
The Distinctiveness of "Gandeng Gendong" BALKONDES: A Critical Ethnographic Investigation of Community-Based Tourism Governance in the Borobudur Heritage Area

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Abstract: This study investigates the "Gandeng Gendong" (mutual support) strategy within the Village Economic Centres (BALKONDES) programme in the Borobudur heritage area as an innovative model of Community-Based Tourism (CBT). Drawing on eight months of critical ethnographic fieldwork across 20 BALKONDES in 20 villages of Borobudur District, Magelang Regency, Central Java, the research examines how communities construct meaning around collaborative tourism governance and how socio-economic transformation unfolds through centripetal and centrifugal mechanisms. Findings reveal that the "Gandeng Gendong" strategy, rooted in Javanese *gotong royong* (collective mutual aid), successfully creates a dual-level collaborative ecosystem: internal mechanisms that empower local communities within individual villages, and external mechanisms that foster inter-village resource sharing and collective marketing. Performance analysis of the 20 BALKONDES identifies three cluster typologies: Advanced, Developing, and Less Developed, shaped by leadership quality, community social capital, geographic accessibility, and state-owned enterprise (BUMN) support intensity. Despite meaningful achievements in livelihood diversification and social capital reconstruction, the model confronts significant sustainability challenges, particularly structural dependency on external corporate patronage and persistent tensions between collaborative solidarity and competitive market incentives. The study proposes a theoretical model of "Gandeng Gendong Distinctiveness" as a distinctive network-based CBT governance paradigm that integrates traditional Javanese values with contemporary institutional arrangements, offering transferable lessons for heritage tourism destinations across Southeast Asia.

Keywords: BALKONDES, Community-Based Tourism, Collaborative Governance, Gandeng Gendong, Social Capital

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INTRODUCTION

The Borobudur area, designated by the Indonesian Government as one of five Super Priority Destinations (Kawasan Strategis Pariwisata Nasional) under the 2019–2024 national tourism agenda, embodies the classic paradox of heritage mass tourism: the intense concentration of visitor flows at the temple compound generating structural inequalities across surrounding communities. With approximately 3.5 million domestic and foreign visitors recorded in 2023 (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2023) focused almost exclusively on the Borobudur Temple itself, the twenty surrounding villages have historically experienced economic and social marginalisation despite their geographical proximity to one of the world's most iconic Buddhist monuments (Achsa et al., 2022; Sutono et al., 2023). This spatial maldistribution of tourism benefits constitutes what development scholars characterise as enclave tourism, a pattern in which economic gains remain spatially bounded within the primary attraction and fail to generate transformative spillover effects into adjacent communities (Blackstock, 2005).

The enclave tourism phenomenon in Borobudur is particularly acute because it occurs within a broader national policy context that has prioritised visitor volume over distributional equity. Data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf, 2023) confirm that post-pandemic tourist arrivals to the Borobudur area recovered to pre-COVID levels by 2022–2023, yet community-level economic benefits have not kept pace with aggregate growth. This divergence between headline tourism performance and community welfare outcomes reflects a structural governance failure that has prompted increasing scholarly attention to participatory and collaborative alternatives to conventional top-down heritage tourism management (Arintoko et al., 2020; Widjajanti et al., 2024). Globally, the turn toward Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has been positioned as a corrective paradigm; however, empirical evidence of its effectiveness in large-scale heritage contexts as opposed to smaller ecotourism settings remains limited (Suyatna et al., 2024).

In response to this structural inequality, the Indonesian Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises launched the BALKONDES programme in 2017 BALKONDES being an acronym for Balai Ekonomi Desa, or Village Economic Centre. The programme operates through a distinctive philosophy colloquially described as the "2,000-watt lamp": making Borobudur Temple a radiant centre that illuminates surrounding villages rather than a beacon that blinds them (Novitaningtyas et al., 2021). Each of the twenty villages surrounding the temple was assigned a state-owned enterprise (BUMN) as a corporate sponsor, tasked with providing financial, technical, and managerial support for village-level tourism infrastructure development.

