



Sasak Way of Life: Ethnographic Perspectives

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Abstract

The research aims to analyse women's participation in labour, entrepreneurship, and community-based economic practices, as well as the social and cultural mechanisms that enable their agency in a patriarchal rural context. Using a qualitative interpretive case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis in Sade Village, Lombok, Indonesia. Thematic analysis was employed to capture patterns of women's economic participation, role negotiation, and cultural mediation within the tourism system.

Keywords:

Introduction

Rural destinations, understood simultaneously as places of residence, livelihood, and visitation, are shaped by intertwined processes of production, social reproduction, and mobility. Within these processes, women play a foundational yet frequently under-recognised role. In agrarian settings, women's participation in the labour force contributes directly to household income, poverty reduction, and local socio-economic development (Majumder & Dey, 2021). When women gain control over key productive assets, such as land, intra-household expenditure patterns shift toward food security and education, producing multiplier effects that support inclusive rural development (Khodary, 2022). These dynamics underscore women's centrality to structural transformation, particularly in rural contexts where livelihoods remain closely tied to land, local institutions, and community networks.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretive case study approach to explore how Sasak women drive socio-economic transformation in rural destinations. A qualitative design is appropriate for examining socially embedded processes of change, particularly where gender relations, cultural norms, and economic practices are intertwined and cannot be meaningfully separated from their contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study approach enables an in-depth, holistic understanding of women's agency within a specific socio-cultural and spatial setting, allowing the research to capture how tradition, the economy, and gendered power relations interact to shape rural destinations (Yin, 2018). The study is informed by a gender-sensitive interpretivist epistemology, which recognises that women's roles and capacities are socially constructed, historically situated, and continuously negotiated rather than fixed or predetermined (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Findings

1. Sasak Women as Agents of Socio-Economic Transformation in Rural Destinations

The findings indicate that Sasak women in Sade village play a central role as agents of socio-economic transformation in the development of a culture-based rural destination. This role did not emerge instantaneously but evolved historically alongside changes in the social and economic functions of village space. Based on field observations and in-depth interviews, women's roles in Sade village have existed since the settlement's establishment. In earlier periods, women's activities were largely confined to the domestic sphere, primarily as homemakers and traditional weavers. At that time, weaving functioned mainly as a cultural practice and a means of fulfilling household needs, rather than as a market-oriented economic activity.

2. Social and Cultural Mechanisms through Which Sasak Women Negotiate and Move Beyond Traditional Gender Roles

The findings demonstrate that the transformation of Sasak women's roles in Sade Hamlet occurs through complex processes of social and cultural negotiation rather than through a rupture with traditional values. Patriarchal norms remain deeply embedded within Sasak social structures, where women are socialised from an early age to master domestic responsibilities such as childcare, household management, serving their husbands, and maintaining cleanliness in and around the home. Customary norms and historically limited access to formal education have reinforced the perception of domestic labour as a lifelong obligation for women.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that Sasak women in Sade Village operate as central agents of socio-economic transformation within a rural, culture-based tourism destination. Their roles encompass income generation, micro-entrepreneurship, and the reproduction of cultural knowledge, positioning women simultaneously as economic actors, community members, and custodians of local heritage. The findings show that women's agency is exercised through everyday practices—particularly weaving and handicraft production—that sustain household livelihoods and underpin the local tourism economy. Importantly, women's expanded participation does not replace domestic responsibilities but coexists with them, resulting in a dual role configuration. Transformation therefore unfolds incrementally through negotiation with customary norms rather than through a fundamental rupture with tradition, producing a form of change that is culturally embedded and socially legitimate.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how Sasak women drive socio-economic transformation in a rural, culture-based tourism destination and to understand the social and cultural mechanisms through which they negotiate and move beyond traditional gender roles while remaining embedded in local values and institutions. Drawing on qualitative evidence from Sade Village, the study demonstrates that women are not peripheral actors in rural tourism development but constitute its socio-economic backbone. Through weaving, handicraft production, and everyday entrepreneurial practices, Sasak women generate stable household income, sustain cultural tourism, and contribute directly to local economic resilience.

References

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