



Mapping the Potentials and Challenges of Emerging Tourism Villages: Reflections from the ASTACITA Forum as a Strategic Planning Foundation

Samerdanta Sinulingga^{*1}, Meutia Nauly², Jonathan Liviera Marpaung³

¹Tourism Destination Department, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan 20155, Indonesia

²Psychological Department, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan 20155, Indonesia

³Mathematics Department, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan 20155, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: danta@usu.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an early-stage analysis of the potentials and challenges faced by emerging tourism villages, using the ASTACITA Summit 2025 as a case study. Held in Kuta Gugung Village, North Sumatra, ASTACITA (Strategic Alliance for Collaborative, Inclusive, and Integrated Village Governance) served as a pioneering forum for multi-stakeholder engagement in rural development. The forum brought together actors from government, academia, business, community, and media within a structured dialogue aimed at empowering rural communities through participatory tourism planning. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through participant observation, informal interviews, and documentation of collaborative sessions during the summit. The study mapped key village potentials including cultural uniqueness, natural attractions, and local entrepreneurial initiatives as well as pressing challenges such as infrastructural limitations, governance gaps, and lack of digital capacity. Through structured discussion tables and networking exchanges, the forum enabled a bottom-up identification of strategic priorities, including training needs, partnership opportunities, and local regulation frameworks. Findings suggest that the ASTACITA format not only facilitated knowledge transfer but also generated community-driven insights that can inform long-term development planning. The mapping process served as a reflective and inclusive diagnostic tool that centered local voices while aligning with national rural tourism goals. This study contributes to the discourse on participatory governance and sustainable tourism by showcasing how structured forums like ASTACITA can be harnessed for strategic, data-informed, and collaborative planning in rural contexts.



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1. Introduction

Indonesia's rural areas are rich with potential for tourism-driven development. From ecological diversity to cultural heritage and community-based traditions, villages across the archipelago hold untapped assets that can be transformed into sustainable tourism offerings. However, many emerging tourism villages remain underdeveloped due to structural limitations. Key challenges include lack of access to markets, weak digital infrastructure, limited financing, and insufficient institutional support. These conditions are further exacerbated by fragmented development programs, often driven by external actors with short-term objectives and limited engagement with the local context. Traditional aid-based models have largely failed to empower communities in a transformative or lasting way. Instead, villages are too often positioned as passive recipients of support rather than as agents of their own development. Consequently, tourism planning in rural areas frequently lacks coherence, community ownership, and strategic vision leading to underutilized potential,

social friction, or unsustainable growth. To address these gaps, there is an urgent need for participatory, data-informed, and collaborative planning processes that center local voices while aligning with broader development frameworks. The pentahelix model provides a useful conceptual foundation for inclusive rural development. It emphasizes collaboration among five stakeholder groups government, academia, business, community, and media each contributing distinct knowledge, resources, and roles. When applied to tourism planning, this model ensures that development is not only multi-dimensional but also responsive to social, economic, cultural, and environmental realities. It promotes the idea that villages must be seen not as objects of development, but as subjects active co-designers of their future. In this framework, participatory planning becomes both a diagnostic and strategic tool.

The pentahelix collaboration model has gained increasing relevance as a framework for inclusive, multi-sector rural governance. It emphasizes the coordinated involvement of five key societal actors government, academia, business, community, and media in jointly planning and implementing development strategies. This approach is particularly suitable for tourism village development, which requires the integration of diverse expertise, stakeholder interests, and resource contributions. Within this model, villages are no longer seen as passive recipients of top-down programs, but as active agents of change with the autonomy to co-define their development priorities and pathways. The pentahelix model reinforces participatory governance by balancing institutional authority with grassroots agency, making it well-aligned with principles of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and collaborative planning. Forums such as ASTACITA embody these principles by creating structured opportunities for dialogue, mapping, and decision-making across sectors. They serve not only as spaces for negotiation and knowledge exchange but also as mechanisms to institutionalize shared ownership and accountability in rural development processes.

