

# STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE BAMBOO CRAFTSMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN VILLAGE EDUCATIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PRE-LAUNCH PHASE: A CASE STUDY OF EMPOWERMENT POLICY IN MEKARSARI VILLAGE

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## Abstract

Village educational tourism is frequently framed through Community-Based Tourism (CBT), yet many initiatives stall in the pre-launch phase when local actors are unprepared. This study examines Awi Edu-tourism in Mekarsari Village, Garut Regency, to identify barriers to bamboo craftsmen's participation and to formulate empowerment strategies. Guided by community participation theory, self-efficacy, and empowerment, the research used a qualitative case-study design with semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, followed by reflexive thematic analysis. Results show three interlinked constraints: limited understanding of edu-tourism beyond 'produce-and-sell' routines, low confidence to interact with visitors, and weak value awareness that craft knowledge can become an educational attraction. These conditions keep participation at an informational level rather than a substantive role in planning. Recommendations emphasise iterative concept workshops, scenario-based communication practice, and institutionalised artisan involvement in village forums with incentives. Findings contribute a pre-launch readiness map linking meaning, confidence, and institutional support to sustainable CBT.

**Keywords:** Community Based Tourism, Edu-Tourism, Pre-Launch Readiness.

## A. INTRODUCTION

The development of village educational tourism can be situated within the broader logic of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), which explicitly positions local communities not external operators as key actors in planning, managing, and capturing tourism benefits (Lee & Jan, 2019). Conceptually, this positioning matters because CBT is often justified on normative and practical grounds: it promises deeper community involvement, a fairer distribution of benefits, and the long-term socio-economic sustainability of rural destinations when local ownership is genuinely built into governance arrangements (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2018). Notably, more recent synthesis work reiterates that "participation" in CBT is not a ceremonial add-on; it tends to be effective only when supported by enabling governance, clear institutional roles, and resilience-oriented capacity building otherwise the distribution of benefits can easily become uneven despite CBT language being used in program documents (Sumandi & Rizkikadduhani, 2025). In other words, CBT is best read as a governance model that requires deliberate social and institutional work, rather than as a label that automatically guarantees equity.

However, a persistent limitation in the CBT literature is its heavy emphasis on post-implementation outcomes, while the pre-launch phase the stage where readiness, initial perceptions, role expectations, and participatory capability are formed often receives

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comparatively limited analytical attention (Lee & Jan, 2019). This gap is consequential because the pre-launch period frequently determines whether community engagement becomes substantive or remains performative. Recent research on *community readiness* reinforces this point by showing that readiness is multi-dimensional (e.g., awareness, leadership, collaboration, resources, and organizational capacity) and that early-stage tourism initiatives can look “promising” yet still be fragile if coordination and institutional support are not secured from the outset (Ferdian et al., 2025). Put differently, pre-launch is not simply a “waiting room” before implementation; it is the phase where the social foundations of participation are either built or quietly undermined.

Within this frame, Mekarsari Village (Selaawi District, Garut Regency) is a strategically relevant locus because it is widely recognized as a bamboo craft center whose weaving tradition has persisted across generations, shaping both livelihoods and local cultural identity. Based on the 2026 Mekarsari Village Profile and the 2025 Mekarsari Precision Village Data Monograph, bamboo craftsmen number 1,368 out of a total population of 6,541 (Mekarsari Village DDP Monograph, 2025; Mekarsari Village Profile, 2026). These figures are not merely descriptive; they suggest that the viability of educational tourism particularly one rooted in craft learning experiences will be structurally dependent on whether craftsmen participate meaningfully and perceive the initiative as credible and beneficial. In educational tourism specifically, this participation often implies a role transition: artisans are expected to move beyond production into interpretive and pedagogical functions, acting as facilitators of learning and cultural transmission an expansion of role expectations that requires careful preparation and design (Masunah et al., 2025).

