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The HECDiS Model: Integration of Ecology, Culture, History, and Digitalization in the Structuring of Hiri Island Tourism

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Abstract. Hiri Island, west of Ternate City, holds a unique tourism appeal, combining ecological richness, cultural heritage, and historical value. This study aims to explore the potential, challenges, and formulate strategies for collaboration and digitalization in tourism management on Hiri Island. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used through field observations, in-depth interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), analyzed using the Husserl–Moustakas phenomenological framework. The results show that Hiri Island possesses a "triple-helix" of ecological, cultural, and historical appeal, but its development is still hampered by limited infrastructure, customary regulations, and minimal synergy across actors. The impact of tourism is ambivalent, strengthening MSMEs and ecological awareness, but also potentially causing social pressure and environmental degradation. As a contribution, this study offers the HECDiS (Hiri Eco-Culture Digital Structuration) model that integrates cultural-ecological narratives (signification), customary protocols (legitimation), and digitalization and resource control (domination). This model provides a theoretical contribution by broadening the horizons of tourism sociology based on Giddens' structuration, while also providing practical strategies for developing inclusive, professional, and sustainable island destinations.

Keywords. Hiri Island; sustainable tourism; local wisdom; structuration; digitalization

Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic sectors in the global economy. With increasing human mobility, a growing middle class, and advances in digital technology, the tourism industry contributes significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP) of various countries. According to a report by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the tourism sector accounts for nearly 10% of global GDP, making it a crucial driver of sustainable development, job creation, and cultural diplomacy (Gössling et al., 2020; UNWTO, 2014). However, global tourism also faces serious challenges in the form of environmental pressures, unequal distribution of economic benefits, and cultural homogenization. Climate change, ecological degradation, and social vulnerability demand new approaches that balance economic interests with environmental preservation and cultural sustainability. Thus, current academic discourse positions tourism not simply as a recreational activity but also as a complex political-economic arena, a cultural identity arena, and a global interaction arena (Bianchi, 2018).

Previous research has shown that culture-based tourism and local wisdom play a vital role in strengthening community identity while offering an alternative, more inclusive development model. The practice of village revitalization through the satoyama concept has successfully integrated nature conservation with the promotion of agrarian tradition-based tourism. In Bali, the integration of the Tri Hita Karana concept into tourism destination management reflects how local wisdom values can serve as an ethical foundation for regulating the relationship between humans, nature, and spirituality (Cole, 2020). Another study in Tanzania confirmed that community participation in ecotourism not only strengthens wildlife conservation but also increases community socio-economic self-confidence. Research in Italy emphasized how socio-economic factors in rural areas contribute to the success of community-based tourism (Piras & Pedes, 2025). These findings demonstrate that local wisdom is not merely a complementary element but a key factor in building destination differentiation, creating authentic appeal, and mitigating the negative impacts of mass tourism.

However, a research gap remains in global trends related to local wisdom-based tourism. First, most literature highlights good practices in East Asia, Europe, or Africa, while the context of small islands in Southeast Asia, particularly North Maluku, has been relatively neglected in international discourse. Second, previous research tends to emphasize economic or conservation aspects, but underexplores the power dynamics, social relations, and customary structures that influence destination governance. Third, although digitalization is touted as a new opportunity in tourism promotion, few studies integrate digital technology with local wisdom as the basis for developing sustainable tourism models (El Archi, Benbba, Zhu, et al., 2023). Therefore, studies that are not only descriptive but also analytical and critical are needed to understand how local communities, governments, and other actors collaborate in developing tourism rooted in tradition, ecology, and history, while simultaneously responding to the demands of modernization.

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to integrate Anthony Giddens' structuration theory perspective into the study of local wisdom-based tourism. Through the framework of modalities of signification, legitimation, and domination, this research attempts to understand how the social practices of local communities on Hiri Island are reproduced and transformed through interactions with modern tourism structures. This approach offers both theoretical and practical contributions: first, it broadens the horizon of tourism sociology by connecting the dimensions of agency and structure within local dynamics; second, it provides a collaborative model based on contextual social innovation and digitalization; and third, it presents a new paradigm in understanding tourism not only as an economic activity but also as an arena for the reproduction of values, identities, and power. Thus, this research seeks to bridge the gap between social theory and the practice of sustainable destination development in the archipelago.