Central to the BALKONDES programme is the "Gandeng Gendong" strategy a phrase drawn from Javanese vernacular meaning, literally, "holding hands and carrying together." This strategy represents far more than operational tourism policy; it constitutes a deliberate attempt to institutionalise the traditional Javanese principle of gotong royong (collective mutual assistance) within a contemporary corporate-community governance framework. The "Gandeng Gendong" mechanism operates across two levels: internally within each village community, and externally among the 20 BALKONDES sites through formalised and informal inter-community networks.

What renders this model analytically compelling is precisely its hybridity: the creative synthesis of deeply rooted cultural values with modern institutional arrangements produces what this study terms the institutional "distinctiveness" of Gandeng Gendong referring to its novelty, originality, and governance sophistication rather than any sense of cultural othering. This distinctiveness lies in the model's capacity to negotiate the inherent tension between collaborative solidarity and competitive market imperatives in ways that neither pure market logic nor romantic communitarianism could achieve alone (Arintoko et al., 2020; Suyatna et al., 2024).

Despite growing scholarly interest in BALKONDES as a policy experiment, four explicit research gaps remain unaddressed. First, prior studies have examined individual BALKONDES sites in isolation (Achsa et al., 2022; Novitaningtyas et al., 2021; Verawati et al., 2023) without systematically comparing performance variation across the full network of 20 sites, thereby obscuring the factors that differentiate successful from less successful implementations. Second, the internal governance mechanisms of the "Gandeng Gendong" strategy, particularly its centripetal-

centrifugal dynamics and “pie sharing” distributive innovation have not yet been subjected to critical ethnographic scrutiny. Third, the sustainability risks arising from structural dependency on corporate (BUMN) patronage remain theoretically underexplored. Fourth, existing CBT scholarship has not adequately theorised the role of traditional local wisdom as an active institutional resource as distinct from static cultural heritage in contemporary tourism governance. These four gaps collectively justify the urgency and novelty of the present study.

This paper presents findings from an eight-month critical ethnographic investigation of 20 BALKONDES across 20 villages in Borobudur District. Four research questions guide the study: (1) How do communities construct meaning around “Gandeng Gendong” in CBT governance? (2) What factors explain performance variations among BALKONDES? (3) How do socio-economic transformation processes unfold through centripetal and centrifugal mechanisms? (4) What are the sustainability implications for community empowerment in heritage tourism areas? Theoretically, the study contributes a novel “Gandeng Gendong Distinctiveness” model that reconceptualises CBT governance from a community-ownership to a community-collaboration paradigm, integrating local wisdom as an active institutional resource. Practically, it offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, BUMN managers, and BALKONDES practitioners on performance-differentiated governance support, distributive innovation, and institutional anchoring for long-term sustainability.

METHODS

This research employs an interpretive paradigm with a critical ethnographic approach. The interpretive paradigm was selected given the study's focus on the thick description of meaning-making processes, lived experiences, and social practices within BALKONDES communities domains of inquiry that resist reduction to quantifiable variables (Geertz, 1973). Critical ethnography adds dimensions of power analysis, structural critique, and social transformation examination, enabling the research to move beyond descriptive cultural portraiture toward an examination of how governance arrangements both reproduce and potentially challenge existing inequalities (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Fieldwork was conducted across 20 BALKONDES in 20 villages of Borobudur District, Magelang Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, over eight months of intensive immersion. The research employs a multiple case study design, grouping the 20 BALKONDES into four geographical and managerial clusters, thereby enabling both within-case depth and cross-case pattern identification. The extended temporal engagement spanning seasonal variations, governance cycles, and longitudinal processes of relationship development is essential for capturing the dynamic character of collaborative tourism governance.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling designed to maximise perspectival diversity and information richness. The sampling rationale was as follows: all 20 BALKONDES managers were included to ensure full programmatic coverage; 20 village heads were selected to capture formal governance perspectives from each site; 15 community leaders and religious figures were identified through snowball referral to represent informal authority structures; and 8 BUMN supervisors were purposively recruited to represent each of the major corporate sponsors active in the cluster. This configuration was designed to achieve both horizontal breadth (across all 20 sites) and vertical depth (across governance levels), consistent with purposive sampling logic in critical ethnographic research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Secondary informants comprised 20 direct beneficiary community members, 20 independent MSME and homestay operators, and 10 tourists and tour operators. Informants are identified throughout this paper using alphanumeric codes (e.g., PB-03, TM-10) to protect participant confidentiality while maintaining analytical traceability.

