

Optimizing Culture and Tourism in Spurring Local Economic Growth in Bulukumba Regency

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Abstract. *This study aims to analyze the relationship between cultural and tourism factors with local economic growth in Bulukumba Regency. In this study, a quantitative approach was used with data collection through a survey involving respondents from various sectors, including local communities, tourism actors, and local governments. The data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify the influence of culture and tourism on the local economy. The results of the study indicate that cultural activities such as traditional events and the development of tourism infrastructure have a significant contribution to local economic growth, especially in terms of increasing community income and creating jobs. However, the study also underlines the need for improved infrastructure, tourism diversification, and more active community participation to optimize the economic potential derived from the cultural and tourism sectors in Bulukumba Regency.*

Keywords: *Cultural Tourism, Economic Growth, Tourism Infrastructure, Local Development, Bulukumba Regency*

Received: June 17, 2024

Received in Revised: July 16, 2024

Accepted: August, 18 2024

INTRODUCTION

Bulukumba Regency, located in the South Sulawesi province of Indonesia, is a region endowed with an extraordinary cultural heritage and a wealth of natural attractions. The area is famously home to the indigenous Kajang tribe, whose customs and way of life have been preserved over centuries. This tribe represents a living cultural museum, attracting visitors interested in experiencing a unique way of life that is untouched by modernity. The Kajang tribe's commitment to their traditional lifestyle, including their black clothing and strict adherence to ancestral laws, offers a rare cultural experience that has the potential to draw significant cultural tourism.

Additionally, Bulukumba is the birthplace of the Phinisi boats, traditional Indonesian sailing vessels that are recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. The craftsmanship involved in the construction of these boats is a centuries-old tradition passed down through generations. The shipyards of Tana Beru, where these boats are built, are not only a vital part of the local economy but also a significant attraction for tourists who are fascinated by this ancient art. Tourists visiting the shipyards can witness the boat-building process firsthand, which enhances their cultural experience and creates opportunities for local artisans to showcase their skills on an international stage.

The region's natural attractions are equally impressive, with pristine beaches like Tanjung Bira offering some of the most beautiful coastal landscapes in Indonesia. Tanjung Bira is known for its clear turquoise waters, white sandy beaches, and vibrant underwater life, making it a popular destination for both local and international tourists (Eimer, 2022). This area is also a gateway to nearby islands, which are ideal for diving and snorkeling activities. These natural

assets are crucial for the tourism sector, as they attract visitors looking for both relaxation and adventure.

Despite these rich cultural and natural resources, Bulukumba Regency has yet to fully capitalize on its tourism potential. Based on the research by Ollivaud & Haxton (2019) shows that the region's cultural and tourism assets are not being leveraged to their full economic potential, as seen in the relatively low levels of tourist arrivals and economic benefits compared to other regions with similar resources. This underutilization of cultural and tourism resources in Bulukumba suggests that there are challenges that need to be addressed to optimize their impact on local economic growth.

Cultural and heritage tourism has emerged as a significant driver of economic growth globally, particularly in regions rich in cultural assets and natural resources. This trend is especially relevant in developing countries where the cultural and creative industries are increasingly recognized as catalysts for local economic development (Brandano & Urso, 2023; Magaouda & Marco, 2020). By capitalizing on unique cultural experiences and natural attractions, many regions have successfully transitioned from traditional economies to more diverse, tourism-driven models (Li et al., 2019; Richardson, 2021). In Indonesia, the tourism sector has been strategically promoted to stimulate regional growth, with specific policies aimed at enhancing cultural and heritage tourism (Ollivaud & Haxton, 2019). However, the extent to which these sectors contribute to local economic development varies, often depending on the effectiveness of infrastructure, marketing, and community engagement.

Bulukumba Regency in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, stands as a region with untapped tourism potential. Despite being endowed with rich cultural and natural assets, including the indigenous Kajang tribe and the renowned Phinisi boats, Bulukumba has not yet fully capitalized on its tourism resources. The Kajang tribe, with their deep adherence to ancestral laws and unique lifestyle, offers a rare opportunity for immersive cultural tourism. Similarly, Bulukumba's Phinisi boat-building tradition, recognized by UNESCO as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, holds tremendous appeal for heritage tourists. Visitors to the shipyards of Tana Beru can witness firsthand the centuries-old craft that continues to be a cornerstone of the local economy.