Based on this framework, this study has three main objectives. First, to identify the potential, challenges, and actual practices in developing ecological, cultural, and historical-based tourism on Hiri Island. Second, to formulate a collaboration pattern between local communities, local government, and tourism actors in building a sustainable destination. Third, to design a strategic model for collaboration, innovation, and digitalization that can strengthen the role of local wisdom in tourism governance. The research questions posed are: (1) What are the potentials and constraints of Hiri Island tourism in the ecological-cultural-historical context? (2) What forms of collaboration do local actors take in managing the destination? (3) What innovations are relevant for integrating local wisdom and digitalization? To answer these questions, the study uses a qualitative phenomenological method with field observation

techniques, in-depth interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The analysis was carried out through the stages of Husserl–Moustakas phenomenology including epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, to synthesis of meaning, to ensure that the research results are not only descriptive, but also explore deeper social meanings (Frey, 2018; Moustakas, 2011; Raco & Tanod, 2012).

Methods

This research uses a qualitative phenomenological approach, aiming to deeply explore the socio-ecological experiences of the Hiri Island community in the context of developing tourism based on ecology, culture, and history. The choice of a phenomenological approach was based on the need to understand the meanings embedded in the community's social practices, rather than simply describing empirical facts. In this way, the research seeks to uncover the essence of community experiences related to the potential, constraints, and dynamics of collaboration in tourism management.

Design and Approach

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology serves as the basic framework, while the analysis guide follows a model developed by Frey, 2018; Moustakas, 2011. Through this framework, the researcher carried out a series of stages, starting with epoche (dismissing preconceptions), phenomenological reduction (essential reading of the data), imaginative variation (searching for possible meanings), and finally, synthesis of meaning (formulating the core of the experience). This approach allows the research to transcend superficial narratives and instead crystallize the structures of social meaning hidden behind the residents' daily experiences.

Data Sources and Informants

Primary data were obtained through direct field involvement. Research informants consisted of local residents of Hiri Island, tourism businesses, youth, traditional leaders, and local government representatives. Informants were selected purposively, considering the representation of actors directly involved in tourism management. Additionally, official documents, such as statements from the Ternate City Culture Office and Tourism Office regarding the policy direction for Hiri Island development, were used as supporting data.

Data Collection Techniques

This research employed three main techniques: field observation, conducted to obtain a description of the actual conditions related to destination management, social interactions, and community adaptation patterns to infrastructure, customs, and environmental challenges. In-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face with local residents, traditional leaders, and tourism stakeholders. These interviews aimed to elicit personal perspectives on the potential, obstacles, and hopes for the future of tourism on Hiri Island. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to bring together various stakeholders for collaborative discussions. Through FGDs, researchers not only validated interview data, but also identified the dynamics of interactions, consensus, and conflict in the cross-party collaboration process.

Data Analysis Process

The analysis was conducted using the Husserl–Moustakas phenomenological steps. First, at the epoche stage, the researcher suspended all theoretical preconceptions to allow the data to be understood from the participants' perspectives. Second, the phenomenological reduction stage enabled the researcher to identify essential themes recurring in the informants'

narratives. Third, through imaginative variation, the data was analyzed by exploring various possible perspectives to uncover deeper meanings. Fourth, the analysis results were synthesized into a holistic picture that demonstrated the interrelationships between potentials, constraints, and collaborative strategies in Hiri Island tourism development.

Validation and Triangulation

To ensure data credibility, this study employed source and method triangulation techniques. Validation was carried out through a second focus group discussion (FGD) with practitioners and academics to test the consistency of the findings and assess their relevance to the community's actual needs. Additionally, official government documents were used as comparative material to strengthen the validity of the results.

Results and Discussion

Categories Themes and Findings

Phenomenological Reduction	Findings
Tourism Potential of Hiri Island.	The natural potential (Gurabala, Gura Mangofa, Blue Water, white sandy beaches, diving/underwater spots), culture (Cakalele, Salai Jin, Pangaji, sago culinary – clove oil – walnut gatang), and history (Lofra, Allied landings, Sultanate artifacts) appear as a “triple-helix” of complementary attractions.
Challenges & Obstacles.	The main obstacles include customary prohibitions (boboss/hoso), limited infrastructure (ports, facilities), minimal budget support/government coordination, and environmental issues (waste). Several respondents assessed that government collaboration is ineffective/uneven.
Tourism Impacts.	Positive impacts: boosting MSMEs, environmental awareness, and cultural preservation; potential negative impacts: ecological pressures and social change. The need for "impact management" becomes clear to balance these two aspects.
Inter-Stakeholder Collaboration.	Communities and youth are relatively active in managing spots like Baru Ma Adu, while official cross-sector synergy remains inconsistent. This confirms that local agencies are taking action, but an enabling structure is needed.
Digitalization & Promotion.	Organic promotion through Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok and the use of drones has been implemented by residents, but there is no integrated digital strategy for content consolidation, reservations, and analytics.
Human Resources Development.	The need for guide training, hospitality, conservation, and digital content production was widely recognized by respondents.
Residents' Hopes & Recommendations.	Hopes focus on structured, professional management that still supports local communities and is sensitive to local customs.