Data were collected through four complementary methods: participant observation in daily BALKONDES operations and inter-village coordination meetings; semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in Javanese and Indonesian, each lasting 60–120 minutes; six thematic focus group discussions; and document analysis of BUMN planning records, financial reports, and digital communication archives. Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework of

Braun and Clarke (2006), modified with grounded theory elements to enable emergent pattern identification. The process proceeded as follows: (1) familiarisation with data through repeated reading of field notes and interview transcripts; (2) generation of initial codes by systematically labelling meaningful units across the dataset; (3) searching for themes by collating codes into candidate thematic clusters; (4) reviewing and refining themes against the coded extracts and the entire dataset; (5) defining and naming themes with clear boundaries and theoretical anchoring; and (6) producing the final analytic narrative through interpretive write-up. All interview transcripts were translated from Javanese or Indonesian into English, with back-translation checks conducted by a bilingual research assistant to ensure conceptual equivalence.

Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, source and method triangulation, systematic audit trail documentation, and peer debriefing with CBT and development studies specialists. These mechanisms collectively support the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the ethnographic interpretations (Geertz, 1973). Ethical safeguards were observed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, formal research permission was obtained from the local government (Pemerintah Kabupaten Magelang) and the relevant BUMN institutional representatives. All participants provided voluntary informed consent, with the research purpose, data use, and confidentiality arrangements explained orally and in writing before each interview or focus group. Participant identities are protected through alphanumeric codes throughout the manuscript. Data were stored securely and accessible only to the research team. No personally identifying information was recorded in field notes or transcripts.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Meaning Construction: Gandeng Gendong as Gotong Royong Revitalised

One of the most striking findings of this study is the consistency with which community members frame "Gandeng Gendong" not as an externally imposed programme concept but as a natural extension of pre-existing cultural values. PB-03, manager of BALKONDES Wringinputih, articulated this meaning construction with particular clarity:

"Gandeng Gendong is like the old gotong royong, but now for making money. If before, gotong royong was for village cleaning, now it is for collective progress in tourism business."

This cultural translation from ceremonial and agrarian collective labour to collaborative tourism enterprise reflects what Suyatna et al. (2024) characterise as the adaptive capacity of Javanese social capital: the ability to maintain foundational value orientations while renegotiating their institutional expressions in response to changing economic contexts. The semantic continuity between traditional gotong royong and contemporary Gandeng Gendong serves as a powerful source of cultural legitimacy, enabling communities to embrace new cooperative arrangements without experiencing them as culturally alien.

Yet this integration is not without ambivalence. TM-10, a Borobudur community leader, acknowledged the underlying tensions:

"Gandeng gendong is good, but sometimes there are those who feel the distribution is unfair. This must be continuously managed so it does not become a problem."

This ambivalence reflects the structural tension between the collaborative logic of gotong royong and the competitive logic of market-oriented tourism. Ansell and Gash (2008) identify precisely this dynamic the precarious institutional achievement of collaborative governance in contexts where economic incentives continuously generate defection pressures.

