



Development and Utilization of the Rammang-Rammang Tourism Area in Maros Regency

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Abstract

This study examines the development of the Rammang-Rammang karst landscape in Maros Regency, South Sulawesi, into a prominent ecotourism destination, through an anthropological perspective. Utilizing qualitative methods—including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions—this research explores how the local community navigates the rapid shift from a traditional agrarian and riverine lifestyle to a tourism-based economy. Anthropological analysis reveals that while ecotourism provides alternative livelihoods and fosters local pride, it also introduces challenges regarding cultural commodification, shifts in communal values, and spatial contestation. The findings indicate that the local community exercises significant agency by integrating their ancestral kinship networks (*siri' na pacce*) into modern tourism management. This cultural adaptation serves as a mechanism for community resilience, ensuring that external commercial pressures do not fully erode local identity. This study concludes that sustainable tourism development in heritage sites like Rammang-Rammang depends on recognizing local communities not merely as stakeholders, but as active cultural custodians of the karst landscape.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Anthropological Perspective, Cultural Transformation, Community Resilience, Rammang-Rammang.

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of global tourism and indigenous landscapes often catalyzes profound socio-cultural transformations within local communities. In recent decades, ecotourism has been widely promoted not only as a tool for environmental conservation but also as an alternative economic engine for rural areas. However, from an anthropological perspective, the influx of tourism into a traditional space is never a neutral economic transition; rather, it is a complex process of cultural negotiation and spatial redefinition. When an isolated or agrarian community opens its doors to global travelers, the everyday meanings of landscape, heritage, and social relationships are inevitably recalibrated. This dynamic creates a critical tension between the preservation of local identity and the pressures of global commercialization.

South Sulawesi is renowned as a region with diverse tourism destinations offering mountain panoramas, marine beauty, traditions and customs, local wisdom, and unique culinary delights. One of the Tourism Destination Areas (DTW) in this province is Maros Regency, which possesses various attractive natural tourism potentials, including the Rammang-Rammang natural tourism area (Marthalina, 2019). Rammang-Rammang, located in Maros Regency, South Sulawesi, is a karst area known not only for its natural beauty but also for its cultural and historical richness (Endra, 2017).

Rammang-Rammang is a term from the Makassar language that means clouds or fog. This naming is closely related to the local natural conditions, where every morning the area is frequently shrouded in clouds and sometimes even covered by thick fog (Endra, 2017). As one of the largest karst areas in the world, Rammang-Rammang holds extraordinary potential, both from the perspective of natural tourism and from scientific and cultural viewpoints (Andi, 2020). The landscape, consisting of limestone mountain clusters, a river intersecting the area, and prehistoric caves preserving artifacts and cave wall paintings, serves as a primary magnet attracting local and international tourists (Mappasomba et al., 2024; Rahmawati, 2019).

In addition to its unique nature, Rammang-Rammang also shares a close relationship with the lives of the local community, most of whom reside in the villages surrounding the area. The community around Rammang-Rammang possesses strong local wisdom, formed through a harmonious relationship with the surrounding natural environment. They live as farmers and fishermen, utilizing available natural resources without damaging the sensitive karst ecosystem (Said & Asriani, 2021). This interconnectedness is also manifested in various traditions, rituals, and local myths related to the natural landscape of the area. For them, the karst area is not merely a place of residence, but also a source of life that carries spiritual and cultural significance (Endra, 2017).

Before being recognized as a natural tourism destination, Rammang-Rammang was once a limestone mining site. This mining activity took place starting in 2008, when three companies from China obtained permits to operate.

However, the community realized that continuous mining could damage the environment. Consequently, they fought to halt these activities. After collective efforts, the permits of the three companies were finally revoked in 2013. Since then, the residents agreed to redirect the function of this area into a natural tourism destination (Marthalina, 2019). In 2015, the community successfully pushed for the enactment of village regulations and a decree (SK) issued by the Head of the Culture and Tourism Office of Maros Regency regarding the management of the Rammang-Rammang area (Eppang et al., 2024; Kusumadewi, 2019).

Along with the development of tourism in South Sulawesi, the Rammang-Rammang area began to undergo a major transformation. In recent years, the local government along with the private sector have made efforts to enhance the tourism potential of this area, such as building road infrastructure, docks, and other supporting facilities (Putri, 2022). Intensive promotion through social media and the internet has also introduced Rammang-Rammang as a premier destination for tourists interested in nature and adventure tourism (Machmud & Hasyim, 2022). As a result, the number of tourist visits to this area has increased significantly, bringing a substantial economic impact to the local community.