Hiri Island's Tourism Potential: Between Ecology, Culture, and History

Research findings indicate that Hiri Island possesses a "triple-helix" tourist attraction: ecology, culture, and history. The underwater attractions of Gurabala and Gura Mangofa, the

traditional Cakalele dance, and the Lofra historical site represent the interconnectedness of nature, identity, and the community's collective memory. This phenomenon emphasizes that the success of sustainable tourism destinations depends not only on natural potential but also on the ability to integrate cultural and historical heritage into the destination narrative. Globally, research in the Philippines also found that combining marine ecotourism with cultural rituals can increase the economic resilience of coastal villages while strengthening social cohesion (Ramos et al., 2021),(Fatah, 2024)

However, critical studies warn that this multifaceted potential can also pose the risk of overexploitation. For example, research in Bali shows that the commodification of culture without strict regulations (Cole, 2020) often creates tension between the sacred values of indigenous communities and the commercial needs of tourism (Carr et al., 2016; Hillmer-Pegram, 2016; Johnston, 2013; Ovies & Bautista, 2021; Scheyvens et al., 2021). This is relevant to the conditions on Hiri Island, where prohibited customary practices such as boboso or hoso serve as protective mechanisms but have the potential to clash with economic interests when tourist pressure increases. Thus, these findings demonstrate a duality: natural, cultural, and historical potential can be key drivers of sustainable tourism, but without customary-based regulations and ecological awareness, this potential becomes a source of vulnerability.

Structural Challenges: Infrastructure, Customs, and Governance

One of the most significant findings is the existence of structural challenges in the form of limited infrastructure, minimal government support, and inefficient collaboration across actors. This condition is not an isolated phenomenon. Research in East Nusa Tenggara found a similar pattern, where uneven tourism infrastructure development isolated potential destinations from global market networks (Ardhana et al., 2022). From the perspective of Giddens' structuration theory, limited infrastructure and governance can be understood as manifestations of weak domination (control over resources). Unequal structures limit the capacity of local agents to innovate, even if they possess commitment and social capital (Ceci et al., 2020; Kim & Shim, 2018; Martínez-Pérez et al., 2016, 2019; Rastrollo-Horrillo & Rivero Díaz, 2019; Tomay & Tuboly, 2023; Tregear & Cooper, 2016). This shows that when the government fails to provide supporting structures (roads, transportation, regulations), community initiatives often get stuck on a micro scale and struggle to develop into movements with broad impact.

On the other hand, customary taboos such as boboso (prohibitions) or hoso can be interpreted as a form of legitimacy (rules/norms) within structuration theory. These rules serve a dual purpose: protecting the ecosystem from exploitation while simultaneously restricting the movement of tourism actors. Research in the Solomon Islands demonstrates a similar phenomenon, where customary prohibitions actually help maintain the sustainability of marine resources, despite being considered "unfriendly" to tourists (Brown, 2016; Datta & Chaffin, 2022; Foukona & Timmer, 2016; Mangubhai et al., 2019; Rabbitt et al., 2022). Therefore, the dilemma between custom and tourism is not a contradiction, but rather a negotiation between traditional values and the needs of modernization.

Tourism Impact: Between Empowerment and Social Disruption

Research reveals that tourism on Hiri Island has a dual impact: boosting MSMEs and environmental awareness, as well as the potential for ecological pressure and social change. This confirms that tourism is a "double-edged sword." Studies in Thailand show that community-based ecotourism programs successfully increased household incomes by 30%, but also generated social jealousy among groups not directly involved in tourism activities

(Kontogeorgopoulos, 2021). The Hiri Island context highlights the urgency of establishing impact management mechanisms to ensure that economic gains do not override ecological sustainability and social balance. Otherwise, tourism becomes merely an instrument of short-term capitalism, without contributing to long-term development.

Collaboration Between Stakeholders: Fragmentation or Synergy?

