

Developing sports tourism based on local wisdom in Gorontalo: Potentials, challenges, and strategic directions

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sports tourism based on local wisdom offers an alternative approach to tourism development that strengthens cultural identity and enhances destination uniqueness. However, research that explicitly integrates sports tourism with local wisdom—particularly in Gorontalo—remains limited, creating a gap in understanding how traditional cultural practices can be incorporated into sports tourism strategies. **Objectives:** This study aims to examine the potential benefits and challenges of developing sports tourism grounded in local wisdom. **Methods:** An exploratory qualitative approach was employed, in-depth interviews were conducted with a number of informants (n = 18), observations, documentation reviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with three key stakeholder groups: local communities, local government institutions, and tourism industry actors. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman and validated through source and methodological triangulation. **Findings/Results:** Qualitative findings reveal that Gorontalo people continue to preserve cultural traditions such as bowling balls, boat racing, and lumense dance which is the main attraction of sports tourism. The region's strengths include its rich cultural heritage, natural resources suitable for outdoor sports, and active community participation. However, development is hindered by limited infrastructure, weak promotional efforts, and insufficient financial support. **Conclusion:** Strategic development requires cross-sector collaboration, strengthened community capacity, and innovation in sports-tourism products rooted in local wisdom. Practically, these insights can guide the creation of inclusive and sustainable tourism initiatives that leverage Gorontalo's cultural and natural assets.

Keywords: Sports tourism; local wisdom; potential and challenges; development strategies; sustainable tourism



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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors driving regional economic growth. Sports tourism, which combines physical activity with travel experiences, has emerged as a global trend (Heebkhoksung et al., 2023; Rebelo et al., 2022). Sports tourism has developed rapidly around the world, becoming a popular trend that contributes to destination branding, community participation and local economic value. International studies on sports tourism have shown that sports can strengthen the identity of destinations and build networks of tourist communities (Platov et al., 2022). Conversely, other studies emphasise the importance of integrating local culture into tourism to create authentic experiences that differentiate a destination (Harisatunisa & Sauqi, 2023). However, these studies generally still focus either on sports or on culture separately, without examining the integration of the two in a single, locally based tourism development model.

At a national level, studies such as those by Nugroho et al. (2023) have emphasised the importance of community-based tourism (CBT) and sustainable tourism approaches in developing alternative destinations, particularly in regions with a strong local cultural heritage. However, the implementation of sports tourism based on local. In Indonesia, this concept is gaining attention, but development remains concentrated in major destinations such as Bali, Jakarta and Yogyakarta (O'Reilly et al., 2022). In contrast, Gorontalo province has untapped sports tourism potential. The region boasts beautiful landscapes, including beaches, lakes, and rolling hills, which are ideal for activities such as swimming, diving, cross-country running, and traditional sports deeply rooted in local culture (Djunaidi, 2021; Rahman, 2021; Wolok, 2024). However, these assets have not yet been developed into competitive tourism products (Manyoe, 2021; Setiadi, 2025).

This study therefore aims to explore how Gorontalo's natural and cultural assets can be integrated into a sustainable sports tourism model. The study is based on the interrelation of three main components (Ito, 2023; Kulakhmetova & Yespenbetov, 2023). Sports tourism encompasses recreational activities and competitions that attract tourists. Local wisdom encompasses cultural values, traditions and practices, offering authenticity and uniqueness. Participatory development involves the community being actively involved in all stages of tourism planning, implementation, and evaluation.

These components are not separate. Instead, they form a cohesive framework in which local nature and culture provide the foundation that informs the design of locally based sporting activities. These activities are then developed into a tourism product through strategic and sustainable management. The proposed model is exploratory and transformative, prioritising sustainability, community engagement and the preservation of cultural identity. It aims to generate income, empower communities and preserve heritage (Banhidi, 2024; Banhidi & Moghimehfar, 2024; Zhou & Banhidi, 2024).

Previous research has noted that Gorontalo has 82 tourist destinations, consisting of 63 marine attractions and 19 natural attractions which utilise sports as their main attraction (Pauweni et al., 2022, 2023; Sakbir, 2021). Popular activities include snorkelling, diving, rafting and paragliding. However, this research is descriptive and has not examined the local cultural values inherent in the development of these destinations in more depth. The promotion of the destinations still focuses on natural beauty and physical activity without incorporating elements of local wisdom to create a distinctive identity.