The transformation of the Rammang-Rammang area into a tourism zone, although bringing positive impacts economically, also creates various issues related to social, cultural, and environmental aspects. From the social side, new dynamics have emerged within the local social structure. The community, which previously depended on the agricultural and fishery sectors, has begun to shift to the tourism service sector, such as opening homestays, becoming tour guides, and selling souvenirs (Sasmita, 2021). This shift certainly brings positive economic impacts; however, on the other hand, it also triggers tensions within the local community (Syamsul & Nurdin, 2021). This transition requires the community to adapt to new ways of life, which might differ from the traditions and norms they have held so far (Eppang et al., 2024).

From a cultural perspective, the development of tourism also presents challenges in preserving local traditions and values. Rammang-Rammang, with its unique karst landscape, holds significant meaning in various local traditions, including customary rituals related to the surrounding nature. The presence of tourists in large numbers often disrupts the sacredness of these customary rituals, even turning them into mere tourist attractions. This process of cultural commodification threatens the sustainability of local traditions that have been passed down through generations (Rahmawati, 2019). The culture, which should serve as the identity of the local community, risks experiencing erosion due to pressure from the commercialization flow of tourism (Endra, 2017).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of tourism area development also impacts the community's relationship with the surrounding nature. While the local community previously maintained a harmonious relationship with their environment, there are now concerns that the exploitation of the karst area for economic gain could threaten the sustainability of the existing ecosystem. Karst is an ecosystem vulnerable to changes, especially if uncontrolled development occurs (Hafid, 2020; Mappasomba et al., 2024). Unsustainable tourism activities, such as pollution from motorized boats, waste generated by tourists, and vegetation damage due to the construction of tourism facilities, can disrupt the natural balance in this area.

These problems form the background for conducting this research. This study arises due to the tension between efforts to improve the community's economy through the tourism sector and the need to maintain socio-cultural balance as well as environmental preservation. The researcher assesses that tourism development in Rammang-Rammang has not fully considered the principles of sustainable tourism and still holds much potential for development. Therefore, a deep study is required regarding how the local community adapts to the socio-cultural changes brought about by tourism, and how the utilization of the tourism area can be carried out sustainably without sacrificing the cultural and ecological values of the tourist destination.

In this context, anthropological research becomes crucial to understanding the socio-cultural dynamics occurring in Rammang-Rammang. Rapid tourism development is frequently followed by fundamental transformations in the lives of local communities, including changes in lifestyles, livelihoods, and values firmly held by the community (Sasmita, 2021). This research attempts to delve deeper into how the local community adapts to the changes resulting from tourism development, and how they utilize available opportunities to improve their welfare without sacrificing cultural identity and environmental sustainability (Spillane, 1994).

The anthropological approach in this study will not only examine how economic and social changes affect the daily lives of the local community, but also how these changes influence the way they interpret their own natural and cultural environment (Smith, 1977). Additionally, this research will also observe the involvement of the local community in managing tourism in Rammang-Rammang. Sustainable tourism ideally involves the active participation of the local community in the planning and management processes, ensuring that they do not merely become objects of tourism development but also possess control over the developments occurring in their region (Timothy, 2002).

A compelling case for exploring these anthropological dynamics is the Rammang-Rammang karst destination, located in the Maros Regency of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Renowned as one of the largest and most breathtaking tower karst formations in the world, Rammang-Rammang was traditionally an isolated, serene sanctuary where local communities lived in deep harmony with the riverine and agricultural ecosystem. For generations, the limestone cliffs and the Pute River served as the physical and spiritual backdrops of daily survival, dictating the community's rhythms, rituals, and kinship structures. The landscape was not viewed as a commercial asset, but rather as an ancestral heritage intrinsic to their collective identity and localized livelihood.

However, the rapid development of Rammang-Rammang into a prominent national and international tourist destination has fundamentally altered this socio-ecological fabric. The transition from a quiet, subsistence-based

agrarian economy to a bustling tourism hub has introduced new socio-cultural challenges, including the commodification of local customs, shifts in communal labor structures, and potential contestations over spatial ownership. While tourism has undoubtedly brought infrastructure development and alternative income streams, it also risks transforming sacred or communal spaces into consumable commodities for outsiders. Consequently, this shift alters how the local population perceives their own culture, prompting a critical examination of how global tourism encounters traditional societal structures.