In this context, village government leadership becomes pivotal for shaping participation during the early development stage, particularly when the program requires coordinated role change, institutional support, and shared rules of engagement. Evidence from village development studies in Indonesia indicates that leadership can significantly influence the quality of community participation, including how consistently participation is facilitated and how far community voices translate into program direction (Setiadi et al., 2025). Therefore, this study focuses on two central questions: (1) what factors hinder the participation of bamboo craftsmen during the pre-launch phase of village educational tourism development, and (2) what empowerment strategies can the village government use to encourage craftsmen’s meaningful involvement at that stage.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Community Participation in Village Development**

Community participation is often best understood as a *continuum* of citizen engagement in public decision-making, spanning from situations where people merely receive information to arrangements in which they hold a substantive voice in shaping development priorities and program choices (Arnstein, 1969). What is noteworthy here is that participation, in this view, cannot be reduced to headcounts at meetings or the sheer frequency of consultations; rather, it hinges on the extent to which citizens can actually influence decisions that affect livelihoods, service access, and the allocation of local resources. This distinction matters analytically because it allows you to separate genuine deliberation from forms of “symbolic” participation cases where community input is solicited and recorded, yet outcomes remain essentially unchanged. In other words, participation becomes meaningful when it carries decision-making weight, not simply when it is visible. Against this backdrop, power-sensitive measures of participation remain highly relevant in contemporary governance debates, especially as participatory institutions become more formalized but continue to be practiced unevenly across local settings (Aspinall et al., 2025).

In rural Indonesia, however, the quality of community participation is rarely determined by procedural design alone; it is strongly shaped by institutional capacity and by the evolving relationship between village governments and residents. Sutiyo and Maharjan (2017) show that decentralization and village leadership can indeed support more inclusive and sustainable participation, yet these gains depend on whether local institutions can translate devolved authority into credible forums for deliberation and collective decision-making. More recent evidence reinforces a related point: the institutional architecture that expanded under the Village Law era does not automatically guarantee substantive citizen power, because local political dynamics, leadership incentives, and day-to-day institutional performance can produce sharply different participation outcomes from one village to another (World Bank, 2023; Aspinall et al., 2025). At the operational level, studies suggest that participation tends to be stronger when village–community relations are organized through collaborative mechanisms that sustain communication, shared problem definition, and mutual accountability rather than relying on one-off consultation events that are easily reduced to administrative formality (Adib, 2024). Interestingly, work on village fund governance further indicates that participation, when paired with transparency and accountable procedures, is often associated with stronger oversight and improved governance performance, which underscores the practical significance of institutional capacity in shaping participatory quality (Hidayat, 2025).

### **Decentralization and Village Institutional Capacity**

The concepts of decentralization and village institutional capacity essentially emphasize that the quality of citizen participation at the village level does not stand alone, but is largely determined by two interrelated factors: how authority is structured through decentralization and how prepared local institutions are to manage the development process. Decentralization does indeed open up opportunities for more inclusive participation because decision-making centers are closer to residents; however, it is important to note that these opportunities can quickly weaken when village institutions lack the capacity to facilitate consistent and meaningful engagement. Interestingly, the institutional capacity referred to goes beyond "administrative" matters, but also encompasses leadership skills, clarity of local rules, coordination between actors, and the ability to translate aspirations into realistic and executable programs. In the Indonesian context, the relationship between village government and residents and the quality of local leadership are often key differences in whether participation develops as a sustainable practice or remains confined to ceremonial forums with minimal follow-up. Therefore, this framework helps explain why participation can appear strong in one village but fragile in another, even though both operate under relatively similar policy umbrellas (Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2017). Indicators:

- Quality of village government facilitation: encouraging dialogue, summarizing aspirations, and following up on decisions.
- Clarity of participation rules: schedules, channels for aspirations, and complaint/feedback mechanisms.
- Capacity of local organizations: BPD, LPM, and artisan groups carry out representation and coordination functions.
- Consistency of communication and transparency: who does what, when, and with what resources.
- Sustainability of institutional support: budget, training, mentoring, and partnership networks.

### **Community-based tourism and Edu-tourism**

The Community-Based Tourism (CBT) approach emphasizes the active involvement of local communities in tourism planning and management as a prerequisite for destination

sustainability. Lee suggests that CBT can contribute to sustainable development if communities have a significant role and directly benefit from tourism activities (Lee & Jan, 2019).