This study addresses a research gap as few studies integrate sports and local culture into tourism development. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the study positions sport as a means of preserving culture and empowering society economically through participatory and sustainable strategies. The theoretical framework draws on Gibson's (2017) and Weed's (2021) sports tourism models, as well as UNESCO's concept of cultural preservation. Findings from Zhang et al. (2024) and Martins et al. (2024) emphasise the importance of integrating local strategies and values into sports tourism. Arici et al. (2025) and Liu (2024) demonstrated the limited number of cross-disciplinary studies, while Nyikana and Tichaawa (2024) and Rossini et al. (2024) emphasised the importance of a community-based approach. By adapting this theory and practice to the context of Gorontalo, the study offers a new conceptual model that supports inclusive, locally identity-based tourism.

The urgency of this research lies in the lack of academic studies and policies that make local wisdom the core of sports tourism development in Indonesia, especially in eastern regions such as Gorontalo. In fact, amidst the challenges of globalization and homogenization of tourism, a local-based approach is actually the

solution to creating authentic, inclusive, and sustainable tourism. By highlighting Gorontalo, this research also contributes to supporting national tourism decentralization, encouraging economic equality, and strengthening local cultural identity. Its main contribution is the mapping of local wisdom-based strategies that can be adopted as an alternative model for tourism development in Indonesia.

The concept of place attachment and experiential tourism is also relevant to explain why the integration between culture and sport can strengthen tourist loyalty to a destination (Ball & Bennett, 2024; Brown et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2021). In addition, the theory of strategic destination development from Ardiansyah (2022) and Febrian and Arahma (2024) provides a framework for identifying key factors in tourism destination development, including aspects of attractiveness, accessibility, infrastructure support, and local community involvement.

Although research into sports and culture-based tourism has expanded considerably, important questions remain unanswered. Previous research has generally treated sports tourism and cultural tourism separately, viewing sports as a purely recreational activity and culture as a passive attraction. Consequently, the integration of the two in a locally based tourism development model has not been studied strategically. Furthermore, there has been no conceptual model of sports tourism based on local knowledge and traditions, particularly in Gorontalo province, despite its strong natural and cultural potential. Existing research in Gorontalo remains descriptive and has not developed an integrative strategy that involves local cultural values, community participation and long-term sustainability. This study therefore aims to formulate an integrative, participatory and sustainable sports tourism development model based on local wisdom that is not only relevant to Gorontalo, but can also be replicated in other regions with similar characteristics.

METHOD

Research Design

This study takes a qualitative, exploratory approach, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of complex socio-cultural phenomena and contexts, particularly in relation to the development of sports tourism based on local wisdom (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach is considered the most relevant because the study's focus is closely related to societal dynamics, local cultural values and participatory tourism development processes that cannot be reduced to quantitative figures or statistics. Qualitative research enables researchers to capture the social meaning and reality of living in society (Newman, 2021; Priya, 2021; Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023). The researcher transcribed the entire interview and FGD verbatim with the help of a research assistant. Transcript accuracy was verified through member checking. If the interview was conducted in a local language, the data was first translated into Indonesian and then back-translated to preserve the meaning. Data analysis follows the stages of open coding, axial. and selective. Units of meaning are identified and grouped into categories before being formulated into core themes.

Three research sites Botubarani, Ayuhulalo, and Limboto Lake were chosen because they represent three characteristics of sports tourism destinations: the sea, plateaus, and bodies of water. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, with relevant codes including access to sports locations, cultural rituals before activities, economic opportunities for events, and the role of communities as managers. The validity of the data was strengthened through triangulation, member checking and peer review. The four groups of informants governments as regulators, tourism managers as activity providers, indigenous leaders as sources of cultural values and MSME actors as part of the destination's economic chain contributed differently to the analysis model.

Participants

The research subjects were purposely selected from among individuals with knowledge of, experience of, or direct involvement in tourism development and cultural preservation in Gorontalo province.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Informants

Category	Number	Description
MSME actors.	6	Local entrepreneurs involved in tourism-related small businesses.
Tourism managers.	6	Operators of diving, hiking, or cultural-based sport tourism.

