



Regenerative Tourism: A Case Study of Wukirsari Tourism Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta

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Abstract

Moving beyond the poverty-focused paradigm, regenerative tourism emphasizes restoring and strengthening a destination's environmental, cultural, and social well-being, rather than merely limiting negative impacts. This study examines the implementation of regenerative tourism in Wukirsari Tourism Village, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, focusing on its cultural and environmental dimensions. Using a qualitative case study design, the study collected primary data through in-depth interviews with three destination managers. The study validated these findings through source triangulation with community groups and the Bantul Regency Government. Data were analyzed thematically through stages of reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the regeneration process in Wukirsari unfolds along two paths. Culturally, this is reflected in the practice of hand-drawn batik (batik tulis), the intergenerational transfer of batik skills, strengthened local identity, culturally immersive tourism experiences, and active community engagement. Environmentally, this is evident in heightened ecological awareness among residents, waste reduction and reuse, and increasingly eco-friendly tourism practices. Nevertheless, the village still faces challenges in maintaining consistent environmental management, building community capacity, integrating various programs, and developing systematic indicators to measure regenerative outcomes. The study concludes that Wukirsari is transitioning from mere aspiration toward genuine regeneration. However, this process requires stronger collaborative governance, clearer impact measurement, and closer integration between cultural preservation and environmental restoration.

Keywords: *Regenerative Tourism, Tourism Village, Culture, Environment, Wukirsari*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is widely valued as a driver of economic growth, employment, and regional development, but growth pursued at the expense of socio-ecological balance can damage the environment, weaken local culture, and disrupt residents' lives. This concern gave rise to the sustainable tourism paradigm, which seeks to balance economic, social, cultural, and environmental interests.

That paradigm, however, is criticized for stopping at damage mitigation rather than reshaping the relationship between tourism, communities, and the environment. Regenerative tourism emerged as a more transformative alternative. Bellato, Frantzeskaki, and Nygaard (2022) describe it as restoring a destination's socio-ecological capacity, treating it as a living system where people, environment, culture, and economy are interconnected. Dredge (2022) adds that this transition requires simultaneous shifts in mindset, systems, and practice, making it a paradigm shift rather than a new product. Bellato and Pollock (2025) note the concept remains young and needs empirical grounding in community-based settings.

Tourism villages are a natural setting for this approach, since community, culture, resources, and economic life are tightly interwoven, and resources support residents' wellbeing as much as they attract visitors. A regenerative reading of success looks beyond visitor numbers to how far tourism strengthens cultural identity, builds capacity, protects ecosystems, and improves social and

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Wukirsari Tourism Village in Bantul Regency exemplifies this well, known for the hand-drawn batik tradition of Giriloyo, varied cultural activities, and a distinctive rural way of life, earning it a place on UN Tourism's "Best Tourism Villages 2024" list, based on criteria spanning cultural and natural resources, conservation, socio-environmental sustainability, value-chain integration, and governance (UN Tourism, 2024a). UN Tourism frames this recognition as Wukirsari's shift from batik artisans to a tourism community that integrates heritage with more sustainable, inclusive practice, in line with the scheme's nine evaluation areas (UN Tourism, 2024b).

Earlier studies point in a similar direction. Widjanarko, Utomo, and Suratna (2023) identify cultural distinctiveness and governance as central to Wukirsari's success, echoing findings in Yogyakarta that cross-sector collaboration among residents, government, and business shapes community-based tourism governance (Manaf et al., 2018).

Research on Wukirsari's batik management highlights hand-drawn batik with traditional motifs and natural dyes as a distinctive asset and economic driver (Wijayanti, 2024), meaning culture functions as both a livelihood source and a marker of identity. On the environmental side, Widjanarko et al. (2024) note that waste management remains a pressing issue. However, empowerment programs combining training, technology transfer, and mentoring have turned waste into organic fertilizer, generating agricultural and economic benefits.

This shift from conservation alone toward genuine value creation makes Wukirsari a useful setting for examining how regenerative tourism principles play out in practice. Theoretically, the study grounds the still largely conceptual regenerative tourism framework in an empirical case; practically, it offers a reference model that tourism villages with similar characteristics, namely strong cultural assets, community-based management, and unresolved environmental challenges, can adapt for their own regeneration strategies, guiding managers and policymakers toward context-suited rather than wholesale adoption.