Previous research has demonstrated the significance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in rural and tourism development, particularly through the pentahelix model. Pribadi and Setiawan emphasized the importance of synergy among government, academia, business, community, and media in advancing community-based tourism in Bonjeruk Village, with empowerment dimensions ranging from enabling to controlling [1]. Similarly, Wilayati et al. highlighted how such collaboration helped optimize marine ecotourism management in Banyuwangi, resulting in increased tourism value and community benefits [2]. Sinulingga et al. (2021) illustrated the role of educational tourism as an innovative strategy to address local tourism weaknesses by enhancing awareness, skills, and destination identity [3]. The need for participatory governance in tourism is also evident in studies by Putra Siringoringo et al., who discussed active learning as a method of local empowerment [4], and who examined how community training programs improve stakeholder engagement in tourism villages. Further, Beatrice found that effective tourism village development requires the institutionalization of local wisdom and stakeholder mapping [5]. Rochayati contributed to this discourse by demonstrating the sustainability of local community involvement in village tourism branding [6], while argued for integrating digital platforms to strengthen public participation [7]. The importance of mapping potentials and challenges in tourism villages was discussed, who stressed participatory data collection to inform strategic planning [8]. Lastly, affirmed that bottom-up approaches especially through inclusive stakeholder forums enhance tourism development sustainability by aligning interventions with local aspirations [9].

This study aims to explore the role of participatory mapping facilitated through the ASTACITA Summit 2025 as a strategic entry point for the development of emerging tourism villages. It investigates how the forum functioned not only as a space for stakeholder interaction but also as a participatory planning platform capable of surfacing local needs, assets, and aspirations. The research specifically seeks to examine the design and execution of the ASTACITA forum in enabling structured engagement among diverse actors. Additionally, it aims to evaluate the roles and interactions of the five pentahelix stakeholders government, academia, business, community, and media in collaboratively identifying both the potentials and the challenges faced by the village. Finally, the study seeks to determine how the outputs of this collaborative mapping process can inform strategic planning, guide policy interventions, and support the formation of long-term, multi-actor partnerships in the context of rural tourism development.

2. Method

2.1 Participant Observation During ASTACITA Sessions

Participant observation was employed to capture the real-time dynamics of the ASTACITA Summit as it unfolded in Kuta Gugung Village. The researcher was actively embedded in the forum activities, attending

keynote presentations, roundtable discussions, idea exchanges, and commitment-signing ceremonies [10,11,12]. This immersive approach enabled the documentation of spontaneous interactions, non-verbal communication, and the tone of engagement among pentahelix actors. Field notes were recorded throughout the sessions to reflect both observable behaviors and contextual nuances that might not surface in formal interviews.

2.2 Informal Interviews with Stakeholders

Informal interviews were conducted with selected representatives from each of the five pentahelix sectors: government officials, academics, business actors, community leaders, and media practitioners. These semi-structured conversations allowed for flexibility in questioning while providing depth in understanding stakeholder perspectives. Topics explored included motivations for participation, perceived challenges, expectations from cross-sector collaboration, and reflections on the summit's planning outcomes. The interviews complemented observational data by adding a personal and interpretive dimension to the participatory process.

2.3 Documentation (Photos, MoUs, Discussion Outputs)

A variety of documentation sources were collected to support analysis and interpretation. These included photographs of forum events, signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between stakeholders, written outputs from group discussions, summit agendas, and printed presentation materials. The documentation served as both a historical record and a source of verification for cross-referencing observational and interview data. Visual and textual materials were coded and organized thematically for deeper analysis.

2.4 Triangulation Approach to Ensure Data Credibility

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, a triangulation strategy was adopted. This involved cross-validating information obtained through different methods (observation, interviews, and documentation) and from diverse sources (actors across the pentahelix sectors). Triangulation helped reduce researcher bias and strengthened the reliability of the interpretations. Contradictory perspectives were also acknowledged to ensure a balanced representation of the collaborative planning process.

2.5 Thematic Analysis as the Data Analysis Method

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which involved several stages: familiarization with the data, initial coding, category development, and synthesis of themes. Themes were constructed inductively from the data, allowing insights to emerge naturally rather than being imposed through pre-existing frameworks. Thematic categories included perceptions of collaboration, identification of tourism potentials, institutional challenges, and stakeholder expectations. This analytic approach enabled a holistic understanding of how the ASTACITA forum functioned as a participatory planning mechanism in a rural tourism context.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Village Potentials Identified

The participatory mapping process facilitated through the ASTACITA Summit revealed several distinct potentials within Kuta Gugung Village that could serve as the foundation for tourism development. First, the village is rich in cultural uniqueness and heritage, particularly from the Batak Karo tradition, which manifests in its architecture, rituals, storytelling, and culinary practices. The participatory mapping process during the ASTACITA Summit 2025 began with a focused exploration of the village's core strengths and unique attributes. Stakeholders from across the pentahelix spectrum engaged in identifying and affirming local potentials as the foundation for sustainable tourism development. Among the most striking assets recognized were the village's rich cultural traditions, community entrepreneurship, and stunning natural landscapes particularly the scenic views of Mount Sinabung that frame the identity and spatial layout of Kuta Gugung. The summit emphasized that tourism planning must start from what the village already possesses, not what it lacks, making this strengths-based approach essential.



