

TOURISM VILLAGES AS A SOFT POWER INSTRUMENT IN INDONESIA'S TOURISM DIPLOMACY

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Abstract

The growing integration of tourism into public diplomacy has positioned desa wisata (village tourism) as a strategic instrument of soft power in Indonesia's foreign policy practice. As global tourism trends shift from mass tourism toward experience-based and community-oriented travel, Indonesia has incorporated village tourism into its national development agenda, particularly following the enactment of Village Law No. 6 of 2014 and its inclusion in the National Medium-Term Development Plan 2020–2024. This study analyzes how desa wisata operates as a soft power resource within Indonesia's tourism diplomacy and examines its implications for national image construction. Using a qualitative research approach, this study relies on document analysis and secondary data derived from government reports, academic literature, and policy documents related to tourism governance and public diplomacy. The findings indicate that village tourism functions as a decentralized diplomatic arena characterized by multi-actor involvement, including state institutions, local governments, community organizations, and tourism industry actors. Through community-based tourism practices, the formation of Indonesia's international image occurs primarily through direct interactions between foreign visitors and local communities. While this model expands Indonesia's soft power by projecting cultural authenticity, sustainability, and grassroots hospitality, it also creates a paradox of limited state control over narrative production. Consequently, strengthening meta-governance, monitoring mechanisms, and local capacity-building initiatives is essential to ensure coherence between local practices and national diplomatic objectives.

Keywords: Tourism Diplomacy; Soft Power; Community-Based Tourism, National Interest; Village Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Entering the 20th century, the practice of diplomacy in international relations underwent significant changes. The use of hard power instruments in diplomacy was no longer fully effective because they tended to be coercive, making it more difficult to reach common ground (Melissen, 2005). By leveraging cultural appeals, political values, and shared experiences, soft power was seen as more persuasive and less coercive (Nye, 2008). The concept of soft power, introduced by Joseph Nye (2004), emphasized that a country's ability to obtain what it wants through an attractive approach has become the spearhead of contemporary diplomatic practice.

The relevance of soft power in contemporary diplomacy is growing, particularly as countries lacking military and economic dominance expand their influence through cultural appeals and tourism. The use of tourism in diplomacy has strategic advantages over other instruments. First, tourism provides a foundation for direct experience through interaction with local communities' culture, social values, and behaviours, making it easier to shape public perceptions (Yüksel, 2025). Second, tourism can garner sympathy and strengthen a country's positive image without resorting to coercion or threats (Casado Claro et al., 2023). Third, tourism has the potential to strengthen national identity narratives, positioning a country as a unique and attractive destination internationally (Kuri et al., 2020). This makes tourism a relatively easy tool to align with a country's national interests.

The success of various countries worldwide has demonstrated the adaptability of tourism in diplomatic practice. For example, Thailand has successfully utilized tourism as a diplomatic instrument, contributing approximately 18–20 per cent to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating approximately US\$85–90 billion in revenue per year (Mitchell, 2005). Meanwhile, Spain's tourism sector contributes approximately US\$260–270 billion to its national GDP, or approximately 15–16 per cent of the country's total economy (WTTC, 2025). This trend demonstrates that tourism as a diplomatic instrument not only shapes a country's image through people-to-people contact but also generates significant economic benefits when optimally managed.

In the Indonesian context, the urgency of maximizing tourism as a diplomatic instrument is increasingly critical and cannot be delayed. Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic state with over 17,000 islands, more than 300 ethnic groups, and one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet, possesses an unparalleled reservoir of soft power assets (BPS, 2023). Yet, despite this extraordinary potential, Indonesia's global tourism competitiveness remains significantly below its capacity. According to the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (2024), Indonesia ranks 22nd in Asia-Pacific, lagging behind regional peers such as Japan (1st), Singapore (3rd), and Thailand (9th). This gap represents not merely an economic shortfall, but a critical

diplomatic deficit — a failure to convert existing cultural and natural wealth into tangible international influence. Moreover, Indonesia's foreign tourist arrivals in 2023 reached approximately 11.68 million, a figure that is still considerably below its pre-pandemic peak of 16.11 million in 2019 (BPS, 2024), indicating an unresolved structural vulnerability in the tourism diplomacy ecosystem. Without a systematic and strategically anchored approach to tourism diplomacy, Indonesia risks ceding its soft power space to competing regional actors who are more aggressively leveraging their cultural assets on the global stage.