Internal Gandeng Gendong: Centripetal-Centrifugal Mechanisms

Observation at BALKONDES Candirejo provides the clearest illustration of centripetal mechanism operation. The site functions simultaneously as: a supply chain integrator, prioritising local suppliers for rice, vegetables, meat, and handicrafts; a labour pool, operating priority recruitment and rotation systems for the local workforce; and a capacity development hub,

providing training and certification services for surrounding community members. TM-16, coordinator of a women's food processing group in Candirejo, described the multiplier effects directly:

"Since BALKONDES existed, women here have steady work. Every day there are food orders, and we take turns cooking. Income becomes more stable and we also learn to cook new menus."

This testimony illustrates what Achsa et al. (2022) identify as the competitive advantage of BALKONDES: their capacity to integrate previously fragmented village economic actors into a coherent tourism value chain. The centripetal mechanism creates not merely employment but structured economic participation a distinction crucial for understanding empowerment as capability expansion (Sen, 1999) rather than income supplementation alone.

The centrifugal mechanism operationalises through spatial and economic distribution strategies. BALKONDES encourage tourists to explore entire village areas through guided village tours, agricultural experience packages, and craft workshops, thereby physically dispersing visitor expenditure across the community. TM-08, a farmer-guide in Giritengah, described this transformation:

"Before, tourists just passed through our village. Now they stop, look at rice fields, buy agricultural products, some even learn farming. Farmers' income increases from selling harvest directly to tourists."

This testimony reflects a form of what Widjajanti et al. (2024) term "participatory benefit-sharing" a governance principle that distributes not just economic outcomes but participation opportunities. The centrifugal mechanism ensures that BALKONDES function as catalysts rather than extractors, generating village-wide development rather than concentrating gains within management structures.

External Gandeng Gendong: Inter-BALKONDES Collaborative Networks

External Gandeng Gendong creates horizontal collaborative networks among BALKONDES sites through three primary mechanisms: regular communication forums (monthly manager meetings and WhatsApp coordination groups); resource sharing systems for equipment, workforce, and expertise; and joint marketing initiatives including collective promotion and tourism product packaging. PB-12, BALKONDES Teksong supervisor, described the resource-sharing logic:

"If there is a big event and we lack plates or chairs, just chat in the WhatsApp group. Someone will definitely help. Same if we need extra hands for cooking or guides, we support each other."

This informal network governance illustrates what Oktavia et al. (2023) identify in their hexa-helix analysis of Borobudur tourism village development: the importance of communication infrastructure and trust as preconditions for effective inter-community collaboration. The WhatsApp coordination mechanism, while technologically mundane, functions as a real-time trust-building and reciprocity-reinforcing institution.

The "Pie Sharing" System: Distributive Innovation

The most distinctive governance innovation of external Gandeng Gendong is the "pie sharing" system an overflow and rotational allocation mechanism that transforms conventional tourist competition into positive-sum collaboration. When a BALKONDES reaches capacity, it actively redirects visitors to available sites rather than simply turning them away. For large group tour packages, a rotational quota system ensures that accommodation, dining, and activity revenue is distributed across the BALKONDES cluster. PB-21, BALKONDES Wringinputih manager, explained the operational logic:

"If our rooms are full, we do not just reject guests. We find accommodation in nearby BALKONDES that are still available. Tourists are happy because they still get accommodation, and other BALKONDES also get income."

This distributive mechanism directly challenges the zero-sum competitive assumptions of mainstream tourism market behaviour. By creating positive-sum institutional arrangements, the pie sharing system operationalises the transformation of social capital into economic capital through network intermediation (Bourdieu, 1986). Its significance extends beyond operational efficiency: the pie sharing system institutionalises collaborative reciprocity as the default governance response to market scarcity, a form of institutional counter-logic to prevailing competitive tourism economies.

BALKONDES Performance Variations and Cluster Typology

Analysis of the 20 BALKONDES reveals significant performance heterogeneity despite their operation within the same "Gandeng Gendong" institutional framework, confirming that programme design alone is insufficient to explain developmental outcomes. The interaction of five determinant factors leadership quality, community social capital, geographic accessibility, unique selling proposition, and BUMN support intensity creates complex causation patterns. Table 1 presents the resulting cluster typology.