Accordingly, this study asks: (1) how does cultural regeneration unfold in Wukirsari? and (2) how does environmental regeneration unfold there? Because most existing work on regenerative tourism remains conceptual, this study contributes empirical evidence from an Indonesian tourism village, while acknowledging that, as a single-case study, its findings offer analytical rather than statistical generalization and require contextual adjustment when applied elsewhere.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regenerative Tourism

Regenerative tourism builds on sustainable tourism but centers on the positive change a destination can generate, rather than merely limiting negative impact (Bellato et al., 2022). Where sustainable tourism mainly protects existing resources and reduces harm, regenerative tourism asks how tourism can actively restore and enhance destination quality. Dredge (2022) frames regeneration as a transformation across mindset, systems, and practice, requiring a rethink of how tourists, communities, culture, environment, and economy relate to one another rather than through isolated environmental programs.

Bellato and Pollock (2025) stress that the concept is still evolving and needs more empirical testing, since regeneration is tied to a place's specific character, history, and ecosystem. Fujimoto (2024) similarly finds the literature dominated by conceptual work rather than destination-level study, pointing to a need for more applied research in contexts such as Japan or Indonesia. This study accordingly treats regenerative tourism as an approach that restores and strengthens a destination's cultural and environmental capacities through community engagement and tourism activity.

The Cultural Dimension

Culture in regenerative tourism is not simply a commodity for visitors but a community's living way of life to be preserved and transmitted. [Fusté-Forné and Hussain \(2022\)](#) argue that tourism's future must anchor itself in local identity alongside natural and cultural wealth rather than substitute standardized products for them.

At village level, cultural regeneration can take the form of preserving traditional knowledge and skills, passing them to younger generations, strengthening residents' pride in their identity, and designing visitor experiences that foster deeper understanding and respect. Its success therefore depends as much on the vitality of the community that owns the culture as on the attractions themselves.

The Environmental Dimension

Because destinations depend on the ecosystems that sustain them, the environment is central to regenerative tourism. [Hussain and Haley \(2022\)](#) argue that regenerative principles need concrete indicators to assess tourism's environmental contribution. A regenerative view of environmental management extends beyond waste minimization or efficiency to ecosystem restoration, resident awareness, changed tourist behavior, resource reuse, and value creation from what was once waste.

[Islam et al. \(2024\)](#) call for indicators that jointly capture environmental restoration, social equity, and economic benefit, treating waste management, circular economy practices, resource conservation, local materials, and environmental education as regenerative only when they simultaneously improve environmental conditions and build residents' capacity.

Community-Based Regeneration

The community is an irreplaceable actor in regeneration; policy and investment alone cannot achieve it without residents helping shape development and sharing in its benefits. [Yoopetch \(2022\)](#) links residents' sense of belonging, cultural pride, and perceived benefit to their support for sustainable development, reinforcing that community and tourism relations must rest on shared benefit and identity.

In a regenerative framework, communities move from beneficiaries to co-creators, preserving culture, managing the environment, delivering experiences, and generating local innovation, with fairness in how benefits and burdens are distributed ([Lazic & Della Lucia, 2024](#)), mirroring [Dredge's \(2022\)](#) point that systemic change is difficult without community participation in decision-making.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case study design ([Yin, 2018](#)), suited to "how" questions that require contextual understanding of a phenomenon whose boundaries with its context are not clearly fixed here: the implementation of regenerative tourism within Wukirsari's community life.

The research site is Wukirsari Tourism Village, Imogiri District, Bantul Regency, chosen purposively for its strong cultural character, especially hand-drawn batik, its varied environmental management practices, and its UN Tourism "Best Tourism Villages 2024" recognition ([UN Tourism, 2024a](#)).

Primary data come from in-depth interviews with key informants selected on two criteria: direct involvement in managing tourism activities, spanning cultural actors such as batik artisan groups and tourism awareness group administrators, and environmental actors such as waste bank and environmental management staff, plus a long track record with Wukirsari that gives them insight into its development over time.

Eight informants participated: three tourism village managers, three officials from the Bantul Regency Government, and two local community stakeholders. Interviews explored informants' understanding of regenerative tourism, cultural preservation practices, resident engagement, environmental management, and implementation challenges.