Since the launch of the "Wonderful Indonesia" campaign in 2011 at the Tourism Ministers' Forum, Indonesia's tourism sector has been explicitly integrated into public diplomacy and nation branding policies (Rosadi et al., 2022). Indonesia's rich natural resources, culture, and traditions serve as diplomatic assets that contribute not only to increasing foreign exchange earnings but also to shaping the country's image, making the audience feel connected to Indonesia's unique identity (Yulliana, 2021). This integration expands tourism's role from mere economic promotion to a soft-power instrument in diplomatic practice. However, the gap between the ambition of the "Wonderful Indonesia" branding and its measurable diplomatic outcomes signals the urgent need for a more structured and community-rooted diplomatic vehicle — one of which is the development of tourism villages.

The development of tourism in Indonesian public diplomacy has shown a positive trend. In 2014, the government opened opportunities for villages to develop their tourism sector by granting autonomous rights and providing resource support for managing local potential (Kemenko Marves, 2022). In the context of diplomacy, in addition to increasing foreign exchange earnings, the development of tourist villages is also aimed at establishing Indonesia's image as a paradise on Earth on the global stage, fostering pride and confidence in Indonesia's diplomatic initiatives (Kemenko Marves, 2022; Yudhanti, 2021). Furthermore, this policy aligns with efforts to achieve the 18 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Affandi et al., 2020; Kemenko Marves, 2022). The urgency of this village-based approach is further underscored by Indonesia's aspirational target of 6,000 established tourism villages by 2024 — a figure that reflects the government's recognition of village tourism as a cornerstone of national soft power projection, not merely a rural economic program (Kemenko Marves, 2022).

The presence of tourism villages in Indonesian diplomatic practices opens up broader interaction between global actors. This diplomatic space can be created through visits by state actors to tourism villages for international events, promotional programs involving global businesses and the travel industry, and visits by foreign tourists, which generate interaction, direct experience, and build an image of Indonesian tourism, fostering optimism about Indonesia's diplomatic future (Yudhanti, 2021). In this regard, the urgency of positioning tourism villages as a formal instrument of Indonesian soft power diplomacy becomes even more apparent: as global tourism increasingly shifts toward authentic, community-based, and culturally immersive experiences, Indonesia's tourism villages are uniquely positioned to meet this demand — provided they are strategically and systematically managed. Failure to capitalize on this moment would mean allowing a rare convergence of global tourism trends and Indonesia's indigenous strengths to pass unutilized.

However, the study of tourism villages within a diplomatic framework also raises critical perspectives. For example, villages like Pentingsari and Penglipuran demonstrate unique cultural assets that can serve as soft power tools. Tourism villages are generally located in areas with more limited access to infrastructure and facilities than popular tourist destinations (Kusworo & Damanik, 2002). Furthermore, government institutional readiness and the quality of human resources (HR) as drivers of the tourism ecosystem still lag behind those of leading destinations (Kusworo & Damanik, 2002). These structural deficiencies are particularly alarming given that Indonesia's window of opportunity is narrow — regional competitors are rapidly developing their own community-based tourism offerings, and Indonesia must act decisively to establish its tourism villages as internationally recognized soft power assets before this competitive advantage erodes. These limitations make the study of tourism villages in diplomacy not only relevant but genuinely urgent.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze Indonesia's strategy for utilizing tourism villages as an instrument of soft power in tourism diplomacy, specifically examining measurable impacts on Indonesia's international image and influence. This research also focuses on the management of soft power within a public diplomacy framework, drawing on Joseph Nye's conceptual approach. Academically, this research aims to contribute to the development of international relations studies, particularly in broadening the understanding of the role of community-based tourism destinations as an instrument of state diplomacy. In practice, this research is expected to serve as a reference for formulating Indonesian tourism diplomacy policies, especially in designing tourism village management strategies that are more integrated, adaptive, and oriented towards strengthening soft power and nation branding.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze how tourist villages serve as strategic tools in Indonesia's tourism diplomacy and soft power initiatives (Creswell, 2013). The research emphasizes the institutionalization of village tourism within Indonesia's national development agenda and its integration into