However, Manyara and Jones caution that without meaningful participation from the outset, CBT risks creating a false sense of engagement that ultimately undermines local ownership and the distribution of benefits (Manyara & Jones, 2007). In the context of educational tourism, the role of the community, particularly artisans, expands beyond simply being producers to also serving as learning facilitators who transmit local cultural knowledge and values to visitors.

### C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design, primarily to understand rather than to merely measure how village actors make sense of, negotiate, and practically enact participation during the early-stage development of educational tourism in Mekarsari Village. Fieldwork was conducted over three months (November 2025–January 2026) in Mekarsari Village, Garut Regency; importantly, this timeframe enabled repeated engagement with everyday community routines as well as the evolving dynamics of village governance. Ten informants were purposively selected to capture information-rich variation across key actor groups: six bamboo craftsmen, two village government officials, and two managers of the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*). The craftsmen were included based on three substantive criteria more than ten years of work experience, involvement in local business groups, and representation from different hamlets because, as you would expect, these characteristics often shape how readiness is perceived, how benefits are interpreted, and whether artisans view the shift toward becoming educational actors as feasible rather than merely aspirational.

Data were generated through three complementary strategies: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation of relevant village activities, and documentary analysis of policy and program materials. Interviews were used to elicit participants' experiences and interpretations—particularly around participation, perceived constraints, expectations for edu-tourism, and the subtle power relations that tend to structure decision-making whereas observation helped capture interaction patterns, informal coordination, and the “rules-in-use” that are not always fully articulated in interview narratives. Documentary sources (including village planning documents, tourism program drafts, meeting notes, and related policy texts) were examined not only to provide contextual grounding, but also to function as an additional evidentiary layer for triangulation. The analytic process followed a thematic analysis approach that moved from systematic familiarisation and initial coding to theme development and interpretive synthesis, consistent with the phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). To enhance analytic rigor particularly given the interpretive nature of theme construction this study drew on more recent guidance on reflexive thematic analysis and good-practice reporting, emphasising transparency in coding decisions, reflexive awareness of the researcher's positioning, and careful articulation of theme boundaries and meaning patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022; Byrne, 2022). Ethical safeguards were maintained throughout: official permission was obtained from the Mekarsari Village Government, all participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was ensured through anonymisation and secure handling of transcripts and field notes.

### D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research results revealed three main barriers to bamboo craftsman participation in the pre-launch phase of Awi Edu-tourism.

### **Limited Understanding of the Edu-tourism concept:**

Some artisans still seem to interpret bamboo weaving primarily as an economic production activity making goods, fulfilling orders, and then selling them so the educational dimension that could actually be embedded in craft practice has not yet entered their horizon of thinking. This is illustrated quite clearly by one informant's remark: "we only know how to make and sell... I don't understand it at all" (P1, bamboo craftsman, 45 years old), suggesting that *edu-tourism* is not yet understood as an operational concept, let alone as a role that can be enacted in everyday practice. Notably, this limited understanding cannot be reduced to a simple "lack of information"; there is a real conceptual gap between how artisans read their work as a daily economic routine and how the village program imagines them as *educational actors*. In other words, before expecting higher levels of involvement, the more fundamental issue is the construction of *shared meaning* a common understanding of what *edu-tourism* is and why bamboo craft activities can be translated into a learning experience for visitors.

When read critically, this situation carries a non-trivial risk: the program may become trapped in symbolic participation, where artisans are "presented" within the educational tourism narrative but have not been adequately prepared to inhabit the new role being assigned to them. Interestingly, the core weakness does not necessarily lie with individual artisans, but with the architecture of policy communication how the village government, *Pokdarwis*, or other driving actors explain *edu-tourism* in concrete terms and translate its benefits into a language that resonates with artisans' everyday realities. If the educational dimension remains unclear, it is unsurprising that the incentive logic artisans use stays rooted in production: time, labor, and materials are calculated for product output, not for designing visitors' learning experiences. As a result, the program is prone to misalignment: the village pushes "educational tourism," while artisans continue operating within a "produce and sell" framework, making their involvement fragile, defensive, or highly contingent on particular conditions (for instance, direct compensation, the presence of a facilitator who organizes activities, or orders that do not disrupt production).