Table 1. BALKONDES Performance Cluster Typology, Borobudur District

Cluster	BALKONDES (n)	Key Characteristics	Critical Success / Constraint Factors
Advanced (7)	Wanurejo, Karanganyar, Ngadiharjo, Borobudur, Karangrejo, Wringinputih, Kembanglimus	High occupancy; diversified income streams; strong community participation; robust inter-BALKONDES network engagement	Visionary transformational leadership; strategic proximity to temple; high bonding and bridging social capital; intensive BUMN mentorship
Developing (8)	Bigaran, Kenalan, Sambeng, Candirejo, Teksongo, Tegalarum, Giritengah, Giripurno	Moderate growth trajectory; emerging product specialisation; gradual community engagement expansion	Adequate institutional foundation; requires targeted intervention in digital marketing and financial governance
Less Developed (6)	Tanjungsari, Ngargogondo, Majaksingi, Bumiharjo, Kebonsari, Wanurejo II	Low visitor footfall; limited product differentiation; high structural dependency on BUMN	HR capacity deficit in financial management and digital skills; requires intensive governance rehabilitation

Source: Field research, Borobudur District, 2024–2025

The Advanced cluster demonstrates that high performance is not solely a function of geographic proximity to the temple but depends critically on leadership quality and community cohesion confirming Hermawan and Suryono's (2023) finding that endogenous institutional capacity is the primary predictor of sustainable CBT outcomes. BALKONDES Karangrejo's documented transformation from a structurally disadvantaged community to one of Magelang's leading cultural tourism destinations (Achsa et al., 2022) provides the clearest empirical evidence that the centripetal-centrifugal mechanism can generate transformative outcomes when underpinned by visionary local leadership.

The Less Developed cluster reveals a pattern of arrested development communities that have adopted the structural forms of BALKONDES governance without yet internalising its collaborative logic. Verawati et al. (2023) identify human resource capacity limitations as the primary constraint in this group, confirmed by this study's observation that Less Developed BALKONDES frequently struggle with basic financial management, digital marketing, and regulatory compliance. The implication is analytically significant: the "Gandeng Gendong" spirit cannot be legislated or financially incentivised into existence; it requires sustained investment in peer learning and governance education that the programme has not yet consistently delivered.

Socio-Economic Transformation

Livelihood Diversification Without Displacement

A significant finding is that BALKONDES-induced economic transformation takes the form of livelihood diversification rather than agricultural displacement. HS-03, a farmer-homestay operator in Teksong, articulated this complementarity:

"I do not abandon farming. Now I farm while hosting guests. It is actually more profitable harvest can be sold directly to staying guests, prices are better than selling to markets."

This diversification pattern aligns with the sustainable livelihoods framework, in which portfolio diversification enhances household resilience (Chambers, 1995). The BALKONDES model appears to support the kind of "tourism plus" economy that sustainable development scholars advocate one in which tourism generates additional rather than replacement income streams, preserving the agri-cultural fabric that sustains community identity and environmental stewardship.

Social Capital Reconstruction and Network Formation

The Gandeng Gendong strategy has catalysed the formation of new productive community networks that transcend traditional geographical and social boundaries. Three primary network types have emerged: BALKONDES Manager Groups for inter-site information exchange and governance coordination; Local Supplier Groups connecting farmers, artisans, and food producers across villages; and Guide and Driver Communities serving multiple BALKONDES sites. KB-07, leader of a batik tulis group in Candirejo, described the cross-village learning dynamics:

"Now we have networks with batik groups in other villages. If there are large orders, we help each other. We also learn new motifs from other villages."

This testimony illustrates what Muktaf et al. (2023) describe as the bridging function of tourism-induced social capital: new economic relationships creating cross-community connections that generate both instrumental (economic) and expressive (identity and belonging) value. The reconstruction of social capital through BALKONDES networks represents a qualitative transformation in community social architecture, not merely a quantitative increase in income.

