of time and space as a continual story of events connected one after another by imagination (Kastenholz et al. 2018). The findings reveal that there has not been much of a shift in the way the village was originally set up. Continuous innovation and diversity of activities will attract tourists to revisit (Chang et al. 2017).

### **Social level: sustainable livelihood**

The inequality that continues to develop among the residents and business owners outside the gate happens because of their non-related status to the Siallagan Clan. The ministry made quick corrections to the neighbourhood booth's facades as a response to the issue that occurred. The outside gate community, however, continues to believe that development is performed by unjust choice because work has only been done on the exterior while the interior still appears deteriorating, especially the stalls on the road to the pier, which have not received any sort of repair in the least.

Attractions at Huta Siallagan also seem to rely on legends and the tangible existence of traditional houses and the stone chair of King Siallagan. Great potential based on local communities can be developed to enrich tourism activities around Huta Siallagan. Thus, the duration of visitor tourism can be extended, and the residents can benefit from tourism activities without requiring the provision of superb facilities. Community-based tourism is meant to offer unique experiences that can be obtained by participating in daily activities only by involving tourists in the daily activities of

residents (Wiweka et al. 2021, Jia et al. 2023). Thus, the community will benefit economically and preserve local culture and customs, for example, by farming and processing corn. A similar concept has been done and proven to be successfully implemented by the village of Nglanggeran and Pentingsari in Yogyakarta (Aji 2020, Wiweka et al. 2021). By relying on community-based tourism, the village of Nglanggeran and Pentingsari has been included in the Top 100 World Sustainable Destinations. This proves that community-based implementation as a tourist attraction can ensure environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability. On the contrary, a study in Romania shows a rather successful effort when the authorities tried to transform a former gold mining area into a tourism destination due to the premature policy framework and the lack of participation from the local communities, NGOs, state institutions and other political and economic actors (Vesalon and Crețan 2013).

### **Spiritual level: place identity**

Place identity is associated with people's perceptions of a place to distinguish one place from another (Kastenholz et al. 2018). This perception is not only related to the physical aspects of a place but also to the social and cultural constructions that shape the identity of the place (Ginting et al. 2017). Huta Siallagan is a traditional village that is the most famous among other traditional Batak villages (Siregar et al. 2022). This fact is based on the existence of a legend or story that distinguishes it from other traditional villages even though physically they look similar. Stories have deep persuasive power, continually influencing and changing how people think, understand, and make decisions. The study's results show a significant positive effect of story marketing on travel engagement and behavioural intentions (Hall et al. 2020).

Tourism activity that involves a backstory or a legend can engage the visitor with a range of reflection, memory work, or imagination that gives the place its own identity (Light et al. 2021a). Tourist destinations, such as memorial museums or cultural heritage sites like Huta Siallagan, may attempt to influence how the recent past is remembered, but their efforts may be impeded by the visitors who have their own entrance narratives, background information, and the ability to accept, negotiate, or reject the historical presentation that they experience (Light et al. 2021b).

Even before going to the location, the tourist was looking forward to seeing the Stone Chair of King Siallagan where the story of cannibalism legend took place. Huta Siallagan has the advantage of inheriting this tradition in the form of tales or legends. The Indonesian government has done a good job of releasing this potential, which is one of the primary forces of revitalisation. However, many foreign visitors suspect that Huta Siallagan's revitalisation is excessively reducing the authenticity that they are looking for. For a traditional village that markets the value of local wisdom and sanctity as the draw, this generates an impression that it is too new and “modern”.

Huta Siallagan is an exclusive traditional village that upholds the ulubalang custom and it is privately governed. The village is organised and protected by the local government. In order to achieve sustainable management, several changes must be made, including integrating traditional community groups with external stakeholders like the national government and business enterprises around tourist sites.