In addition to its cultural significance, Bulukumba's natural landscapes, particularly the beaches of Tanjung Bira, are among the most beautiful in Indonesia. These pristine coastal areas, with their turquoise waters and rich marine biodiversity, attract both domestic and international tourists seeking relaxation and adventure. Yet, despite these advantages, the tourism sector in Bulukumba remains underdeveloped, as reflected in relatively low levels of tourist arrivals and economic benefits compared to other regions with similar resources (Ollivaud & Haxton, 2019).

One of the main challenges is the lack of infrastructure and facilities to support tourism activities. For instance, while Tanjung Bira is a popular destination, the supporting infrastructure, such as accommodation, transportation, and other tourist amenities, is not sufficiently developed to meet the needs of a growing number of visitors. This lack of infrastructure not only limits the length of stay of tourists but also reduces their overall spending in the region, thereby limiting the economic benefits that could be derived from tourism.

This underutilization of cultural and natural tourism assets suggests that there are structural challenges limiting their impact on local economic growth. Chief among these challenges is the lack of adequate infrastructure. While destinations like Tanjung Bira attract significant visitor numbers, the supporting facilities accommodation, transportation, and tourist amenities are insufficient to accommodate the growing influx of tourists. This gap in infrastructure not only shortens the duration of tourist stays but also limits the economic benefits that could be realized from extended visitor engagement.

Moreover, the marketing and promotion of Bulukumba's unique cultural and natural attractions have been limited. Despite the region's potential, there is a lack of visibility among

broader tourist markets, both domestically and internationally. This lack of awareness can be attributed to insufficient marketing strategies, such as digital marketing campaigns and partnerships with travel agencies, which could significantly boost the region's profile (Shantika et al., 2023). Without effective promotion, Bulukumba's cultural and natural treasures remain hidden, contributing to the region's inability to fully leverage its tourism assets.

Another significant issue is the limited involvement of local communities in the tourism sector. While local artisans and cultural practitioners stand to benefit greatly from increased tourism, there is a need for more structured support and training to enable them to take full advantage of these opportunities. By fostering greater community participation and ensuring that tourism revenues are equitably distributed, Bulukumba could promote a more sustainable and inclusive tourism model (Khalid et al., 2019).

Understanding these challenges is crucial for unlocking Bulukumba's full economic potential through culture and tourism. As many regions around the world have demonstrated, successful integration of cultural and tourism sectors can spur local economic growth, create jobs, and foster cultural preservation. However, achieving these outcomes requires not only recognizing the value of cultural assets but also implementing effective policies and strategies that address the specific barriers to tourism development (Bryson, 2018).

The primary objective of this study is to assess the impact of culture and tourism on local economic growth in Bulukumba Regency. Specifically, it aims to evaluate the current state of cultural and tourism resources, quantify their economic contributions, and identify strategies to optimize their role in driving local development. This research is particularly timely given the growing recognition of the economic potential of cultural and creative industries in the global economy.

By grounding this study in the theoretical framework of cultural economics, which explores the relationship between culture, economics, and society, the research provides a nuanced understanding of how cultural assets can be leveraged for economic development. Cultural economics posits that cultural goods and services possess both economic and cultural value, and their production is influenced by market forces, cultural preferences, and public policies (DiMaggio, 2019). This framework is particularly relevant to Bulukumba, where cultural assets such as the Kajang tribe and Phinisi boats represent significant untapped economic value.