Field findings indicate that communities and youth are relatively active in managing tourist attractions like Baru Ma Adu, but formal synergy across sectors remains inconsistent. This indicates a "collaboration paradox." Local agents are mobilizing, while formal structures lag behind. Recent literature supports this finding. Research (Wardhani et al., 2023) in Java confirms that collaboration across actors (government, communities, businesses) is a key factor in the development of halal tourism destinations. However, without strong institutional coordination, collaboration tends to be episodic and unsustainable. Conversely, research in Spain demonstrates the success of a co-management model, in which the local government grants full authority to local communities to manage natural tourism parks (López-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Mendoza et al., 2021). The result is a significant increase in citizen participation and ecosystem conservation (Martínez-Graña et al., 2021). This comparison confirms that Hiri Island needs reconstruction of collaboration mechanisms to avoid being trapped in actor fragmentation.

Digitalization and Promotion

Research has found that tourism promotion on Hiri Island remains organic and sporadic, for example through residents' personal social media, without a unified digital strategy. However, the literature shows that digitalization is a crucial catalyst in expanding the reach of destinations. Bibliometric studies have shown that digitalization strengthens destination sustainability through the use of big data, social media, and travel apps (Asif & Fazel, 2024; El Archi, Benbba, Kabil, et al., 2023; El Archi, Benbba, Zhu, et al., 2023; Madzik et al., 2023; Ogutu et al., 2025; Rodrigues et al., 2023). Similarly, studies (Ćwikła et al., 2024) show that the use of digital technology can increase tourist loyalty by up to 25% through personalized experiences. However, concerns have also been raised that digitalization could potentially alienate local communities if dominated solely by external actors. Therefore, the digitalization strategy on Hiri Island needs to ensure community participation as content producers and curators, not merely passive consumers.

Human Resource Development

The need for training in tour guides, hospitality, conservation, and digital content production emerged as a key finding in this study. This confirms that local human resources are key actors in ensuring destination sustainability. Global research consistently supports this finding. Studies in Vietnam show that ongoing training programs for local guides can improve service quality while strengthening authentic cultural narratives (Huynh et al., 2025; Khuong, 2015; Nam & Thanh, 2024). In Indonesia, research (Mulyantari et al., 2021) also emphasizes that archaeology's contribution to tourism is only effective if supported by human resource capacity in cultural heritage interpretation. However, training without a clear incentive system and regulations only produces formal competence, not substantive change. Therefore, the human resource development strategy on Hiri Island needs to be accompanied by policy designs that provide socio-economic mobility for local actors.

The discussion of these results points to the need for an integrative model that combines the potential of ecology, culture, and history with actor collaboration, digitalization, and human resource development. The HECDiS (Hiri Eco-Culture Digital Structuration) model offered by this study represents an attempt to translate Giddens' structure theory into tourism practice. International literature supports this direction. Research in Italy emphasizes the importance of an integrative framework linking socio-economic factors to rural tourism innovation (Piras & Pedes, 2025). Similarly, (El Archi, Benbba, Zhu, et al., 2023) demonstrates that digitalization and sustainability are inseparable in destination management. Critically, (Cole, 2020) warns that without social control, the integration of culture and tourism has the potential to create excessive commodification. Thus, Hiri Island can serve as a social laboratory for the development of a structure-based tourism model: how local agents, through their cultural capacities, historical narratives, and ecology, can form new structures that enable them to manage tourism professionally, inclusively, and sustainably.

Conclusions

This study confirms that Hiri Island possesses comparative advantages rooted in a combination of ecology, culture, and history. Attractions such as the underwater beauty of Gurabala and Gura Mangofa, the Cakalele and Salai Jin traditions, and the Lofra historical site demonstrate that Hiri Island holds not only aesthetic value but also embodies the collective memory and social identity of the community. However, tourism development on Hiri Island still faces various structural obstacles, such as limited infrastructure, customary regulations that have not been fully integrated into formal governance, and minimal synergy between stakeholders. The study results indicate that tourism on Hiri Island has a dual impact. On the one hand, it encourages the growth of MSMEs, strengthens ecological awareness, and revitalizes local cultural pride. On the other hand, it has the potential to bring about ecological pressures, social inequality, and the commodification of traditions. To address these challenges, this study offers the HECDiS (Hiri Eco-Culture Digital Structuration) model which seeks to integrate local narratives (signification), customary protocols and regulations (legitimation), and resource control and digitalization (domination) within the framework of Giddens' structuration theory.

This model offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it broadens the sociological horizons of tourism by linking local community agencies and modern tourism structures within a sustainable development framework. Practically, it provides concrete strategies for strengthening cross-actor collaboration, building an inclusive digitalization system, and enhancing the capacity of local human resources. Thus, Hiri Island can develop as a professional, sustainable, and globally competitive tourism destination, without losing its cultural roots.

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