Figure 1. Village potentials of Desa Kuta Gugung

Figure 1 captures a symbolic moment of this process, featuring key community leaders and institutional representatives standing in front of Mount Sinabung while holding samples of local agricultural products. This setting visually reflects the intertwined potential of agro-tourism, cultural heritage, and ecological stewardship that defines Kuta Gugung's tourism identity. The use of traditional red woven scarves (ulus) worn by participants signifies unity, local pride, and cultural continuity. Such visual documentation served not only as evidence of participation but also as a communicative tool to inspire shared ownership and external recognition of the village's tourism value. This image became an anchor in discussions, reminding all stakeholders that development must be rooted in context, pride, and locally owned resources. This cultural depth offers high value for developing authentic tourism experiences rooted in local identity. Second, the village is surrounded by natural landscapes with strong eco-tourism potential, including forested hills, agricultural terraces, and panoramic viewpoints. These assets are well-suited for low-impact tourism models such as trekking, agro-tourism, and camping, which align with sustainability principles. Third, the village demonstrated vibrant local entrepreneurship and strong social capital, visible in the presence of youth groups, women's collectives, and informal networks engaged in crafts, traditional performances, and food production. These grassroots initiatives indicate a readiness for community-based tourism if provided with the proper support structures.

3.2. Key Challenges Identified

Despite its potential, the village also faces several pressing challenges that must be addressed to support meaningful tourism development. The most immediate concern relates to infrastructure gaps, particularly in transportation access, signage, sanitation, and basic visitor facilities. These limitations constrain mobility, reduce visitor satisfaction, and limit the scalability of tourism offerings. Another significant barrier is the presence of digital and institutional limitations. The village lacks stable internet connectivity, which hinders digital promotion and communication with external stakeholders. Institutional capacity for tourism governance is also underdeveloped, with no existing tourism working group or formal coordination structure at the village level. In addition, the mapping process highlighted issues of weak regulation and stakeholder coordination, where overlapping responsibilities and unclear leadership structures made it difficult to implement long-term planning or resource mobilization. These challenges point to the necessity of strategic, multi-actor engagement to bridge systemic gaps. Following the identification of local potentials, the ASTACITA Summit moved into a critical phase of participatory issue mapping. This process aimed to uncover the structural, economic, digital, and governance-related challenges that may hinder tourism development in Kuta Gugung. Rather than relying solely on external assessments, the summit prioritized a community-driven diagnosis through structured dialogues. Village residents, local leaders, youth representatives, and stakeholders from academia, government, and business sectors were encouraged to voice concerns, share lived experiences, and analyze obstacles to growth. The facilitation team employed open-floor discussions and thematic clustering techniques to ensure inclusive participation and equal speaking opportunities across groups.



Figure 2. Identification of the issue

Figure 2 captures two key moments from this session: on the left, a representative voice an institutional concern during a focused group discussion; on the right, participants are seen actively engaged in roundtable debates to articulate infrastructure and regulatory limitations. The tented forum layout was intentionally designed to foster proximity and informality, allowing hierarchical barriers to be broken down in favor of authentic dialogue. These visual scenes underscore the democratic nature of the summit, where issues were not prescribed from the top, but surfaced organically through community participation. The information generated during this process directly informed the shared planning priorities and collaborative action proposals that followed in subsequent sessions.

3.3. Role of Pentahelix Actors in the Mapping Process

The pentahelix model demonstrated its practical value during the participatory mapping activities of the summit. Each sector contributed uniquely to the process, creating an environment of sectoral synergy. Government representatives provided policy direction, development priorities, and institutional legitimacy. Academics helped facilitate structured mapping using SWOT and stakeholder analysis frameworks, while the business sector offered insights on tourism trends and product-market fit. The community's participation was central to the entire process. Village leaders, youth groups, and residents contributed lived knowledge about local assets and aspirations. Their input shaped the framing of tourism priorities and gave meaning to spatial data collected during the summit. Dialogues and roundtable discussions served as engagement tools that allowed for iterative feedback, clarification of assumptions, and alignment of stakeholder perspectives. These mechanisms ensured that planning was not only top-down or technical, but grounded in local values and realities.

