



Development Challenge for Cultural Heritage Case Study: Borobudur Temple, Indonesia

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Abstract: Borobudur Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, holds profound cultural, religious, and economic significance for Indonesia. Constructed during the 8th and 9th centuries by the Sailendra Dynasty, the temple embodies both tangible and intangible heritage values that contribute to national identity, tourism, and local development. This paper explores the role of Borobudur Temple in development planning by examining its cultural preservation, economic impact, and the challenges of stakeholder coordination. Using a qualitative document analysis method, the study integrates culturally sustainable development (CSD) theory and a stakeholder framework to analyze relevant literature, policy documents, and statistical data. Findings reveal that while Borobudur Temple significantly contributes to regional economic growth and international tourism, unequal benefit distribution and architectural degradation remain key challenges. International organizations, national and local governments, civil society, and communities play vital roles, yet often operate without cohesive coordination or shared strategic vision. The study highlights policy gaps, institutional overlaps, and limited community participation in the current heritage management approach. As a response, the paper supports participatory heritage practices that prioritize local knowledge, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and inclusive planning. Such an approach not only enhances the sustainability of Borobudur's cultural and economic value but also aligns development goals with the preservation of national heritage. This research contributes to discussions on heritage-led development by offering insights into the complexities of managing iconic cultural assets in a rapidly evolving socio-political context.

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INTRODUCTION

Borobudur Temple is an Indonesian cultural heritage built in the 8th and 9th centuries by the Sailendra Dynasty and designated by UNESCO in

1991 (UNESCO, 2007). This recognition is based on the rich cultural, religious, and architectural values of the Borobudur Temple (Banindro, 2015). The reliefs and architecture of this temple depict

Buddhist values, which are reflected in the daily lives of the Javanese people (Kowal, 2019; Munandar, 2016). Furthermore, the Borobudur Temple serves as a symbol of the Indonesian nation, attracting the interest and attention of visitors from both local and international backgrounds.

The research by Hermawan et al. (2016), conducted from a marketing tourism perspective, reveals differences in the reasons for visiting Borobudur Temple between international and domestic tourists. Furthermore, his research revealed that sacredness is the main reason for the Buddhist religious values represented by international tourists. While domestic tourists see the destination image of Borobudur Temple more as a tourist attraction. This reason gave rise to an increase in the number of visits to Borobudur Temple, which was proven from 2009 to 2016 (Hermawan et al., 2019). The trend of visitors to Borobudur Temple then decreased from 2019 to 2021 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, based on data from the Central Statistics Agency of Indonesia, the curve of the number of visitors increased again in 2023 to reach 1.47 million people (BPS, 2024). Thus, it is obvious that the Borobudur Temple still remains a popular attraction for tourists.

Furthermore, the high number of visitors to Borobudur Temple has an impact on increasing the economy for the community, the local government, and the state. The results of research by Kausar (2011), who is an expert in development, tourism, and culture, explained that the existence of Borobudur Temple has an impact on increasing the gross regional domestic product (GRDP) at the local level. Furthermore, this economic impact is realized by the development of infrastructure around the cultural heritage site and the emergence of business opportunities for the community. Income from tourist ticket purchases, souvenir sales, and frequent performances around the location serve as another example of economic growth. However, two years later, Kausar (2013) found that this economic impact was only felt by those who had access and ability to the tourism market. This is supported by Soeroso (2007), who found that of the 170 souvenir products offered at the Borobudur Temple tourist location, only 7 were made by the local community. This fact highlights the existence of challenges in

maximizing the utilization of Borobudur Temple to enhance the economy and preserve the architectural structure.

As a building that has been built for a long time, Borobudur Temple faces challenges to the durability of its architectural quality and relief. Natural factors, including earthquakes (Anes et al., 2022) and stone erosion due to acidification and rain, cause this damage. Other factors are from humans who are visitors, such as intentional or unintentional damage by visitors (Batjargal et al., 2023). Moreover, Hermawan et al. (2019) stated that the increase in the number of visitors was not in line with the site maintenance, thus causing damage to the temple building. This damage can be seen in Figure 1, which illustrates the cracks and erosion of the temple building. Therefore, this essay will explain the analysis of the theoretical framework, and the key debates and discussion regarding development planning through the Borobudur Temple in Indonesia, as well as the conclusions.



Figure 1. The damage of Candi Borobudur
Source: detiktravel.com

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

In recent decades, the definition of cultural heritage has undergone several developments, from a tangible perspective to a focus on intangible elements. The results of research by Vecco (2010), who is an expert in cultural heritage and cultural entrepreneurship, explain the semantic evolution from rigid and material-based criteria to a more inclusive approach that considers cultural values and the significance of tangible and intangible elements. Ahmad (2006), Ruggles & Silverman (2009), and Smith (2015) further elucidated the

findings of the same study, emphasizing that cultural heritage encompasses not only tangible elements such as objects and things, but also intangible elements of value, meaning, and culture.