The implication is that this finding points to the need for interventions far more substantive than one-way socialization. What is required is a capacity-strengthening process that gradually reshapes how artisans make sense of their work while, at the same time, opening space for a role transition from producers to learning facilitators without making them feel they are losing control over their livelihoods. Practically, a plausible starting point is to reframe craft experience as "local knowledge" that can indeed be taught: technical demonstrations, narratives about raw materials, cultural values, quality standards, and craft work ethics, which are then packaged into visitor formats that are simple, structured, and realistic given artisans' work rhythms. Nevertheless, such a strategy is unlikely to succeed if it stands alone; it needs to be supported by clear institutional arrangements firm role division, practice-based training, and incentive mechanisms that help artisans view *edu-tourism* as a rational opportunity rather than an additional burden disconnected from their economic needs. Therefore, in the early phase, the central challenge is not merely "increasing the number of participants," but building meaning readiness and role readiness as prerequisites for participation that is genuinely substantive.

### **Low Confidence in Public Interaction**

Another barrier that emerged was the craftsmen's low confidence in interacting with visitors. This is reflected in the following statement: "If a guest comes, I might just stay quiet, especially if the guest is from the city" (P2, bamboo craftsman, 38 years old). This situation

indicates that communication skills are a crucial factor in craftsmen's readiness to participate in edu-tourism.

Within the framework of self-efficacy, social behavior such as speaking, guiding, or explaining something to others is strongly shaped by a person's belief in their own capability. When this belief is low, what often happens is not simply an inability to perform, but rather a tendency to avoid the situation, remain silent, or withdraw, even though the person may actually have sufficient knowledge to share. Notably, P2's remark ("I might just stay quiet...") is therefore better interpreted not as a lack of information, but as an indication that the task demands of edu-tourism greeting visitors, explaining, guiding, and facilitating a learning experience have not yet been perceived as falling within the artisan's personal capacity. Put differently, the barrier is not only "what is known," but also "how confident one feels about communicating it" in a social setting that is experienced as challenging. Theoretically, such a condition is a plausible factor constraining participation during the pre-launch phase, because people tend to postpone involvement when they perceive the social risk as high (Bandura, 1977).

If you situate this finding within the CBT/edu-tourism context, the barrier appears more structural than merely personal. In community-based destinations, visitor experience quality and program sustainability often hinge on local communication competence: how residents explain processes, articulate cultural meanings, and build courteous, clear service interactions. Interestingly, research on developing speaking competence in CBT settings in Indonesian tourism villages emphasizes that communication skills including confidence in interaction are a critical prerequisite, since local residents are the ones who engage directly with tourists and, in practice, represent the "face" of the destination (Zanah, 2025). Accordingly, when artisans feel awkward, inferior, or afraid of saying the wrong thing in front of guests especially city visitors who are perceived as "more knowledgeable" their role as educational actors becomes difficult to enact. The implications are serious: the program may stall at a minimal level of participation, where artisans are physically present but do not genuinely guide the learning process that forms the core of edu-tourism.

Critically, this finding clarifies that readiness for edu-tourism cannot be built through concept socialization or one-way information delivery alone. What is needed is capacity strengthening that targets practical communication skills *how to greet, explain, guide, and narrate local knowledge* because this is where the real "role burden" of edu-tourism is located. Literature on language/communication training for tourism-village communities suggests that contextual training models grounded in communication situations that commonly occur in the field can help communities improve communicative competence for serving tourists more effectively while still preserving the authenticity of local values (Rusmawan et al., 2025). Other findings also emphasize that communication training for *Pokdarwis* and tourism-village communities is designed to improve interaction with visitors, which in turn strengthens service readiness at the community level (Laksana, 2023). Thus, your finding becomes even more compelling: "silence" is not merely an individual symptom, but an indicator that key prerequisites for participation the combination of self-efficacy and communication competence have not yet been met. For this reason, pre-launch strategies should incorporate simple, repetitive, practice-based communication training so that artisans feel safe to try, make mistakes, and gradually develop their confidence and skill