Credibility was ensured through source triangulation ([Patton, 2002](#)), cross-checking managers' accounts against community groups and the Bantul Regency Government so that interpretation does not rest on managers' perspectives alone. Secondary data were drawn from scholarly articles, government publications, UN Tourism documents, and prior research on Wukirsari.

Data were analyzed thematically following [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#): reduction, coding, and interpretation, leading to conclusions ([Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014](#)). Interview data were first reduced to relevant material, then grouped into cultural and environmental themes and interpreted for their connection to regeneration processes, before concluding patterns across sources.

These two themes follow directly from the conceptual framework in Chapter 2: cultural regeneration (preservation, knowledge transmission, identity-building, participation, and experience design) addressing the first research question, and environmental regeneration (waste management, resource reuse, awareness, eco-friendly practice, and value creation) addressing the second ([Fusté-Forné & Hussain, 2022](#); [Hussain & Haley, 2022](#); [Islam et al., 2024](#)).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Culture as a Living Foundation

Culture, anchored by Giriloyo's generations-old hand-drawn batik tradition, is the primary foundation of Wukirsari's development. Batik is no longer just a product tourists buy; it is woven into the visitor experience itself, as tourists watch the production process, learn the philosophy behind the motifs, talk with artisans, and try the craft themselves.

This marks a shift from culture as mere "attraction" to culture as "living practice," consistent with [Wijayanti's \(2024\)](#) identification of hand-drawn batik with traditional motifs and natural dyes as Wukirsari's hallmark and her recommendation to combine batik with other local assets into thematic packages.

From a regenerative view, tourism here does not simply extract value from culture. However, it gives it room to thrive, since visitors learning the craft create both economic incentive and renewed appreciation for the tradition. Cultural regeneration in Wukirsari thus unfolds through the interplay of preservation, transmission, use, and value creation.

Transmission, Value Creation, and Participation

Passing skills to the next generation is central to this process: without intergenerational transmission, cultural activity risks becoming spectacle rather than living knowledge. Multiple generations' involvement in batik-making sustains local knowledge while tourism assigns it economic value, echoing [Fusté-Forné and Hussain's \(2022\)](#) call to strengthen identity while enriching visitor experience through heritage; regeneration here means letting culture evolve without losing its core identity, not freezing it in the past.

Culture also functions economically: batik, art, folklore, and local life generate value not as a "tourism product" but as a "community asset" requiring ongoing care. Culture attracts visitors, visitors generate demand for local goods and services, and resulting income sustains the cultural activity itself, but this needs careful management, since excessive commercialization can erode authenticity. Control over how culture is presented must therefore remain with the community; regeneration is not commercialization but a balance among economic value, identity, meaning, and

community ownership.

This makes citizen participation essential, since the culture that draws tourists is inseparable from residents' own way of life. [Meilania and Rahmi \(2019\)](#) similarly found community involvement in batik-making vital to Wukirsari's emergence as a destination, a pattern also seen elsewhere in Yogyakarta through cross-sector collaboration among residents, government, and business ([Manaf et al., 2018](#)), and consistent with [Widjanarko et al.'s \(2023\)](#) emphasis on combining cultural distinctiveness with governance.

A regenerative approach requires participation beyond operational tasks: communities need the capacity to design, develop, and evaluate tourism activity themselves, since greater proficiency in managing culture and tourism expands their ability to benefit while retaining control of their own resources.

From Waste Management to Environmental Regeneration

Environmental management, particularly waste handling, has become a growing priority in Wukirsari, consistent with [Widjanarko et al.'s \(2024\)](#) identification of waste as a tangible challenge. Empowerment programs combining training, technology transfer, and mentoring have turned waste into organic fertilizer for agriculture, generating economic value. This is regenerative because it changes what the resource does: waste shifts from environmental burden to production input, resembling a small-scale circular economy in which discarded material re-enters productive use.

Broader research confirms that circular-economy strategies covering organic waste, plastics, and water use are among the most effective routes to sustainable tourism and progress on the Sustainable Development Goals ([Strippoli et al., 2024](#)). This links environmental management directly to the local economy, reframing it as an opportunity for combined social and economic benefit rather than simply a cost.