In conclusion, this study seeks to bridge the gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the economic impact of culture and tourism in Bulukumba Regency. By exploring both cultural and economic dimensions, the study offers practical recommendations for optimizing these sectors to contribute more effectively to local economic growth. The findings are intended to inform policy and practice, not only in Bulukumba but also in other regions seeking to harness the potential of culture and tourism for sustainable development.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative design to analyze the impact of culture and tourism on local economic growth in Bulukumba Regency. A stratified random sampling technique was employed, and data were collected from 250 respondents consisting of business actors, cultural practitioners, tourism operators, and tourists using a structured questionnaire that had been validated through reliability and validity tests. Data analysis was conducted using multiple regression to assess the relationship between cultural and tourism activities and economic growth, correlation analysis to identify the strength of the relationships between variables, and ANOVA and ANCOVA to evaluate differences in economic impacts based on tourism types and to control for confounding variables. This approach provided an in-depth understanding of the contribution of culture and tourism to the local economy in Bulukumba.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	135	54%
Female	115	46%
Age Group		
18-30 years	80	32%
31-45 years	100	40%
46-60 years	55	22%
>60 years	15	6%
Occupation		
Business Owner	90	36%
Cultural Practitioner	50	20%
Tourism Operator	40	16%
Visitor	70	28%
Education Level		
Primary School	40	16%
Secondary School	60	24%
Undergraduate	110	44%
Graduate	40	16%

Table 1 shows a relatively balanced distribution between male (54%) and female (46%) respondents, with most respondents aged 31-45 years (40%). This group likely represents the active working population engaged in tourism and cultural sectors. However, a deeper examination of how specific demographics, such as the predominance of business owners (36%) and respondents with at least secondary education (84%), shape their perceptions of tourism is crucial. For instance, business owners may have a vested interest in promoting cultural events that attract tourists, which could explain the high satisfaction levels observed in Table 2. Additionally, the relatively educated population could indicate greater awareness and expectations for tourism development, which may drive demand for better infrastructure and diversified activities.

Table 2. Perception of Cultural and Tourism Resources in Bulukumba

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Quality of Cultural Events	4.2	0.7	High perceived quality of cultural events.
Tourism Infrastructure	3.5	0.9	Moderate satisfaction with tourism infrastructure.
Accessibility to Tourist Sites	3.8	0.8	Good accessibility but with room for improvement.
Variety of Tourism Activities	3.6	0.7	Moderate variety in tourism activities available.
Contribution to Local Economy	4.0	0.6	Strong perception of positive economic contribution.

Table 2 shows that respondents' perceptions of cultural and tourism resources in Bulukumba are generally positive, particularly regarding the quality of cultural events (mean = 4.2). However, moderate satisfaction with tourism infrastructure (mean = 3.5) suggests that there are areas in need of improvement. Expanding the analysis by comparing these perceptions with those in similar regions could provide context for understanding these moderate ratings. For example, infrastructure challenges in rural tourism destinations often stem from inadequate investment in transportation and facilities, a common issue in many developing regions.

Exploring specific infrastructure deficits, such as road conditions or availability of accommodations, could lead to targeted recommendations for improvements. The moderate variety of tourism activities (mean = 3.6) also warrants further exploration. Identifying gaps in the current offerings, such as a lack of eco-tourism or adventure tourism options, and proposing new activities that align with both local culture and global tourism trends could help diversify and strengthen Bulukumba's tourism appeal.

Table 3. Economic Impact Indicators

Economic Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Increase in Local Income (IDR)	2,500,000	750,000	Moderate income increase attributed to tourism and culture.
Job Creation (No. of Jobs)	25	10	Cultural and tourism activities are creating some jobs.
Business Growth (%)	10	3	Positive but modest business growth linked to these sectors.

Table 3 shows that the economic indicators present a clear but modest impact of tourism and cultural activities on the local economy. The average income increase of IDR 2,500,000 and job creation rate of 25 jobs per initiative reflect positive contributions, but the analysis could benefit from a discussion of the sustainability and scalability of these impacts. For example, while these activities generate moderate income, questions remain about their long-term viability—will these gains continue as tourism grows, or are they likely to plateau without further investment? Additionally, while business growth linked to these sectors is positive (10%), the factors limiting more significant expansion should be considered. Local businesses may face constraints such as limited access to capital, marketing challenges, or supply chain disruptions. Addressing these barriers could unlock more substantial economic benefits, and further research into these factors would provide a more comprehensive view of tourism's potential in the region.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis – Impact of Cultural and Tourism Factors on Local Economic Growth