public diplomacy strategies. Specifically, the study examines how tourist villages are operationalized through community-based tourism mechanisms and how this model shapes Indonesia's international image. The temporal scope of this research highlights the post-2014 period, when village tourism was officially incorporated into national policy frameworks, including Village Law No. 6 of 2014 and the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan.

This study employs a literature review and relies on secondary data sources, including official government documents, policy papers, academic journal articles, institutional reports, and relevant media publications, to ensure a comprehensive and systematic analysis (Nasir, 2014; Tracy, 2020). The data collected comprises publications from the Ministries of Tourism, Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration, as well as the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs and Investment. Additionally, scholarly works on soft power (Nye, 2004, 2008, 2019), public diplomacy, and community-based tourism were used to construct an analytical framework.

To analyze the collected data, this study employed thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and conceptual linkages between village tourism and soft power diplomacy (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013). Through systematic categorization and interpretation of qualitative data, this study evaluates how village tourism functions not only as a local economic development strategy but also as a symbolic resource within Indonesia's diplomatic framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Landscape of Indonesian Tourism Diplomacy

The integration of tourism into Indonesian diplomatic practices is inextricably linked to the transformation of foreign policy, particularly post-reform, which has placed greater emphasis on public diplomacy and economic diplomacy. Indonesia's foreign policy emphasises an international orientation through the promotion of culture, national identity, and cross-border social experiences (Nuaba, 2025; Rachmawati, 2017). In 2011, Indonesia began aggressively promoting its global tourism appeal through various international forums following the integration of nation-branding programs such as Wonderful, which, in Indonesian public diplomacy practices, seeks to promote Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the international public (Rosadi et al., 2022). This policy transformation aligns with the changing global political structure, which is no longer monopolized or dominated by state-to-state interactions but now involves the roles of various non-state actors (Nye, 2019).

Diplomacy through a tourism approach also has implications for national economic growth. In 2022, the tourism sector contributed approximately 3.72% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), increasing to 3.9% in 2023, and again to 4% in 2024 (Kemenpar, 2025). This growth strengthens Indonesia's tourism position as a strategic instrument in public diplomacy, creating a positive image while boosting national economic growth. Within a soft power framework, this practice affirms the country's legitimacy and ability to operationalize tourism instruments in diplomatic practice, using approaches that emphasize cultural appeal, values, and structural policies (Melissen, 2005; Nye, 2019).

In terms of actors, Indonesian tourism diplomacy involves both state and non-state actors (Kemenko Marves, 2022; Wulandari, 2024). First, state actors are responsible for policy formulation, establishing promotional strategies, and building a sustainable national tourism image. Second, non-state actors, such as businesspeople and the travel industry, actively participate in destination marketing through tour packages, international tourism exhibitions, and cross-border digital promotions, serving as key links between national economic interests and global market demand. Third, domestic and international communities operationalize tourism activities and shape Indonesia's image through cultural experiences, tourism services, and representations of local identity. Fourth, media and digital platforms facilitate information exchange and play a strategic role in influencing international perceptions.

This configuration of multi-actor involvement in Indonesian tourism diplomacy demonstrates an open and dynamic diplomatic practice (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). However, diplomacy using this approach also carries risks, particularly regarding the state's limited authority over the movement of narratives and representations generated by interactions among non-state actors (Zhu & Faucher, 2025). As the formation of a country's image is increasingly determined by the direct experiences of tourists mediated by industry players, local communities, and digital platforms, the state lacks full authority over the meanings and messages received by the international public. Under these conditions, the goal of building a positive image is potentially unattainable if tourism practices are unprofessional, unsustainable, or result in negative experiences that are widely reproduced in the global public sphere.