The tangible components of the Borobudur Temple can be seen in its unique construction, artifacts, and physical shape (Milosz & Kesik, 2024). The preservation of these physical components is also a key component of UNESCO's authenticity criterion (De Laiglesia, 2020). Nevertheless, this point of view acknowledges the vulnerability of the endurance of architectural structures and monuments, therefore requiring continuous maintenance and preservation (Lucia, 2024). On the other hand, the intangible aspects of Borobudur Temple are evident in the practice of prayer and the enduring presence of various Buddhist customs nowadays. Therefore, it is essential to preserve this temple due to its extraordinary assets and its significant role in promoting economic and social development.

Culturally Sustainable Development (CSD)

This theory is explained in detail by economists in the cultural and development aspects, namely Throsby (2017), that tangible and intangible elements in cultural heritage can provide economic value as cultural capital. The entrepreneurial element in the cultural heritage sector contributes to increasing the city's economy (Vinod et al., 2023) by opening jobs and attracting investors (Zreika et al., 2022). On the other hand, development models with culture cannot be equated and have different strategies between each country and cultural object (De Beukelaer, 2016). Furthermore, Throsby (2017) stated that the availability of cultural capital for economic development requires a management function that can be interpreted in the sustainability practice framework. Therefore, the policy strategies and efforts made by related institutions and communities are important for further consideration.

Key Stakeholder in CSD

International institutions play the most crucial role in recognizing cultural sites as cultural heritage, namely through UNESCO and enforcing regulatory guidelines through authorized heritage discourse (AHD) (Smith, 2015). UNESCO is

responsible for setting international standards for the protection of cultural heritage and facilitating monitoring of compliance between countries (Papaioannou, 2017). Other examples are ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), World Bank, World Monuments Fund (WMF), and others.

The government has a very important role in regulating practical strategies and political policies in maintaining culture in the development industry (De Marchi & Ladeira 2019). The role of government in cultural heritage development has many aspects, including policymaking, funding, and facilitating community involvement.

Civil society associations are essential for preserving and promoting cultural heritage. They are involved in policy-making, advocacy, and public awareness, as well as influencing national identity and contributing to cultural tourism, job creation, and economic growth (Dhomo & Canaj 2024).

The community also plays an equally important role in preserving cultural heritage. Studies have shown that through ongoing traditions and rituals, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) contributes to increasing social cohesion (Shandidy, 2023). In addition, local communities are often directly involved in the care and maintenance of cultural heritage sites. Community knowledge, awareness, and participation are essential in decision-making to support multi-stakeholder collaboration in the protection of cultural heritage.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative document analysis approach to critically explore the dynamics between cultural heritage preservation and development planning in the context of Borobudur Temple. This method allows for an in-depth examination of textual sources, government policy documents, institutional reports, and academic literature relevant to the case study.

Research Design

The study utilizes a descriptive-analytical design, integrating cultural heritage frameworks (tangible and intangible), culturally sustainable development (CSD) theory, and stakeholder analysis. The design aims to map interconnections

between policy frameworks, stakeholder roles, and cultural-economic impacts.

Data Collection

Data for this study were obtained from secondary sources, including:

1. Academic journal articles (e.g., Throsby, Vecco, Smith)
2. Government documents and planning frameworks (e.g., RPJMN 2025–2029, Law No. 11/2010)
3. Reports from international institutions (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank)
4. Online news sources (e.g., Detiktravel.com) for updated visual and narrative insights
5. Statistical data from BPS (Statistics Indonesia)

Data Analysis

A thematic content analysis technique was employed, based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework:

1. Familiarization with data (reading and re-reading textual material)
2. Generating initial codes such as stakeholder roles, economic impact, preservation challenges
3. Identifying and reviewing themes, including cultural sustainability, policy gaps, and participatory development
4. Mapping themes against the theoretical frameworks
5. Drawing analytical connections to evaluate the effectiveness of development efforts through Borobudur Temple

Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility:

1. Triangulation was performed by cross-checking data from government, academic, and international sources.
2. Reflexivity was applied to recognize potential biases during interpretation.
3. Peer-reviewed sources and official data were prioritized to maintain accuracy and academic rigor.

Limitations

1. The study relies on existing literature and policy documents, which may not fully

capture recent or unpublished community-level initiatives.

2. The lack of primary data (e.g., interviews, field visits) limits the ability to explore community perceptions in depth.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Indonesian government has designated tourism as one of the major parts of the development plan to improve the economy. The National Development Planning Agency under the Ministry of National Development Planning includes tourism in the 2025-2029 Indonesian National Medium-Term Development Plan (Bappenas, 2024). This policy demonstrates the recognition of the tourism sector's proven contribution to national development. Furthermore, Borobudur Temple is included in the five priority destinations of Indonesia that received the highest total investment (Kausar et al., 2024) (see figure 2). Therefore, it can be revealed that the government is specifically committed to optimizing Borobudur Temple in national development.