Psychological Empowerment and Aspiration Transformation

Perhaps the most psychologically salient transformation documented in this study concerns shifting community attitudes toward tourism work as a domain of legitimate aspiration and social status. KD-10, Candirejo Village Head, observed:

"Now young people are proud to work in tourism. Before they were embarrassed when asked what they do; now they are proud to speak English, to meet foreigners. The community paradigm has totally changed."

This aspirational transformation reflects the psychological empowerment dimension identified by Rowlands (1997): the expansion of community members' sense of personal efficacy and future orientation. It suggests that BALKONDES' most durable contributions may be less visible in income statistics than in the cultural and psychological dimensions of community wellbeing.

Challenges, Tensions, and Structural Vulnerabilities

The Collaboration-Competition Tension

Despite the institutional architecture of Gandeng Gendong, competitive pressures remain a persistent structural reality. PB-11, BALKONDES Giritengah manager, articulated the frustration common among Advanced cluster sites:

"If honest, sometimes there is also a sense of unfairness. We who are already advanced are constantly asked to help those not yet advanced, while BUMN support is actually more for those not yet advanced. This sometimes makes the gandeng gendong spirit decline."

This testimony reveals a structural dilemma in redistributive collaborative governance: the moral hazard of free-riding and the resentment of high-performing actors who bear disproportionate collaborative costs. Ansell and Gash (2008) identify this as a critical failure point in collaborative governance design, requiring explicit incentive alignment to prevent defection by high-capacity partners.

Structural Dependency and Sustainability Vulnerability

The most acute structural vulnerability in the BALKONDES model is the high dependency on BUMN support, generating what development scholars describe as programme dependency communities capable of functioning within the programme architecture but unable to self-sustain once external support diminishes. PB-16, BALKONDES Ngargogondo manager, expressed this anxiety directly:

"We are worried if later BUMNs change policies or there is management turnover. This programme is still very dependent on their support. There is no long-term certainty yet."

This dependency reflects the structural limitations identified in the broader CBT literature: programmes that substitute external resources for internal capacity building may achieve short-term outputs while undermining long-term community agency (Blackstock, 2005; Hermawan and Suryono, 2023). The BALKONDES model requires urgent attention to what Widjajanti et al. (2024) call "institutional anchoring" embedding collaborative governance mechanisms in community-owned structures rather than corporate-administered frameworks.

Discussion The "Gandeng Gendong Distinctiveness" Model

A Network-Based CBT Governance Paradigm

The "Gandeng Gendong Distinctiveness" model that emerges from this study constitutes a theoretically significant contribution to Community-Based Tourism scholarship. It reconceptualises CBT from a community-ownership model to a community-collaboration model shifting the analytical unit from the bounded community to the inter-community network as the generative institutional architecture. This reconceptualisation is consequential: it addresses a fundamental limitation of conventional CBT theory, which struggles to account for the collaborative governance dynamics that emerge when multiple communities must share tourism resources, visitor flows, and economic opportunities within a shared destination ecosystem.

The model operates through three structural dimensions. First, dual-level collaboration: internal (intra-community) Gandeng Gendong creates centripetal-centrifugal economic dynamics; external (inter-community) Gandeng Gendong generates network governance and distributive innovation. Second, adaptive governance structure: the model accommodates diverse community capacities through cluster-based management and performance-differentiated support. Third, hybrid economic logic: market mechanisms are embedded within social economy principles, enabling individual entrepreneurship while sustaining collective action.

Local Wisdom as Institutional Foundation

The “distinctiveness” in this model’s title refers to the institutional originality of this governance synthesis, the creative integration of traditional Javanese gotong royong values within contemporary institutional arrangements. This integration challenges the frequently observed bifurcation in development practice between technocratic programme design that ignores cultural context and romantic communitarianism that essentialises local knowledge. The BALKONDES Gandeng Gendong model demonstrates that local wisdom need not be museified, it can be an active institutional resource that shapes governance architecture, creates cultural legitimacy, and generates genuine community ownership.