In this tourism diplomacy landscape, the emergence of tourism village policies can be understood as a structural consequence of the development of diplomatic practices and the agenda to expand Indonesia's tourism sector. Tourism villages reinforce the shift in the locus of diplomacy from the state level to the community level, where local cultural practices, social relations, and domestic experiences become the primary medium for

constructing meanings about Indonesia. Thus, tourism villages not only contribute as local economic instruments but also operate as instruments for the country's image. In soft power studies, this is seen as a form of expanding a country's attractiveness resources, no longer solely generated through top-down state policies but also constructed bottom-up through social practices, community interactions, and local cultural representations (Casado Claro et al., 2023; Nye, 2008).

Therefore, the inclusion of tourist villages as an instrument in Indonesia's tourism diplomacy, which has previously emphasized cultural promotion, nation branding, and multi-actor involvement, implies an expansion of diplomatic practices into a more fragmented and difficult-to-control social space. Consequently, the state no longer operates as a sole actor in determining the direction of national image formation, but rather as a facilitator orchestrating interactions between local communities, the tourism industry, and the global public. Consequently, the effectiveness of tourism diplomacy through tourist villages is determined not only by national promotional strategies but also by the quality of local experiences and the community's capacity to manage tourism practices. Consistency in cultural representation is a key factor in ensuring that these experiences can positively shape Indonesia's image in the international public's eyes. At the same time, this condition expands the potential for soft power, but also opens up the risk of narrative distortion, cultural commodification, and image failure if tourism practices are not managed professionally.

Tourism Villages as an Instrument of Indonesian Tourism Diplomacy

The emergence of tourism villages as an instrument of Indonesian tourism diplomacy is inextricably linked to the shift in the global tourism market from mass tourism to experiential, nature-based, and socially interactive tourism (Kemenko Marves, 2022). This transformation is driven by saturation of homogeneous destinations, increasing environmental awareness, and tourists' preference for authentic, contextual experiences. Indonesia positions tourism villages as a strategic response to these changes by offering differentiation based on local life that is more unique, has symbolic value, and is difficult to replicate (Affandi et al., 2020; Yudhanti, 2021). Tourism village policies are also part of the diffusion of global norms through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically the 18 SDG goals (Affandi et al., 2020; Kemenko Marves, 2022). This positioning of tourism within a sustainable development framework links economic growth with social inclusivity, environmental preservation, and community empowerment. Within a diplomatic framework, this configuration shifts the function of tourism from a mere foreign-exchange earner to a soft-power medium that shapes a national image through values, social practices, and cultural representations.

Nationally, tourism villages are included in the national priority agenda outlined in the 2014-2019 *Nawacita* Program, reflecting a commitment to village development. This commitment is reinforced by Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages and the inclusion of the Tourism Village program in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (Kemenko Marves, 2022; Rizaldi et al., 2021). This policy is supported by the existence of 74,961 villages, projected to contribute 74% to the national development target (Kemenko Marves, 2022). This demonstrates the state's conscious, active expansion of tourism diplomacy from a sectoral to a local domain, establishing villages as subnational actors. Tourism villages function as new diplomatic hubs, bridging domestic development agendas with foreign policy interests by shaping the nation's image.

Tourism villages operate through a multi-actor configuration consisting of ministries and institutions, local governments, communities, business actors, associations, and the media (Kemenko Marves, 2022; Yudhanti, 2021). This structure can be understood as resembling the pattern of tourism diplomacy practiced by Indonesia more generally, in which the state acts as a regulator, facilitator, and resource provider (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). This multi-actor involvement increasingly demonstrates that image production and dissemination are no longer hierarchical, but rather occur within a network of interacting actors (Diamond & McDonald, 1996; Hocking, 2005). In this context, tourism villages become an integral part of Indonesia's tourism diplomacy, yet operate through a more decentralized governance mechanism that relies on cross-sector collaboration.