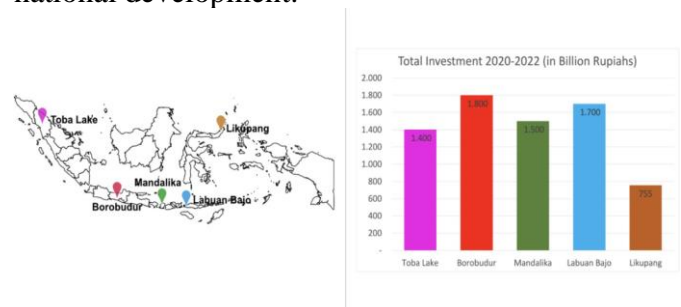


Figure 2. Borobudur in Five Priority Tourist Destinations and Total Investment in 2020-2022

Apart from its development impact, the Borobudur Temple, which has tangible and intangible cultural elements, also has several policies to ensure its protection. The preservation of the property is carried out in accordance with Indonesian Law No. 11/2010, which specifically addresses cultural heritage and the related cultural environment. In accordance with the Law concerning Spatial Management No. 26/2007 and Governmental Regulation No. 26/2008 concerning National Spatial Planning, the Ministry of Public Works executes the project under a National Strategic Area and the Spatial Management Plan. This will be further enforced by another presidential regulation concerning the management of the

Borobudur National Strategic Area, which is now being drafted by the Ministry of Public Works.

The potential for development through Borobudur Temple is also recognized by international institutions such as the World Bank. In 2018, the World Bank provided assistance of USD 722 million to the Indonesia Tourism Development Project (World Bank, 2018). This project aims to enhance fundamental tourism infrastructure and services, reinforce local economic connections with tourism, and stimulate private investment in selected Indonesian tourist destinations. Assistance in this project has a major impact on infrastructure development around the Borobudur Temple area, strengthening the capacity and capabilities of tourism actors and the surrounding community, and initiating new investments. Furthermore, programs from the World Bank and initiatives from the national government require cooperation with other institutions. In addition to international and national governments, there are several other institutions that play a role in the development of Borobudur Temple.

The Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Education actively contribute to policies that regulate specific aspects of development through Borobudur Temple, such as tourism management, local economic empowerment, preservation and conservation, research, and education. Furthermore, the local government in Magelang Regency is also the closest institution to Borobudur Temple, so it is very crucial in implementing and monitoring policies and programs. In addition, several foundations and civil society groups also actively participate in various promotional activities and the implementation of tourism and the protection of Borobudur Temple. On the other hand, stakeholder initiatives face a variety of challenges in their implementation. The role of the government often encounters several gaps and shortcomings in its implementation. The dynamics of political interest and government policies have a major influence on the ratification of policies and decisions in cultural heritage tourism areas. According to Kausar et al. (2024), there is no clear shared vision about priority tourist destinations in Borobudur Temple management, which affects the unclear division of tasks and responsibilities of each institution involved.

This illustrates that each institution, both government and community, carries out its duties individually and is not in line. Moreover, this issue gives an opportunity for intersections and deficiencies of such form that institutions frequently shift the responsibility in enforcing policies and programs to one another. Furthermore, apart from inter-institutional challenges the participation of civil society also experiences obstacles. Research conducted by Yun (2024) revealed gaps in the involvement and participation of civil society, as well as limitations in comprehending the creative industry. This suggests that very few individuals have the authority and influence to manage the management of the Borobudur Temple and ensure its protection, as well as the equitable distribution of its impacts. Several initiative frameworks from scholars and practitioners can be considered alternatives for ensuring community development and cultural heritage protection. According to research by participatory heritage practice experts from the University of Rotterdam, Rosetti et al. (2022), international regulations and recommendations on cultural heritage management have included many community-centered approaches and involvement.

This approach is considered more inclusive and sensitive to cultural diversity because it provides space for participation and decision-making through a multi-stakeholder partnership scheme. Fanzini et al. (2024) support this by asserting that a collaborative approach that prioritizes the contribution and participation of local communities is a crucial strategy for ensuring the impact of cultural heritage on development. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that a strategic approach in cultural heritage management benefits from the incorporation of local knowledge, beliefs, and community skills (Kyriakidis, 2020). Finally, with its cultural resilience and sustainability, this alternative approach is believed to be able to overcome the dilemma of development through cultural heritage.

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of Borobudur Temple plays a significant role in both regional and national development. Economic growth, infrastructure development, and the enhancement of local capacity

are tangible evidence of impactful development. The responsibility for challenges such as damage to buildings and architecture, as well as inequality in the distribution of benefits, relies with all parties involved. International, national, and regional governments, along with communities and other institutions, are actively promoting efforts to preserve the Borobudur Temple, despite encountering challenges in its implementation. Participatory approaches, people-centered development, and multi-stakeholder collaboration are considered strategic alternatives to ensure a common understanding and inclusiveness in the distribution of roles among all institutions, with the objective of enhancing development through cultural heritage, specifically the Borobudur Temple.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ilhamda El Zuhri led the study design, conducted the literature review, and drafted the manuscript. Rangga Alif Faresta was responsible for developing the methodology and contributed to the theoretical and analytical framework. Zahra El Zuhri supported data collection, visualization, and formatting of the document. Ardito Satrya reviewed and edited the manuscript, with a particular focus on stakeholder roles and policy analysis. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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