Category	Number	Description
Cultural/traditional leaders.	3	Community elders or custodians of local customs.
Government officials.	3	Representatives from tourism departments at district/province level.
Total.	18	Diverse stakeholder representation from public, private, and community sectors.

The research subjects were purposively selected based on their direct involvement, knowledge and experience in tourism and cultural preservation in Gorontalo Province. The inclusion criteria were at least five years' experience, a strategic role (e.g. MSME actors, tourism managers, cultural figures or government officials) and willingness to participate via informed consent. The exclusion criteria were individuals irrelevant to the tourism/cultural sector or unwilling to participate. A total of 18 informants were involved: 6 MSME actors, 6 tourism managers, 3 indigenous leaders and 3 government officials. The informants were 10 men and 8 women with 5-20 years' work experience. The study was conducted in Botubarani Village, Ayuhulalo Village (Boalemo) and Limboto District, which were chosen to represent geographical and cultural variations including coastal areas, tourist villages and regional policy centres. The number of informants is considered sufficient because data saturation has been reached, meaning no new themes will emerge from additional interviews.

Ethical Approval and Consent

This research was conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics. All participants were given a clear explanation of the study's objectives, benefits and potential risks before taking part. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants' identities and personal information are kept confidential and are only used for academic purposes. As the study did not involve any medical interventions or high-risk experiments, it was not subject to the oversight of a formal Institutional Review Board (IRB). Nevertheless, the entire research procedure has been adapted to align with the prevailing Social and Humanities Research Ethics guidelines.

Instrument

The main instrument used in this study was a set of semi-structured interview guidelines, designed based on literature studies and the local context of Gorontalo. The interview guide covers important topics such as perceptions of culture-based sports tourism, community involvement, the role of local governments, local values in traditional sports activities, and the development of these activities. Interviews were conducted in person at the informants' homes or workplaces and lasted an average of between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviews are recorded with consent and supplemented with field notes to enrich the data and capture social dynamics on site. This flexible, open-ended interview technique allows the researcher to adjust the direction of the questions according to the informant's response. This enables an in-depth exploration of the local context and the values embodied in the community's cultural practices and sporting activities.

Table 2. Interview and Observation Instruments

Informant Group	Question
Local Community	1. What traditional sports or cultural activities are still practiced here?
	2. Has this activity ever been used as a tourist attraction?
	3. How do people view culture-based tourism?
Local Government/Tourism Office	1. Is there a sports tourism development program in Gorontalo?
	2. What is the role of local wisdom in tourism policy?
	3. What are the challenges in developing locally-based sports tourism?
Tourism Business Actors/Communities	1. What type of tourism is most popular in Gorontalo at the moment?
	2. Is there any potential for sports activities that can be developed into tourism packages?
	3. What are the obstacles in promoting or packaging tourism products?

The validity of the instrument was ensured by developing interview guidelines through a review of the relevant literature and a contextual analysis of Gorontalo's cultural background. Prior to fieldwork, two experts

in cultural studies and tourism development reviewed and validated the draft guidelines, providing feedback on the relevance, clarity, and suitability of the content for local conditions. A small trial was also conducted with two informants not included in the sample to refine the wording and order of the questions. These revisions strengthened the reliability and credibility of the instrument for use in actual data collection.

Procedures

This study, which focused on areas with high potential for the development of culture-based sports tourism, was conducted in Gorontalo province from July to December 2024. The main locations included the Tomini Bay coast, which is rich in marine activities; Lake Limboto, the centre of local customs and traditions; and a number of traditional villages that still incorporate local wisdom into everyday life. Data collection was specifically centred in Botubarani Village, Ayuhulalo Village (Boalemo) and the Limboto sub-district, as these locations represent geographical, cultural and administrative variations.

Data collection was carried out in several stages. First, the researchers identified and established the location and potential informants using a purposive approach and snowball sampling. Secondly, data were obtained through four main methods. (1) in-depth interviews ($n = 18$), each lasting 45-90 minutes and recorded with the informant's consent, alongside Field Notes; (2) focus group discussions ($n = 3$), each involving six participants from various sectors and guided by a moderator/principal investigator, lasting 60-90 minutes; (3) direct observation of cultural and sporting activities, using structured checklists; and (4) a review of documents, including the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA), regional regulations and cultural archives. Selection criteria included relevance to the theme of cultural tourism and availability of official data.

All interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher with the help of a research assistant. The accuracy of the transcripts was verified through member checking with the participants and reviewed by the research team. If an interview was conducted in the Gorontalo regional language, the transcription was first translated into Indonesian and then back-translated into the regional language by an independent translator, to ensure fidelity of meaning.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using an interactive approach developed ([Matsuri et al., 2023](#)). This consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. During the data reduction stage, relevant data is sorted, simplified and grouped into thematic categories that correspond to the research focus. This is achieved by encoding interview transcripts to identify the main themes. The data are then presented in the form of narratives, direct quotes from informants and thematic matrices, making it easier for researchers to interpret the meaning and relationships between themes. In the final stage, conclusions are drawn based on emerging patterns in the data. These are then verified through source triangulation, which involves comparing data from various stakeholder groups, such as the community, government, businesses, and cultural figures, and method triangulation, which involves comparing the results of interviews, observations, documentation studies, and focus group discussions/FGDs. Thematic coding is done manually and reinforced by iterative memo writing to capture deep reflection and understanding during analysis. Although no software such as NVivo is used, the Coding Framework still follows standard qualitative analysis procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This approach ensures the validity and credibility of the findings, enabling the results to be scientifically accounted for ([Berends, 2021](#); [Naeem, 2023](#)).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Potential of Sports Tourism in Gorontalo

The Potential of Nature

Gorontalo's natural resources, such as the Tomini Bay coastline, Lake Limboto and mountainous landscapes, support activities such as trail running, mountain biking and water sports. This potential aligns with the concept of place-based tourism development, which emphasises the importance of exploiting local geographical characteristics to create authentic tourist experiences.

The Potential of Culture

Traditional games and cultural festivals, such as Pacu Sampan and Tidi Lo'o Limutu, demonstrate how the sports and culture of the local people can be incorporated into tourist attractions. This reinforces the literature on cultural sports tourism, which states that the integration of culture and sport can build a destination's identity.

Challenges of Sport Tourism

Infrastructure

Infrastructure to support tourism, such as access roads, sanitation facilities and accommodation, is still limited, particularly in potential villages. This is the main obstacle to the sustainable development of sports tourism destinations.

Human Resources

A lack of tourism training and literacy means the community is unable to professionally manage sports tourism activities. This contradicts the principle of community empowerment, which is the cornerstone of the community-based tourism approach.

Promotion and Branding Strategy

A lack of digital promotional strategies and destination branding has resulted in Gorontalo having low exposure at national and international levels. In fact, the importance of communicating a distinctive local identity to build a competitive sports tourism image.

Table 3. Matrix of Research Findings

Main Themes	Subtheme	Field Findings
Potential	Nature	Tomini Bay, Lake Limboto, landscape supports nature sports
	Culture	Traditional games, local cultural festivals
	Infrastructure	Road, limited tourist facilities
Challenges	SDM	Lack of training, low travel literacy
	Promotion	Minimal branding and digital strategy
Solution / Strategy	Collaboration	Government-private-community is not optimal
	Education	There is no integrated training program yet

The results of the study to see the potential and challenges of developing culture and sports-based tourism (sports tourism) in Gorontalo Province, a series of interviews and observations were conducted on three main groups of stakeholders, namely local communities, local government/Tourism Office, and tourism business actors/communities. The results of this qualitative approach provide a deeper picture of local cultural practices, community views on tourism, government policies, and real conditions in the field faced by tourism industry players.

Table 4. Results of Interviews and Observations of Local Communities

Question	Answer
What traditional sports or cultural activities are still practiced here?	Some traditional sports that are still often done in Gorontalo are Bola Bowling (a type of ball game with physical strength) and Lomba Perahu which is part of the coastal fishermen's tradition. In addition, we also have traditional dances such as the Lumense Dance which depicts the social life of the community.
Has this activity ever been used as a tourist attraction?	Yes, some traditional activities such as Boat Races are often used as tourist attractions, especially during big day celebrations or annual festivals in Gorontalo. However, Bola Bowling is not yet widely known as a tourist attraction.
How do people view culture-based tourism?	Most people support culture-based tourism because it can promote traditional values and provide economic benefits to local communities. However, there are also concerns that our native culture will be displaced by the influence of modernization.