### **Traditional Village Governance**

Based on the previous discussion, the revitalisation project implemented a top-down planning approach. The leading roles are taken by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Public Works. On the one hand, this strategy reduces bureaucracy, which has impeded tourism development efforts, particularly in lagging areas. On the other hand, this strategy has become a rebounding challenge due to the fact that it raises issues and tensions since parties feel that their interests have been overlooked or disregarded. Previous studies have shown that a top-down (government-community) approach to tourism development and management has proven unsuccessful (Garrod 2003). A top-down strategy begins at the level of the government by dictating strategic policies for the growth of the tourism industry. This planning procedure can be described as more bureaucratic and centralised (Boukas and Ziakas 2016). A top-down strategy fails to give the neighbourhood chances and incentives for successful change (Kubickova and Campbell 2020).

Regarding the structure and framework of management, it is ambiguous who is accountable for and entitled to the outcomes of revitalisation, which naturally involves risks and benefits associated with tourism activity. At this point, Huta Siallagan remains under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing for one year after the completion of revitalisation works. Despite all this, the unclear management structure raises doubts about who is accountable for the necessary operational expenses, in this case, the two-month-overdue electricity payments. Who should take advantage of revitalisation, such as the revenue from kiosk rent, which the chief has been the only one to benefit this far? This means that, after the revitalisation completes, there has been no discussion on who is responsible for what. This ambiguity creates a conflict of interest, as the central government appears to only get insight and listen to ideas from a limited group of stakeholders. Another example comes from the unequal tourists' spending in the souvenir shops area. The revitalised space opens opportunities only for the kiosks inside the village perimeter, where structures are designed accordingly. Unfortunately, the sellers in the village's surroundings, which are plenty, receive fewer shoppers. The area which has been badly affected is within the proximity of the lake, with the absence of visitors passing. The economic benefit for the local community is proven unequal. These challenges that arise are due to the absence of clarity in the structure, strategy, and action plans that should have been developed prior to the execution of the project. Ultimately, due to insufficient

governance and coordination, monitoring and reporting efforts are also neglected.

Besides that, top-down planning makes it difficult for those engaged in tourism in Huta Siallagan and its surroundings to get along. Several parties believe that they have been neglected and do not play a substantial role in this project. In addition, the rotation of service personnel in the local government agencies hinders the staff's ability to optimally supervise the destination. This will also have an effect on the promotion and diffusion of information about the destination, as the new personnel will require time to adjust to the new work environment and to learn about the potential and challenges.

A social-entrepreneurship tourism approach that emphasises local community companies and activities can also facilitate engagement between local communities, external stakeholders, and tourists (Canavan 2017, Roxas et al. 2020). The existence of cultural performances and entertainment must also be safeguarded by genuine local knowledge in order to not impact the long-established identity of the location. Entertainment shows and performances must be carried out with clarity and commitment in reality.

Finally, in managing pressure and change, which involves preventing and overcoming crises that could be detrimental to a tourism location, there are several things that occur. Being a place of cultural heritage, the environment's authenticity must always be preserved. Preventing and mitigating external hazards such as fires and natural catastrophes is essential. The absence of a visible and accessible fire extinguisher in the village is one of the concerns that can be addressed. A fire had happened in this village, which is one of the reasons for replacing the palm-fibre roof with shingle roofs. The perception of the local inhabitants, which is gradually growing more modern and accepting these changes as natural, represents a further internal concern. This is risky for the originality that defines the identity of Huta Siallagan; physical changes caused by revitalisation, such as the use of non-local materials and the construction of extended homes, can significantly change the people's perceptions of the original design of the Batak traditional house.

## **Governance of the Traditional Village**

Based on the previous discussion, the revitalisation project implemented a top-down planning approach. The leading roles are taken by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Public Works. On the one hand, this strategy reduces bureaucracy, which has impeded tourism development efforts, particularly in lagging areas. On the other hand, this strategy has become a rebounding challenge due to the fact that it raises issues and tensions since parties feel that their interests have been overlooked or disregarded. Previous studies have shown that a top-down (government-community) approach to tourism development and management has proven unsuccessful (Garrod

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Another example comes from the unequal tourists' spending in the souvenir shops area. The revitalised space opens opportunities only for the kiosks inside the village perimeter, where structures are designed accordingly. Unfortunately, the sellers in the village's surroundings, which are plenty, receive fewer shoppers. The area which has been badly affected is within the proximity of the lake, with the absence of visitors passing (Figure 9). The economic benefit for the local community is proven unequal. These challenges that arise are due to the absence of clarity in the structure, strategy, and action plans that should have been developed prior to the execution of the project. Ultimately, due to insufficient governance and coordination, monitoring and reporting efforts are also neglected.