3.4. Strategic Implications of the Mapping Process

The participatory mapping process produced several strategic outcomes. Most notably, it facilitated the emergence of shared development priorities among stakeholders. These included investment in digital infrastructure, support for cultural preservation, development of eco-tourism packages, and training for local tourism operators. Rather than isolated proposals, these priorities were negotiated and endorsed collaboratively during forum sessions. Furthermore, the summit enabled early-stage partnership identification, with several organizations expressing interest in follow-up engagements. These included universities offering to assist in product development, local businesses exploring tourism packaging, and government agencies committing to incorporate the forum's outcomes into official planning documents. Finally, the mapping process laid the foundation for long-term collaborative planning, both by producing a preliminary tourism development roadmap and by institutionalizing multi-actor dialogue through the ASTACITA mechanism. This demonstrates how structured participation can evolve into sustained governance models for rural tourism.

To translate identified challenges into actionable strategies, the ASTACITA forum emphasized the importance of aligning village potentials with long-term sustainability goals. The participatory discussions revealed that many of Kuta Gugung's obstacles such as infrastructure gaps, digital limitations, and regulatory inconsistencies are not insurmountable when approached through collaborative, context-sensitive planning. Rather than viewing these as isolated problems, the summit facilitated a process of linking challenges to existing strengths, thereby enabling stakeholders to craft feasible, locally grounded solutions. Table 1 summarizes the key development challenges surfaced during the forum and presents corresponding sustainability strategies based on the village's unique cultural, ecological, and entrepreneurial assets. Each recommendation reflects the principles of community-based tourism, emphasizing participation, authenticity,

and environmental stewardship.

Table 1. Challenges and Sustainability Strategies Based on Village Potentials

Identified Challenge	Linked Village Potential	Strategic Sustainability Recommendation
Limited infrastructure (roads, sanitation, signage)	Natural landscapes and scenic viewpoints	Develop eco-friendly basic infrastructure (e.g., trails, waste systems) through multi-stakeholder financing.
Weak digital connectivity and promotion tools	Local entrepreneurship and youth digital awareness	Establish village Wi-Fi hubs and digital training programs for youth-led tourism marketing.
Lack of formal tourism governance or village tourism body	Strong social capital and leadership networks	Form a community-based tourism working group supported by legal village decree and stakeholder mentorship.
Low access to external investment or tourism capital	Active community enterprises and agricultural products	Develop cooperative business models and link with ethical tourism investors and social enterprises.
Inconsistent regulatory support from district level	Community initiatives aligned with policy goals	Advocate for village inclusion in district tourism masterplans and seek MoUs with government institutions.
Cultural commodification risks (loss of authenticity)	Unique Batak Karo cultural heritage	Promote cultural preservation through curated, community-led tourism experiences and rotating activity cycles.
Environmental degradation risk from unmanaged tourism	Eco-tourism readiness and agroforestry landscape	Implement visitor caps, green codes of conduct, and reinvest tourism revenues into conservation funds.

As seen in Table 1, the strategic responses extend beyond infrastructure to include institutional formation, digital empowerment, cultural preservation, and ecological protection. These strategies are intended to serve not only as ideas but as actionable pathways for collaborative implementation, where each stakeholder in the pentahelix model contributes to a shared vision. By mapping challenges through the lens of local capacity, the ASTACITA process reinforces the notion that sustainable rural tourism does not begin with external solutions it begins with a deeper understanding of what the village already has, and what it aspires to become.

4. Conclusions

The ASTACITA Summit 2025 demonstrates the potential of structured, multi-stakeholder forums to serve as replicable models for inclusive and participatory village planning. Through the application of the pentahelix framework and participatory mapping methodologies, the summit succeeded in bringing together government, academia, business, community, and media to jointly identify both the potentials and challenges facing Kuta Gugung as an emerging tourism village. The use of participatory mapping as a strategic diagnostic tool proved essential in centering local voices, surfacing context-specific development priorities, and aligning multi-actor interests. This process not only improved the accuracy of planning but also fostered a sense of ownership and accountability among all stakeholders involved. Most importantly, the findings underscore the critical importance of local agency in rural transformation. Villages like Kuta Gugung are not blank canvases awaiting external intervention; they are active agents of change, capable of articulating their aspirations and co-designing their future with the right facilitation and support. This case contributes meaningfully to the discourse on sustainable rural tourism by showcasing how collaborative governance, context-driven strategy, and community empowerment can converge within a forum like ASTACITA. It calls for greater investment in participatory mechanisms that enable rural communities to move beyond development as a target—to development as a process they lead.

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