As can be seen in **Table 4**, the preservation of local culture in Gorontalo plays an important role in supporting the development of culture-based tourism and sports tourism. Interviews with locals revealed that several traditional cultural and sporting activities are still practised, including Bowling, boat races and the Lumense dance. While not all of these activities have been packaged as tourist products, they represent cultural assets with the potential for further development.

“Bola Bowling is usually played during the harvest season or on special occasions, but it has never been included in a tourist event.” (Informants, local people).

These findings can be conceptualised within the framework of community-based tourism (CBT), where local communities are the primary agents in cultural preservation and the beneficiaries of tourism.

Table 5. Results of Interviews and Observations of The Regional Government/Tourism Office

Question	Answer
Is there a sports tourism development program in Gorontalo?	Currently, the Gorontalo Regional Government is designing a nature-based sports tourism program, especially for water sports such as snorkeling, diving, and rafting. We are also preparing infrastructure to support these activities.
What is the role of local wisdom in tourism policy?	Local wisdom is an important foundation in our tourism policy. We strive to involve local cultural elements in every tourism program, such as integrating traditional dance and music in tourism events to create an authentic experience for tourists.
What are the challenges in developing locally-based sports tourism?	The main challenge we face is the lack of adequate infrastructure, such as road access and limited accommodation facilities. In addition, less than optimal promotion and a lack of understanding of culture-based tourism management are also obstacles.

Table 6. Results of Interviews and Observations of Tourism Business Actors/Communities

Question	Answer
What type of tourism is most popular in Gorontalo at the moment?	Marine tourism, especially snorkeling and diving, is currently the most popular type of tourism in Gorontalo. In addition, nature tourism such as trekking around Lake Limboto is also starting to attract many visitors.
Is there any potential for sports activities that can be developed into tourism packages?	Yes, we see great potential to develop paragliding and paddleboarding as part of the sports tourism package. These activities can be combined with the natural beauty and local culture to create a different experience for tourists.
What are the obstacles in promoting or packaging tourism products?	One of the main obstacles is the lack of budget for effective promotion. In addition, existing promotions are more focused on natural tourist attractions,

while culture-based sports tourism is still less well-known to the wider community. We also face limitations in packaging tourism products that can attract tourists from outside the region.

The results of the study in **Tables 5** and **6** show that local governments and businesses emphasise the great potential of nature-based tourism, including snorkelling, diving, rafting and paragliding, as well as paddleboarding, which provide opportunities for developing natural and traditional sports tourism. These activities can be combined with local cultural values to create a unique tourism experience.

“We have tried paragliding packages on the coast. If they could be combined with cultural performances, they would be even more interesting.” (Informants, tourism business actors).

These findings are in line with the Sustainable Tourism literature (Van Rheenen et al., 2016; Van Rheenen & Roberson, 2023; Zhou & Banhidi, 2024), this emphasises the importance of integrating natural and cultural attractions to create authentic tourist destinations. Promotion and infrastructure barriers also provide insight into the opportunities for natural sports tourism. Interviews with the three groups of informants revealed significant obstacles, including limited infrastructure (road access and accommodation), limited promotional budgets and inadequate packaging of culture-based tourism products. Almost all of the informants in **Tables 3** and **4** cited infrastructure limitations, digital promotion and the packaging of tourism products as the main challenges.

“If it's not a big festival, it's hard to attract tourists' attention. Promotion still focuses largely on diving.” (informant, tourist community).

“We need training to create attractive tour packages. Sometimes we have good ideas, but we don't know how to implement them.” (informant, tourism village youth community).

Document Findings

The development strategy must adopt a participatory tourism approach, in which each stakeholder plays a role in the tourism value chain, from packaging to promotion. This demonstrates the necessity of a collaborative governance approach, in which the synergy between government, the private sector, and community actors is pivotal for the successful development of inclusive and sustainable tourism.