In practice, state actors play a role in managing tourist villages, primarily through regulatory, facilitative, and initial resource provision, such as establishing policy frameworks, allocating budgets, mentoring, training, and macro-destination promotion (Kemenko Marves, 2022). Therefore, in the context of diplomatic practices, the state tends to act as a policy architect but is not directly involved in the operation of tourist villages. The formation of a country's image occurs through direct interactions between tourists and local communities and is generally beyond the reach of state institutions. This diplomatic practice demonstrates that, although the state strongly legitimizes tourist villages, the state plays a relatively limited, indirect role in shaping the country's image (Nye, 2019; Zhu & Faucher, 2025) (Nye, 2019; Zhu & Faucher, 2025).

Table 1. Comparative Practices of Tourism Villages in Indonesia

Tourism Village	Resources & Management Tourist	Interaction	State Control	Building National Image
Pujonkidul (Malang)	Nature, agrotourism; Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes)	Homestay, farming education, local consumption	Medium	Hospitality of residents & village life experiences
Tamansari (Banyuwangi)	Nature (Ijen), culture; Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes)	Homestay, local guides, off-roading	Low	Community narrative & direct interaction
Kemiren (Banyuwangi)	Osing culture; indigenous community	Cultural rituals, daily life	Low	Authentic cultural representation
CMC Tiga Warna (Malang)	Coastal ecology; local foundation	Edu-tourism, conservation	Very Low	Ecological morals & environmental ethics
Pentingsari (Sleman)	Culture & nature; community	Live-in, village activities	Low	Rural life & social values
Nglanggeran (Gunungkidul)	Geotourism; Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes)	Tracking, geological education,	Medium	Nature as a symbol of sustainability
Penglipuran (Bali)	Indigenous culture; Low	Traditional village Rituals & architecture	Low	Balinese traditions & social order
Wae Rebo (NTT)	Manggarai culture; Low Sade (Lombok)	community Living with residents	Low	Culture as a symbolic commodity
Sade (Lombok)	Sasak culture; community	Cultural attractions & crafts	Low	Culture as a symbolic commodity
Cibuntu (Kuningan)	Nature & history; Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes)	Edu-tourism & homestay	Medium	Village as a social learning space

Source: (Kemenko Marves, 2022)

The limited state involvement in people-to-people diplomacy has created space for community-based tourism to develop. This management model places local communities as key actors in the production and distribution of tourism experiences. With the state’s reduced direct control over representational practices at the local level, the diplomatic space shifts to a more fluid and relational social realm, where everyday interactions between tourists and communities become the primary medium for constructing meaning about Indonesia. In this context, community-based tourism is not only a tourism management model but also the operational foundation for tourist villages and an instrument of Indonesian tourism diplomacy.

Community-based tourism is the primary foundation for operationalizing tourism villages as an instrument of Indonesian tourism diplomacy. In this model, local communities serve not only as objects of development but also as key actors producing, managing, and distributing tourism experiences (Rahayu et al., 2024). This model demonstrates a shift from a top-down to a participatory approach, positioning communities as holders of social and cultural authority over the representation of local identity (Simarmata, 2024). In the context of diplomacy, this configuration makes interactions between foreign tourists and local communities the primary medium for shaping the nation’s image.

Conceptually, community-based tourism operates through collective mechanisms such as Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), tourism awareness groups (*pokdarwis*), customary institutions, and networks of local entrepreneurs (Syabella & Muljanto, 2025). The state plays a role in providing a regulatory framework, initial funding support, training, and macro-promotion of destinations, but the daily practices that shape tourists’ perceptions occur within the community’s social space. Thus, the production of soft power is not entirely controlled by state institutions but is instead constructed through authentic experiences, cultural practices, and locally rooted social values.

In Joseph Nye’s soft power framework, attraction stems from culture, values, and policies deemed legitimate by external parties. Community-based tourism villages expand these sources of attraction through direct experience (experiential diplomacy). Tourists who stay in homestays, participate in traditional rituals, or engage in agricultural and environmental conservation activities experience a concrete representation of Indonesia, not merely through formal promotional narratives. These interactions create people-to-people contact, strengthening Indonesia’s image as a welcoming, diverse, and sustainable nation.