Even so, a distinction remains between sustainable and regenerative practice: waste reduction, sorting, and management are sustainability practices by default, becoming regenerative only when they trigger broader gains, such as improved environmental quality, stronger community capacity, new income, and greater environmental awareness. Wukirsari's conversion of organic waste into agricultural fertilizer shows this trajectory, reinforcing [Islam et al.'s \(2024\)](#) argument that regeneration must be measured across environmental, social, and economic benefits together, not through a single environmental indicator.

Integrating Culture and Environment

A central finding is that culture and environment are inseparable parts of one destination system: culture gives a place its identity. In contrast, the environment supplies the space and resources that let cultural life flourish, so environmental decline erodes cultural experience just as culture itself can encourage residents to protect their surroundings.

This is visible in Wukirsari, where the tourism experience rests as much on the rural atmosphere and interaction with residents as on batik itself, consistent with [Bellato et al.'s \(2022\)](#) framing of a destination as a socio-ecological system in which people and environment form one integrated whole.

Wukirsari as an Emerging Regenerative Practice

Taken together, four features mark Wukirsari as an early or emerging example of regenerative tourism: cultural regeneration through preserving and transmitting hand-drawn batik; resident empowerment through active participation; environmental regeneration through waste management and reuse; and local economic value creation through integrating culture,

environment, and tourism.

These align with UN Tourism's 2024 recognition of Wukirsari's integration of heritage with sustainability and resident empowerment (UN Tourism, 2024a), and with practices it has since highlighted, such as the Becik Resik Karangkulon initiative, reduced plastic use, leaf-based packaging, and natural waste management.

Even so, Wukirsari should be understood as moving toward, rather than having fully achieved, a regenerative state, since regeneration is an ongoing process requiring continual evaluation of whether tourism genuinely improves social, cultural, and ecological conditions, consistent with Dredge's (2022) emphasis on continuous change in mindset, systems, and practice.

Implications

These findings illustrate regeneration as the interplay of preservation, participation, and regeneration itself: ensuring continuity of resources, positioning community as central actor, and ensuring tourism genuinely improves conditions, thereby reinforcing Bellato et al. (2022) and Dredge (2022) in framing regenerative tourism as a paradigm shift rather than a set of technical practices.

For Wukirsari's managers, this means integrating culture and environment rather than treating them as separate programs: strengthening intergenerational transmission alongside deeper cultural tourism experiences, and shifting waste management toward a circular economy in which waste is sorted, processed, and repurposed rather than simply discarded.

For the Bantul Regency Government, it underscores the value of policy that links tourism village development with culture, environment, MSME empowerment, agriculture, and the local economy; for the community, regeneration offers a path to greater economic benefit from existing resources alongside preserved identity.

Limitations

As a single case study, these findings primarily reflect Wukirsari's own context and should not be generalized to all Indonesian tourism villages without caution. The study also focuses only on cultural and environmental dimensions, leaving economic and social dimensions less examined despite their close connection to regeneration.

Its reliance on interviews, though strengthened through triangulation with community groups and the Bantul Regency Government, would benefit from future long-term observation and quantitative measurement. Finally, because regenerative tourism remains a developing concept, standardized measurement indicators are not yet fully established, echoing Bellato and Pollock's (2025) call for further conceptual and empirical development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that regenerative tourism in Wukirsari unfolds through culture and environment together. Culturally, regeneration appears in preserving hand-drawn batik, intergenerational skill transfer, community engagement, and culturally grounded tourism experiences, turning batik from a mere product into part of the community's identity and daily life.

Environmentally, it appears in waste management that creates value, such as organic fertilizer supporting agriculture, showing that environmental management can generate social and economic benefits at the same time. Culture and environment together shape the destination's character, and Wukirsari shows a clear transition toward regenerative tourism, though it still needs capacity building, collaboration, and ongoing evaluation.

Going forward, Wukirsari's management should develop a Regenerative Tourism Action Plan integrating culture, environment, economy, and community wellbeing, supported by indicators

measuring cultural preservation, participation, environmental quality, resource use, and economic benefit. Waste management should move further toward circular practices linked to agriculture, MSMEs, and the local economy, while cultural regeneration should be strengthened through deeper youth involvement and knowledge transmission.

Tourism experiences should be more meaningful and transformative, helping visitors not only enjoy but also understand and contribute to preservation. Finally, the Bantul Regency Government should strengthen cross-sector collaboration to keep regenerative tourism development integrated and sustainable.

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