Table 7. Tourism Development Documentation Study in Gorontalo

Document Type	Document	Main Contents	Relevance to Tourism
National Policy.	Law No. 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism.	Legal basis for developing the national tourism sector.	To be a reference for regional policies in compiling tourism programs and regulations.
Regional Strategic Plan.	RPJMD of Gorontalo Province.	Vision, mission and priority programs for regional development.	Determining the direction and priorities of tourism development in Gorontalo.
Local regulation.	Regional Regulation on Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPPDA).	Destination development strategies, marketing, human resources and institutions.	Technical plan for the implementation of regional tourism development.
Cultural Archives.	Customary records, oral traditions, local cultural manuscripts.	Information about cultural heritage and local wisdom.	The main source of inspiration and attraction in the development of cultural tourism.
Academic Research Documents.	Results of university and NGO studies on the socio-culture and economy of Gorontalo.	Analysis of local socio-cultural and economic conditions.	To serve as an academic basis for tourism policy planning and evaluation.

The results of the research data in **Table 7** there are RIPPDA and RPJMD documents that serve as policy umbrellas to integrate the role of Interactors, but these documents need to be translated into more concrete coordination and engagement mechanisms at the local level. As part of the effort to understand the institutional and historical context in tourism development in Gorontalo, a documentation study was conducted on various official sources, both national and local. This documentation includes government policies, regional strategic plans, laws and regulations, cultural archives, and academic study results. These documents have important value in providing a normative basis, development direction, and a description of the potential and challenges of developing the tourism sector. Through document analysis, an understanding is obtained of the extent to which tourism has become part of the regional development agenda, as well as how local wisdom and Gorontalo culture are included in its development strategy. The results of one documentation study in Table 5 show the relationship between the type of document and its main content and relevance to tourism development. These results provide a basis for identifying the role of tourism in development planning documents, and for exploring the potential of local culture as a key element in sustainable tourism strategies.

The analysis shows that low community involvement in preparing tour packages and a lack of promotion inhibit the formation of a sense of belonging and narrow the market, in accordance with place attachment and destination management theory. Documents were studied, including Law No. 10/2009, the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), the Regional Spatial Planning and Development Plan (RIPPDA), regional regulations, the Cultural Archives and academic research, because they provide a legal basis, development direction, cultural foundation and empirical evidence related to locally based sports tourism. The findings indicate a shared awareness of Gorontalo's potential as a sports tourism destination. However, coordination between government, community and business actors remains suboptimal, particularly with regard to human resource training, tour package preparation and promotion.

Conceptually, infrastructure challenges have been shown to affect community capacity and the quality of tourism experiences, thus hindering the implementation of community-based tourism. Therefore, an integrated framework linking place attachment, destination management, CBT and UNESCO cultural preservation is required to ensure that the development of sports tourism is sustainable and reflects local identity.

Gorontalo has a number of features that could greatly support the development of sports tourism based on local knowledge. The exotic beaches of the Tomini Bay coastline offer opportunities for water sports such as snorkelling, diving and surfing (Abukasim et al., 2022; Ninasafitri et al., 2025; Puspita et al., 2020). The main attraction is the beauty of the underwater world and the diversity of abundant marine life. Meanwhile, Gorontalo's rich historical and cultural heritage makes it an ideal location for water sports activities involving traditional boats, paddles or canoes, which can be combined with local cultural performances (Pauweni et al., 2023). Several traditional villages in Gorontalo still preserve cultural traditions such as rituals, dances and handicrafts, providing tremendous potential for developing sports activities based on local traditions. Traditional sports such as boat races and running races can attract tourists and serve as a means of preserving cultural values. This demonstrates that integrating modern sports with local traditions can create unique and engaging tourism products.

This study demonstrates the potential of sport tourism in improving the local economy and preserving culture. These results align with previous research (Dudney & Moghimehfar, 2024; Gibson, 2017; Wallace & Kernozek, 2017), which suggests that sports tourism is an effective means of promoting local culture and attracting tourists. Cultural tourism reinforces the argument that integrating local cultures into sports tourism can strengthen cultural identity and provide economic benefits to local communities. Further research Hungenberg et al. (2022) and Leber (2024) has emphasised the importance of collaboration between local governments, local communities and the private sector, a finding that is also relevant to this study. Additionally, this study sheds new light on the significance of training and education for local communities as part of the sport tourism development strategy, a topic that has received less attention in previous studies (Ellyas et al., 2023). However, the study also identified unique challenges, such as a lack of infrastructure and promotion, that were not widely addressed in previous research focused on modern sports or major events.

Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis reveals several main categories: cultural preservation; infrastructure challenges; limited human resource capacity; and suboptimal promotion strategies. These categories are interrelated and form a complex system. For instance, the community's weak capacity in sports-based tourism management is linked to the inadequate training and education provided by policymakers, which directly impacts the poor quality of the tourism products on offer. These relationships demonstrate that developing sport tourism based on local wisdom requires a holistic approach that synergistically integrates social, cultural, economic, and institutional aspects.

Discussion

Interpretation of Results Based on Theory (CBT and Place Attachment)

The findings of this study can be interpreted through the lenses of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and place attachment theories. The results indicate that the integration of sports activities with local culture strengthens community involvement and fosters a sense of ownership among local residents, which is a core principle of CBT. Active participation of communities in planning and managing sports tourism activities enhances social cohesion and ensures that tourism development aligns with local values and needs. Furthermore, the incorporation of traditional sports and cultural practices into tourism products reinforces emotional bonds between residents, visitors, and destinations, supporting the theory of place attachment. This emotional connection contributes to destination loyalty and long-term sustainability, as both communities and tourists develop a stronger sense of belonging to the place.

Reinforcement of Findings with Literature

These findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasise the importance of a holistic approach to culture-based sports tourism development ([Aragónés-Jericó et al., 2023](#); [Kadyrbekova & Orazanbay, 2024](#)). Prior research highlights that infrastructure development alone is insufficient without parallel investments in community training and education ([Dadan & Widodo, 2020](#); [Goliah et al., 2021](#)). The importance of collaboration among local governments, communities, and the private sector identified in this study also aligns with ([Vrondou, 2023](#)), who stresses multi-stakeholder partnerships as a key factor in overcoming development barriers and optimising tourism potential. Moreover, the challenges identified in Gorontalo—such as limited infrastructure, weak promotion, and insufficient community involvement—mirror issues reported in other emerging sports tourism destinations.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to tourism theory by extending the application of CBT and place attachment frameworks within the context of culture-based sports tourism. It demonstrates that traditional sports can function not only as recreational attractions but also as cultural assets that reinforce destination identity. By positioning local knowledge and traditional practices at the core of sports tourism development, the study offers a conceptual refinement that bridges the gap between sports tourism and cultural tourism literature. The emphasis on training and education further enriches existing theories by highlighting human capital development as a critical mechanism for sustaining place attachment and community-based tourism outcomes.

Practical Implications (Development Strategies)

The practical implications of this study suggest several strategic actions. First, local governments should prioritise the improvement of basic infrastructure, including road access, accommodation, and supporting public facilities, to enhance accessibility to sports tourism sites. Second, promotional strategies should shift from a narrow focus on marine tourism to a broader representation of traditional sports, culture, and natural landscapes, utilising digital media and tourism platforms to reach wider markets. Third, a participatory development approach is essential, requiring local communities to be actively involved in all stages of tourism planning and implementation. This should be supported by integrated training programmes in tour package development, event management, and digital literacy, particularly targeting youth in tourism villages. Finally,

the development of event-based tourism through annual traditional sports and cultural festivals can strengthen Gorontalo's image as an authentic, inclusive, and competitive sports tourism destination.

CONCLUSION

Gorontalo Province has great potential for developing sports tourism based on culture and nature. Strengthening basic infrastructure can enhance digital promotion and boost community engagement through training and participatory approaches. Community-based tourism (CBT) and place attachment theory help to create destination identities. Regional policies aim to strengthen coordination among stakeholders in accordance with the RPJMD and RIPPDA frameworks. The competitiveness of sports tourism destinations in Gorontalo can be gauged using digital branding strategies and sports- and culture-based events. However, the study was limited by the geographical location of Gorontalo, the small number of respondents and the lack of quantitative data, which prevented a more robust analysis. Further research is recommended in the form of cross-regional comparative studies, expanded stakeholder participation and quantitative approaches to measuring tourist preferences and economic impacts. Additionally, longitudinal studies are required to evaluate the long-term socio-economic impact and effectiveness of multi-actor collaboration models in sustaining culture- and nature-based sports tourism.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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