Technically, management is carried out through village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), tourism awareness groups, traditional institutions, or networks of local actors, which have relative autonomy in determining the form of attractions, interaction patterns, and cultural narratives presented. Thus, the state no longer functions as a direct

producer of tourism imagery but rather as a background actor providing an institutional framework. At the same time, the community manages daily practices of representation as a non-state actor.

Nevertheless, the practice of tourism diplomacy within this community-based tourism framework does not preclude the possibility of dragging the state into a vortex of conflict or positive appreciation. In contemporary diplomacy, the role and influence of the state are not eliminated. Although not directly involved, the state remains a crucial actor in shaping the impact or outcome of diplomatic agendas, regardless of who the primary actor is (Hocking, 2005; Melissen, 2005). Therefore, individual tourists' experiences, both positive and negative, can directly shape Indonesia's international representation without strong institutional filtering.

Through this diplomatic configuration, tourist villages simultaneously function as a source of Indonesia's symbolic power and a vulnerable point in tourism diplomacy. The success of tourist villages as diplomatic instruments in building a positive image depends on the quality of local governance, community capacity, and the consistency of service practices, which are not fully under the state's control. This situation creates a paradox within the diplomatic paradigm. The state gains traction through decentralization of actors, but loses some control over the production of images and representations.

If this diplomatic practice is allowed to develop without stronger standardization and oversight mechanisms, Indonesian tourism diplomacy risks fragmenting into micro-experiences that do not always align with the desired national narrative. Therefore, the main challenge going forward is not simply to expand the number of tourist villages, but rather to enhance the state's capacity for meta-governance by directing, curating, and harmonizing local practices so that they continue to operate within a strategically coherent soft power framework. Without direct state intervention, tourist villages have the potential to reproduce soft power that is sporadic, unintegrated, and vulnerable to image distortions that are difficult to control.

Tourism Villages in Soft Power Studies

The practice of tourism diplomacy through the instrument of tourist villages presents an empirical configuration that cannot be fully explained by the classical understanding of soft power as formulated by Joseph Nye's (2004). In its initial formulation, soft power was understood as the state's ability to shape others' preferences through cultural appeal, political values, and policy legitimacy. The state is assumed to be the central actor strategically managing these attractive resources. However, in the context of tourist villages, attractiveness is not entirely produced through centralized policy design. Instead, it emerges from everyday social practices that are micro, relational, and contingent. Attractiveness results from direct interactions between tourists and local communities, not merely symbolic representations constructed by state institutions.

Thus, tourist villages demonstrate that soft power can operate in a more distributed form (distributed soft power), in which attractiveness resources are not concentrated within the state but rather dispersed across a network of social actors. The state provides the regulatory framework, budgetary support, and normative legitimacy, but the production of meaning about "Indonesia" occurs outside the realm of formal diplomacy. National identity is no longer solely mediated through official speeches, nation-branding campaigns, or international forums, but rather through direct experience, cultural practices, and interpersonal relationships at the local level. In this context, soft power shifts from a policy instrument to an emergent social process.

This finding extends Joseph Nye (2008, 2019), argument regarding the strengthening role of non-state actors in public diplomacy. However, tourism villages demonstrate a more complex dynamic than simply involving non-state actors. Here, the locus of state image production shifts from central institutions to communities with social and cultural autonomy. This process indicates a transformation from representation-based diplomacy to experience-based diplomacy. In this model, legitimacy and attractiveness are no longer determined by the state's narrative, but by the quality of the experience tourists have. This means that soft power is no longer simply a matter of messages, but rather a matter of relationships.

This configuration creates a structural paradox in the practice of soft power. States consciously construct community-based diplomacy as a strategy to expand their sources of appeal. Tourism villages are legitimized within national policy frameworks, incorporated into development agendas, and positioned within nation-branding strategies. However, the state lacks direct control over the social interactions that are the primary source of image formation. From a network governance perspective (Hocking, 2005), the state has indeed transformed from a dominant actor into a network coordinator. However, coordination in the context of tourism villages is loose and highly dependent on diverse local capacities.