#### **Lack of Awareness of Educational and Economic Values.**

Furthermore, bamboo crafts are still viewed as routine work, not as a potential educational attraction. An informant said: "We've always made bird cages and woven things. Now, they say it can be a tourist attraction and a learning experience for guests." (P3, bamboo craftsman, 52 years old). From the village government's perspective, the craftsmen's limited

preparedness was also acknowledged: "The potential is huge, but it seems like most craftsmen aren't ready to explain the process to visitors." (A1, village government official).

### **Contradiction in how craft is understood: routine work vs educational attraction**

The findings of this study show that some artisans still position bamboo craftsmanship within a routine work framework: production orders sales. As a result, the idea of a "learning attraction" tends to feel like an agenda coming from outside, rather than a perspective that has taken root in everyday work practices. Nevertheless, this pattern does not always appear in other tourism-village contexts. Setiawati and Syam's (2023) study, for instance, indicates that in Sidatapa Village, craft activities including local production processes have already been integrated into a culture-based tourism-village development package; interestingly, the emphasis is not only on economic output, but also on community empowerment and involvement through capacity strengthening and the development of tourism-awareness cadres. In other words, in the Sidatapa case, craft work is not merely "maintained as production," but is repositioned as part of a tourism experience architecture that is intentionally designed to be accessed and learned by visitors (Setiawati & Syam, 2023).

The analytical implication is fairly clear: this difference suggests that the barrier in Mekarsari is likely not that bamboo craft "has no educational value," but rather that the process of meaning conversion from routine work into a learning experience has not yet genuinely taken shape. Notably, failures of meaning conversion like this are often linked to a pre-launch phase, program communication designs that are not yet operational, or the absence of collective learning mechanisms that make artisans feel safe to adopt new roles. Thus, the issue lies not in the potential itself, but in how that potential is translated into practices that make sense to the main actors involved.

### **Contradiction in readiness to explain: not ready vs having "professional staff"**

A1's quote ("the potential is huge, but... not ready to explain the process") confirms that the challenge identified by this study goes beyond promotion or branding; the core issue is readiness to enact an educational role. Interestingly, when this finding is compared with Iskandar et al.'s (2024) study in Gintangan Village, a different picture emerges: they identify the status of a bamboo craft tourism village as a key strength, accompanied by "good branding" and even the presence of "professional staff." In that study, the most prominent weakness is not an inability to explain the process to visitors, but limited knowledge of technology-based digital marketing (Iskandar et al., 2024). This suggests that in some contexts, face-to-face service readiness and experiential capacity are relatively more established, while challenges shift into the digital domain.

This comparison implies that "interaction readiness" and the ability to explain processes are not always the primary problems across all craft-based tourism villages indeed, in some cases these aspects are better managed, and the bottleneck moves toward digital marketing. However, in Mekarsari (based on P3 and A1), the problem appears more foundational: artisans have not yet positioned themselves as narrators or educators, so explaining the process is not yet understood as part of the work itself. For me, this contradiction strengthens the argument of this study that the pre-launch phase is crucial for building role identity and service capacity, rather than merely preparing promotional materials.

### **Contradiction in edu-tourism as experiential learning: structured vs still discourse-level**

In the edu-tourism literature, it is worth noting that there are contexts where "learning" is not merely a program claim, but a deliberately designed core complete with an experiential flow, interaction points, and explicit learning objectives. Aulia and Listyorini's (2025) study, for example, emphasizes that edu-tourism can be positioned as experiential learning, meaning that visitors' learning experiences are genuinely explored in real and systematic destination practices. When compared with the findings of this study, the contrast is quite sharp: in

Mekarsari, “learning” remains at the level of a claim (“they say it can become an attraction”), whereas in that study, “learning” has already been translated into an experience design that can be operationalized (Aulia & Listyorini, 2025). This matters because it indicates that the success of edu-tourism is not determined by its label, but by the extent to which learning processes are designed, enacted, and supported through local actors’ capacity.