This finding resonates with Widjajanti et al. (2024) and Suyatna et al. (2024), who document the centrality of local social norms in sustaining CBT governance in Indonesian tourism villages. It also connects to broader debates in development theory about the relationship between cultural capital and institutional effectiveness, suggesting that governance models attuned to local cultural logics may generate more durable and equitable outcomes than context-blind frameworks.

Practical Implications

For policymakers, the BALKONDES model offers lessons about the structural conditions that enable collaborative heritage tourism governance: formalised inter-community coordination mechanisms, performance-differentiated support strategies, and regulatory frameworks that enable cross-village cooperation while preventing monopolistic capture. For development practitioners, the model emphasises that capacity building must address not only individual skills but collective governance competencies the institutional capacities required for sustainable network management.

For BALKONDES managers specifically, three strategic priorities emerge from this analysis. First, the formalisation of Gandeng Gendong mechanisms in multi-village agreements or memoranda of understanding to provide structural certainty beyond interpersonal trust. Second, the development of transparent performance-based incentive systems that align individual motivations with collective goals. Third, the creation of endogenous financial reserves drawing on village fund (Dana Desa) and BUMDes mechanisms to reduce structural dependency on BUMN patronage.

Several methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged in interpreting this study’s findings. First, the eight-month fieldwork period, while sufficient to capture seasonal variation and relational dynamics, remains insufficient for observing long-term institutional consolidation. The study’s findings therefore reflect a specific developmental moment in the BALKONDES programme trajectory, and the sustainability of the empowerment gains documented here particularly the bridging social capital networks and psychological empowerment changes cannot be confirmed without longitudinal follow-up. This limitation is particularly consequential given the finding that structural dependency on BUMN support represents the model’s most acute vulnerability: any assessment of sustainability requires observation over a period during which BUMN support levels actually vary.

Second, geographic focus on the Borobudur heritage area constrains direct generalisability of the findings. The Borobudur context is distinctive in several analytically important respects: its designation as a Super Priority Destination implies sustained government investment; its Javanese cultural context provides the specific gotong royong value base that underpins Gandeng Gendong’s legitimacy; and the Buddhist World Heritage status generates a specific tourist profile. These contextual specificities mean that the “Gandeng Gendong Distinctiveness” model requires contextual adaptation before application to other heritage settings.

Third, while purposive sampling was designed to maximise perspectival diversity, selection bias risks persist particularly regarding the voices of marginalised community members (including women in Less Developed cluster villages, non-BALKONDES-affiliated households, and seasonal

workers) who may lack access to formal programme structures and whose experiences of the model may differ substantially from the mainstream narratives captured in this study. Future research should employ dedicated sampling strategies to access these subaltern perspectives.

Fourth, the performance cluster typology presented in Table 1 is based on field observations and informant assessments rather than standardised quantitative metrics. While this approach is appropriate for the interpretive paradigm employed, it introduces subjectivity that limits precise cross-site comparison. The development and validation of a standardised BALKONDES performance assessment instrument incorporating financial, social capital, governance, and empowerment indicators represents an important methodological priority for the research programme.

These limitations collectively define a productive agenda for future research. Four research directions are particularly well-positioned to extend and deepen the analytical contributions of this study. First, longitudinal studies tracking the same BALKONDES communities over five to ten years would enable rigorous assessment of whether empowerment gains persist under conditions of reduced BUMN support and changing government priorities directly addressing the sustainability vulnerability identified as the model's critical weakness. Such research should specifically track the evolution of the pie sharing system and inter-BALKONDES network governance under competitive pressures.

Second, comparative research examining CBT governance in analogous heritage tourism contexts including Prambanan (Hindu World Heritage, Central Java), Tanah Lot (Balinese Hindu ritual landscape), and Komodo (UNESCO Natural Heritage, East Nusa Tenggara) would illuminate the contextual conditions under which the Gandeng Gendong governance model is transferable and the cultural specificities that constrain replication. Such comparative analysis could also explore whether equivalents to gotong royong in other Indonesian cultural traditions (such as Balinese subak or Minangkabau adat) could serve as alternative institutional foundations for similar collaborative governance models.