This paradox highlights the state's ambivalence in community-based diplomacy. On the one hand, decentralization expands soft power resources through cultural authenticity and interpersonal closeness. On the other hand, decentralization opens up space for narrative fragmentation. Each tourist village produces a representation of Indonesia that may vary, depending on its social context, managerial capacity, and community orientation (Yudhanti, 2021). If tourists' experiences in a location are inconsistent with national narratives of

sustainability, professionalism, or hospitality, the country's image can be directly impacted. In this context, soft power becomes an arena that is not only productive but also vulnerable.

Furthermore, the practice of tourist villages challenges the rational-instrumental assumptions of soft power theory. In much of the literature, attractions are treated as resources that can be strategically mobilized to achieve specific political goals. However, within the framework of community-based tourism, attractions cannot be completely engineered. They depend on the quality of human interactions, the consistency of cultural practices, environmental governance, and service ethics. These factors are contextual and cannot always be standardized nationally. Thus, the effectiveness of soft power is not solely determined by policy design, but rather by the reproduction of sustainable social practices at the local level.

Measurement issues further exacerbate this complexity. Unlike economic indicators such as contribution to GDP or the number of tourist visits, the impact on international image and perception is abstract and long-term (Nye, 2004; Yüksel, 2025). The success of diplomacy through village tourism cannot be measured instantly or linearly. Positive perceptions formed from one experience can be reinforced, altered, or even negated by other, different experiences. This demonstrates that soft power in the context of village tourism operates within an accumulative and relational logic rather than a simple causal one.

Therefore, the state faces the need to develop meta-governance mechanisms that can direct and harmonize local practices without eliminating community autonomy. The state cannot return to a centralized approach without reducing the authenticity that is the primary source of village tourism's appeal. Instead, the state needs to establish monitoring systems, minimal standardization, and strengthen local capacity to enable strategic narrative coherence. The main challenge is not controlling communities but ensuring that local practices align with national diplomatic goals.

Thus, tourism villages enrich the study of soft power by demonstrating that decentralization is not merely a strategy for expanding attractiveness but also a source of structural vulnerability. Soft power, in this context, cannot be understood as a hegemonic capacity solely vested in the state. It is the result of a complex interaction among national policies, community practices, and global perceptions. This study, therefore, proposes a more relational and multi-level understanding of soft power, in which the state serves as the architect of normative frameworks. At the same time, local communities are the primary producers of experiences that shape Indonesia's credibility and global appeal.

CONCLUSION

The entry of tourist villages into Indonesia's tourism diplomacy is not only a consequence of the development of public diplomacy but also a strategic response to the shift in the global tourism market from mass tourism to experiential, social-interactive tourism. Within the national policy framework, tourist villages are prioritized as a development program, demonstrating that tourism is no longer seen solely as an economic sector but also as an instrument that can be operationalized for foreign policy interests and national image-building.

Tourism diplomacy through tourist villages is implemented in a multi-actor configuration involving the state, industry players, local communities, and tourists. However, this practice operates within the framework of community-based tourism. Hence, shaping the country's image primarily occurs through direct interactions between tourists and local communities. This condition limits the state's capacity to control the resulting representations and narratives. The state acts as a policy framework provider and facilitator, but is not directly involved in the production of experiences, which are the primary source of soft power.

From a soft power perspective, this configuration aligns with Joseph Nye's thesis on the strengthening role of non-state actors and the difficulty of measuring the success of attraction-based diplomacy. However, the case of tourist villages demonstrates greater complexity, as states consciously capitalize on this arena as a diplomatic instrument while simultaneously accepting the consequences of reduced control over image formation. Therefore, empirically, states need to develop clear monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that these diplomatic practices remain aligned with national interests. Theoretically, tourist villages expand the study of soft power by demonstrating that states do not lose their role but instead choose to position themselves as structural framework regulators in a diplomatic arena deliberately dominated by non-state actors.

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