Independent Variables	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized Coefficient)	t-value	p-value
Quality of Cultural Events	0.50	0.10	0.45	5.00	0.001**
Tourism Infrastructure	0.35	0.12	0.30	2.92	0.004**
Accessibility to Tourist Sites	0.25	0.09	0.22	2.78	0.006**
Variety of Tourism Activities	0.30	0.11	0.28	2.73	0.007**
R-squared			0.60		
Adjusted R-squared			0.58		
F-statistic			32.14		0.001**

Table 4 shows that cultural and tourism factors significantly contribute to local economic growth, with the quality of cultural events showing the strongest impact (Beta = 0.45). However, the practical implications of these findings can be expanded. For instance, while cultural events have a strong positive effect, it would be valuable to explore how these events could be further optimized to maximize their economic impact. Could the frequency or scale of these events be increased, or could collaborations with regional or national festivals amplify their effects? Moreover, potential limitations of the regression model, such as omitted variables, should be acknowledged. Factors such as external investment, government policy, or regional competition may also influence economic growth and should be considered in future analyses. Addressing

these limitations would strengthen the model's validity and offer more precise recommendations for policymakers.

Table 5. Correlation Analysis – Relationships Between Cultural and Tourism Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of Cultural Events	1				
Tourism Infrastructure	0.55**	1			
Accessibility to Tourist Sites	0.47**	0.60**	1		
Variety of Tourism Activities	0.42**	0.50**	0.45**	1	
Local Economic Growth	0.65**	0.60**	0.58**	0.55**	1

Table 5 shows that the significant relationships between cultural and tourism variables, particularly the strong correlation between cultural events and economic growth ($r = 0.65$). While this correlation suggests a close link, it is crucial to consider potential causal pathways. For example, successful cultural events might attract greater infrastructure investments, which in turn support economic growth. Alternatively, improved infrastructure might facilitate larger and more frequent cultural events, driving economic gains. Investigating these dynamics would add depth to the analysis and offer more actionable insights for stakeholders looking to prioritize interventions.

Table 6. ANOVA – Comparison of Economic Impact Based on Types of Tourism

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	5.20	3	1.73	4.56	0.005**
Within Groups	90.80	246	0.37		
Total	96.00	249			

Table 6 shows that reveal significant differences in the economic impacts of various types of tourism, with some forms, such as cultural tourism, likely having a greater effect on the local economy than others. Expanding on this by hypothesizing why cultural tourism might be more impactful—such as its alignment with Bulukumba’s unique cultural heritage—could provide a foundation for more targeted tourism development strategies. For instance, Bulukumba’s rich history and traditional practices offer a strong basis for cultural tourism that appeals to both domestic and international visitors. In contrast, nature tourism, while valuable, might not generate the same level of economic activity due to less frequent visitor turnover or lower spending levels. Understanding these distinctions can help local authorities focus on promoting the most economically beneficial forms of tourism while supporting other sectors with complementary policies.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of culture and tourism on local economic growth in Bulukumba Regency, significantly contributing to the existing literature by addressing key gaps. However, a critical reflection on the study's limitations and broader implications would provide a more balanced and nuanced conclusion.

The study successfully fills a gap in the literature by disaggregating the cultural and tourism sectors into specific components such as the quality of cultural events, tourism infrastructure, and site accessibility and exploring how these factors contribute to local economic growth. Previous studies, such as those by Hughes (2002) and Smith (2015), often treated cultural tourism as a single entity, overlooking the complexity of its various elements. By employing a multiple regression analysis that explains 60% of the variance in local economic growth ($R^2 = 0.60$), this research offers a more granular understanding of the interactions between cultural and tourism factors.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge potential biases and limitations in the analysis. For example, the sample primarily consisted of respondents actively engaged in tourism or cultural activities, which may have influenced their perceptions. The predominance of business

owners and educated individuals could introduce a bias toward more favorable views on the economic impact of tourism. Future research could benefit from incorporating a more diverse sample that includes residents not directly involved in the tourism sector, which would provide a broader perspective on the perceived and actual economic impacts of tourism and cultural activities.