Besides that, top-down planning makes it difficult for those engaged in tourism in Huta Siallagan and its surroundings to get along. Several parties believe that they have been neglected and that they do not play a substantial role in this project. In addition, the rotation of service personnel in the local government agencies hinders the staff's ability to optimally supervise the destination. This will also have an effect on the promotion and diffusion of information about the destination, as the new personnel will require time to adjust to the new work environment and learn about the potential and challenges. A social-entrepreneurship tourism approach that emphasises local community companies and activities can also facilitate engagement between local communities, external stakeholders, and tourists (Canavan 2017, Roxas et al. 2020). The existence of cultural performances and entertainment must also be safeguarded by genuine local knowledge in order to not impact the long-established identity of the

location. Entertainment shows and performances must be carried out with clarity and commitment in reality.



*Figure 9. The area of Huta Siallagan receives different economic gains (red kiosks with the least number of visitors; yellow kiosks with average numbers of visitors; and blue kiosks with the most visitors)*

Finally, in managing pressure and change, which involves preventing and overcoming crises that could be detrimental to a tourism location, there are several things that occur. Being a place of cultural heritage, the environment's authenticity must always be preserved. Preventing and mitigating external hazards such as fires and natural catastrophes is essential. The absence of a visible and accessible fire extinguisher in the village is one of the concerns that can be addressed. A fire happened in this village, which is one of the reasons for replacing the palm-fibre roof with shingle roofs. The perception of the local inhabitants, which is gradually growing more modern and accepting these changes as natural, represents a further internal concern. This is risky for the originality that defines the identity of Huta Siallagan; physical changes caused by revitalisation, such as the use of non-local materials and the construction of extended homes, can significantly change the people's perceptions of the original design of the Batak traditional house.

## Conclusions

Huta Siallagan, located on the shores of Lake Toba, is expected to generate a significant income for the nation's tourism industry. Such expectations must consider the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's standards (GSTC 2022) in its development and they

must pay attention to the implications of destination sustainability. The objective of revitalising tourism destinations is to expand a region's tourism economy. Physical, sociocultural, and spiritual revitalisation should be conducted as part of a sustainable tourism strategy. These three levels of village revitalisation are interconnected and mutually influencing. The social and spiritual levels that comprise a place should therefore be considered during the pre-design phase, even if the revitalisation is limited to the physical level through the refurbishment of facilities and infrastructure. The foundation of sociocultural and spiritual significance will protect and preserve cultural and environmental assets and maintain the long-established image and perception of the village. Additionally, the top-down planning of this revitalisation project, which affects the people's lives, causes both internal and external tensions. Experts and stakeholders from the destination must be involved in the development and comprehension of local knowledge.

It can be concluded that in order to achieve sustainable governance within a tourist destination, research in planning is essential. The lack of research as a foundation will lead to a premature design that causes further issues in the physical, sociocultural, and even the place identity, especially in revitalising a destination with a high reputation. The findings from this research can provide valuable insights into planning future indigenous village revitalisation projects and on how to avoid internal conflicts that may arise in tourism. Further research is recommended to develop a suitable governance structure and framework for sustainable tourism in traditional village areas. Research and planning are vital for achieving sustainable governance in a destination. A lack of research as a basis will lead to an inappropriate design, which will bring in extra problems in the physical, sociocultural, and even place identity, particularly when revitalising a well-known destination. Finally, the findings of this study can provide valuable insights for planning future traditional village revitalisation programs and avoiding potential conflicts that may occur due to tourism activities.

### *Acknowledgments*

The research for this article was supported by Riset Kolaborasi Indonesia with funding from three Indonesian universities, namely Universitas Sumatera Utara, Universitas Andalas, and Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember under contract numbers 1) 6/UN.5.2.3.1/PPM/KP-RKI/2022, 2) T/22/UN.16.17/PT.01.03/Soshum-22/2022, and 3) 1356/PKS/ITS/2022. Special thanks to the Huta Siallagan Village committee and all the interviewees for their help and support throughout the research process.

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