A summary of the empirical findings and the village government's strategic responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Barriers to Bamboo Craftsmen's Participation and the Mekarsari Village Government's Strategic Response in the Pre-Launch Phase of Awi Edutourism

<i>Obstacle Theme</i>	<i>Field Indications</i>	<i>Empowerment Strategy</i>	<i>Initial Impact</i>
Limited understanding	Production is understood as an economic activity	Workshop konsep eduwisata	Increased initial understanding
Low self-confidence	Reluctant to interact with tourists	Tourism interaction simulation	Readiness of some craftsmen
Low value awareness	Crafts are considered routine	Involvement in village activities	Initial perception changes

Research findings indicate that bamboo craftsmen's participation in the pre-launch phase remained at the information and consultation level within the community participation spectrum (Arnstein, 1969). This indicates that craftsmen were involved in the initial process but did not yet have a substantive role in strategic decision-making.

From a CBT perspective, limited participation from the initial stage has the potential to weaken local ownership and the sustainability of the village educational tourism program (Lee & Jan, 2019; Manyara & Jones, 2007). However, the value of mutual cooperation and synergy between the village government, Pokdarwis (Tourism Working Group), and craftsmen groups provides important social capital to encourage increased participation in subsequent stages (Sutiyo & Maharjan, 2017).

These findings align with Mulyaningsih's research, which emphasizes the importance of collective commitment between village officials and the community in building a village identity based on local wisdom. In the context of Mekarsari Village, bamboo crafts not only function as an economic activity but also as an identity narrative and educational medium that strengthens the craftsmen's position in the development of ecotourism (Mulyaningsih, 2025). Furthermore, this study expands the literature on community-based tourism by emphasizing that the pre-launch phase is not merely a technical preparation phase, but rather a strategic arena for building community participatory capacity. At this stage, local actors' perceptions, confidence, and awareness of values begin to form, so the quality of empowerment interventions carried out before the program is fully operational will significantly determine the level of local ownership and sustainability of the village ecotourism.

## E. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the participation of bamboo craftsmen during the pre-launch phase of Awi Edu-tourism in Mekarsari Village is still constrained by three main barriers: limited understanding of the educational tourism concept, which means that craftwork is more often seen as a “produce-and-sell” economic activity; low confidence in interacting with visitors and explaining the production process; and insufficient value awareness that craft practices can be converted into an educational attraction that benefits both the village and the

craftsmen. Notably, these findings underscore that the core issue is not a lack of potential, but rather the absence of role readiness: many craftsmen do not yet see themselves as narrators or learning guides, so their involvement tends to stop at the level of “information and consultation” they are present in the early process, yet they have not substantively influenced strategic decisions. Viewed against the research objectives, this outcome can be considered a meaningful achievement because the study not only maps the inhibiting factors, but also identifies relevant strategic responses by the village government during the pre-launch phase, ranging from edu-tourism concept workshops to strengthen initial understanding, to tourism interaction simulations to improve communication readiness, and to involving craftsmen in village activities that encourage shifts in value perception indicated by increased understanding, emerging readiness among some craftsmen, and changing perceptions of the role of craftwork. Interestingly, the most significant contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on the pre-launch phase as a “space for building social foundations” shared meaning, role identity, and service capacity as well as in developing an operational map of barriers strategies early impacts for the context of a bamboo craft village being directed toward educational tourism. As a recommendation, the village government and *Pokdarwis* should structure pre-launch interventions in a more layered and measurable way by maintaining workshops as a repeated learning process (rather than one-off socialization), making interaction simulations a routine, scenario-based practice (greeting, explaining, demonstrating), and institutionalizing craftsmen’s involvement in village forums and activities so that participation can move from “consultation” toward a more substantive partnership supported by clear role division, realistic time/income incentives, and public feedback mechanisms that allow craftsmen’s capacity development to be monitored and continuously improved.

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