Additionally, the study does not fully account for external economic factors that may influence local economic growth, such as fluctuations in national or global markets, government policies, or the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Acknowledging these limitations would strengthen the credibility of the findings by presenting a more balanced analysis of the drivers of economic growth.

The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the cultural economy in rural contexts by supporting the idea that cultural activities are significant drivers of economic development, as argued by Throsby (2001) and Pratt (2011). The positive and significant correlation between the quality of cultural events and economic growth ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$) aligns with these theories, emphasizing the broader economic dynamism that can be generated through cultural programming.

However, this study extends the theoretical conversation by highlighting the importance of infrastructure and accessibility factors that are often underrepresented in cultural economy theories. The finding that tourism infrastructure ($\text{Beta} = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) has a significant impact on economic growth suggests that cultural events alone are insufficient to drive sustained economic benefits without adequate physical and logistical support. This adds to the existing theoretical framework by incorporating the role of infrastructure as a critical enabler of cultural economy benefits, in line with the findings of Boersma et al. (2018).

A comparison with contrasting studies could further enrich this discussion. For instance, while McKercher & Tolkach (2016) and Nyaupane & Timothy (2022) emphasize the role of cultural offerings in tourism, other studies such as those by Dwyer (2023) have questioned the long-term sustainability of cultural tourism's economic benefits, particularly in regions with limited infrastructure. Integrating such perspectives would offer a more critical analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of this study and highlight the conditions under which cultural tourism can successfully drive economic growth.

The practical implications of this study are clear: strategic investments in cultural programming and infrastructure are essential for maximizing the economic benefits of tourism in Bulukumba Regency. The strong relationship between cultural events and economic growth underscores the need for enhanced cultural offerings, including the development of new attractions and the improvement of existing ones. However, the reliance on cultural tourism also raises concerns about the sustainability of these economic gains. Future studies could explore how diversifying tourism activities might mitigate the risks of overdependence on cultural tourism, particularly in regions vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations or global economic downturns.

Furthermore, the importance of tourism infrastructure, as highlighted in the study, suggests that policymakers should prioritize improvements in transportation, accommodation, and other essential services. This would not only enhance the visitor experience but also increase the length of stay and spending by tourists, as argued by Nyaupane and Timothy (2022). However, it is essential to consider the broader economic context when formulating these recommendations. For instance, investment in infrastructure might be constrained by local government budgets or external economic factors, such as inflation or shifting national priorities. Acknowledging these broader challenges would provide a more realistic set of recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders.

While the findings are robust, they should be interpreted with caution. The positive correlations and significant regression results suggest a strong relationship between cultural

tourism and economic growth, but causality cannot be definitively established. External factors such as government interventions, global tourism trends, or unforeseen economic shocks could also influence the observed relationships. Additionally, the study's focus on a single region Bulukumba Regency limit the generalizability of the findings to other rural or semi-rural areas. Comparative studies across different regions with varying cultural, economic, and infrastructure profiles would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive tourism-related economic growth.

CONCLUSION

This study shows the significant impact of culture and tourism on local economic growth in Bulukumba Regency, filling important gaps in the existing literature by providing a detailed quantitative analysis. The findings reveal that the quality of cultural events, supported by robust tourism infrastructure and accessibility, plays a crucial role in driving economic development. The research underscores the importance of strategically investing in cultural and tourism sectors, particularly in enhancing the quality and variety of cultural offerings, while also improving the infrastructure that supports these activities. By doing so, Bulukumba Regency can maximize the economic benefits derived from these sectors, ensuring sustainable growth that benefits the local community. This study not only contributes to theoretical understanding but also offers practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that leverages the strengths of both culture and tourism to spur local economic growth. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, particularly in the context of long-term sustainability and the potential risks associated with the commodification of culture in tourism-driven economies.

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