Third, action research partnerships co-designed with BALKONDES communities particularly those in the Less Developed cluster would address the governance rehabilitation needs identified in this study while generating contextually grounded theoretical insights. Such partnerships could pilot and evaluate specific governance innovations, including the formalisation of Gandeng Gendong in community agreements and the development of performance-differentiated incentive structures. This approach aligns with the emerging agenda in Indonesian CBT scholarship for collaborative knowledge production (Widjajanti et al., 2024; Yuliani et al., 2025).

Fourth, gender-focused research on women's participation in BALKONDES governance and benefit distribution is urgently needed. While this study documented women's economic participation (as food processing group members, homestay operators, and guide assistants), it did not systematically examine gender equity dimensions of governance access, benefit distribution, or psychological empowerment. Given that women constitute a significant proportion of BALKONDES workforce participants, understanding whether the Gandeng Gendong model generates gender-equitable outcomes is both empirically important and ethically imperative.

CONCLUSIONS

THIS study set out to examine whether and how the "Gandeng Gendong" strategy within the BALKONDES programme in Borobudur constitutes a genuinely innovative model of Community-Based Tourism governance one capable of addressing the structural inequalities that characterise enclave heritage tourism while sustaining meaningful community empowerment. Based on eight months of critical ethnographic fieldwork across 20 BALKONDES in 20 villages, the study yields four principal conclusions that speak directly to the research questions posed.

First, communities do not merely adopt Gandeng Gendong as an externally designed programme instrument; they actively appropriate it as a culturally authentic expression of pre-existing gotong royong values. This cultural legitimisation is not incidental to the model's effectiveness it is foundational to it. By embedding new institutional arrangements within familiar

moral frameworks, the programme achieves a degree of community ownership that purely technocratic governance models cannot generate. The risk, conversely, is that cultural legitimacy may mask the structural dependency on BUMN support that underlies the model's current form: communities may experience the programme as culturally theirs even as its governance architecture remains externally controlled.

Second, performance variation across the 20 BALKONDES is driven primarily by the quality of local leadership and the pre-existing stock of community social capital, rather than by programme design features or geographic proximity to the temple. This finding has an important policy implication: uniform programmatic interventions cannot reliably produce uniform outcomes. Sustainable improvement in Less Developed cluster BALKONDES requires tailored, context-sensitive support strategies that invest in governance competencies and leadership development rather than simply providing additional financial resources.

Third, the centripetal-centrifugal mechanism produces genuine socio-economic transformation across three dimensions: livelihood diversification that complements rather than displaces agricultural livelihoods; reconstruction of bridging social capital through new cross-village networks; and psychological empowerment through the emergence of tourism as a domain of aspiration and identity for younger community members. Among these, the psychological dimension the shift in how communities perceive themselves and their developmental possibilities, may prove the most durable and self-reinforcing legacy of successful BALKONDES implementation.

Fourth, the "pie sharing" distributive innovation is the model's most theoretically significant institutional contribution. By converting tourist competition into positive-sum collaboration through a governance mechanism rather than market forces, it demonstrates that cooperative economic institutions can be deliberately designed and maintained in community settings challenging the assumption that inter-community competition in tourism is structurally inevitable. This insight has direct relevance for CBT programme design beyond the Borobudur context.

Together, these conclusions support the "Gandeng Gendong Distinctiveness" model as a theoretically coherent and empirically grounded contribution to CBT scholarship. The model is not a universal template: its effectiveness is contingent on cultural traditions of collective action, sustained institutional support for inter-community governance, and committed investment in endogenous leadership development. Where these enabling conditions are present, however, the creative synthesis of traditional wisdom and contemporary governance architecture that defines Gandeng Gendong represents a genuinely distinctive, and distinctive in its sophistication pathway toward heritage tourism development that is both equitable and resilient.

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