To fully comprehend these shifting dynamics, this study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in anthropological inquiry. By utilizing in-depth interviews, participant observation, and ethnographical fieldwork, this research delves beneath surface-level economic metrics to explore the lived experiences, agency, and cultural adaptations of the Rammang-Rammang community. Through an anthropological lens, this paper investigates how local inhabitants navigate cultural transformation, utilize their traditional values—such as *siri' na pacce* (honor and solidarity)—to manage tourism, and assert their resilience against external commercial pressures. Ultimately, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of sustainable tourism that places community agency and cultural preservation at the center of development.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with an ethnographic approach to gain a deep, contextual understanding of the socio-cultural transformations in Rammang-Rammang. Anthropological inquiry demands that the researcher looks beyond superficial statistics to grasp the "emic" perspective—the viewpoint of the insiders or local inhabitants. Fieldwork was conducted over a specific period in the Rammang-Rammang karst area, Maros Regency, allowing the researcher to immerse themselves in the daily lives of the community. This qualitative framework is essential for capturing the nuances of human behavior, shifts in communal values, and the subtle ways local cultural identity is renegotiated in response to rising tourism activities.

Data collection was carried out through triangulation, combining participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Through participant observation, the researcher actively engaged in community life, observing daily interactions at boat docks, local homestays, and agricultural fields to understand the intersection of tourism and traditional livelihoods. In-depth interviews were conducted using purposive sampling to select key informants who possess diverse and critical viewpoints. These informants included village elders, traditional leaders, local tourism operators (such as boat drivers and tour guides), women artisans, and representatives from the local tourism awareness group (*Kelompok Sadar Wisata* or Pokdarwis), ensuring a comprehensive representation of community voices.

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, deeply rooted in anthropological interpretation. The analysis followed an iterative process of transcribing field notes and interviews, coding raw data, and categorizing them into recurring cultural themes, such as cultural commodification, spatial contestation, and community resilience mechanisms like *siri' na pacce*. These themes were then interpreted by mirroring them against anthropological theories of tourism and socio-cultural change. To ensure data validity and ethical integrity, member-checking was performed by verifying the findings with the informants, and informed consent was strictly obtained prior to all interviews, respecting the privacy and cultural norms of the Rammang-Rammang community.



Gambar 1. Objek Wisata Rammang-Rammang

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

General Overview of the Research Site

When conducting research, it is essential for the researcher to understand the general characteristics of the study area. This research is situated in Maros Regency, specifically in Salenrang Village. Maros Regency is located in South Sulawesi Province and occupies a strategic position, sharing a direct border with Makassar City, the provincial capital. The regency is recognized as an area with significant potential regarding natural resources, culture, and tourism within South Sulawesi. In addition to its mountainous terrain, rice fields, rivers, and coastal areas, Maros Regency is renowned for its karst landscape—specifically the Maros-Pangkep Karst area—which ranks among the largest karst regions in the world.

Maros Regency plays a highly strategic role in supporting the development of Makassar City, serving as both a transit corridor and the primary northern gateway to the Mamminasata metropolitan area. This location offers substantial opportunities for development and economic growth within the regency. Furthermore, the area boasts premier tourist destinations that attract visitors to both Makassar City and South Sulawesi, such as Bantimurung-Bulusaraung National Park, the Leang-Leang prehistoric cave site, and the Rammang-Rammang karst area—another of the world's largest karst landscapes. Beyond tourism, Maros Regency holds significant economic importance for South Sulawesi as the site of Sultan Hasanuddin International Airport. (Data source: https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabupaten_Maros).

Administratively, Maros Regency comprises several districts, each with distinct geographical characteristics. In terms of geography and topography, the regency's 103 villages and urban villages are distributed as follows: 10 are located in coastal areas, 5 in valleys, 28 in hilly terrain, and the remaining 60 on flat or gently sloping land. This diverse geography offers a wealth of natural, historical, and cultural attractions with significant potential for development. Maros Regency is also recognized for its rich historical and cultural heritage. Local life remains deeply influenced by Bugis-Makassar culture, evident in customs, language, social patterns, and daily traditions. Furthermore, the majority of the population—particularly those residing in rural and karst areas—maintains a close connection with the surrounding natural environment.

The tourism sector, especially nature-based tourism, has experienced rapid growth in Maros Regency. In recent years, the Maros Regency government has prioritized tourism as a key driver of regional development. Various tourist attractions are being developed and promoted, including the Rammang-Rammang nature tourism area, which has emerged as a premier destination in the regency. Bontoa is a district located in Maros Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The name "Bontoa" originates from the Makassar language, meaning "highland" or "hill." The district's administrative center is located in Panjalingan, within Bontoa Urban Village (*Kelurahan*), approximately 6 kilometers from Turikale, the capital of Maros Regency.

Prior to 2001, Bontoa District was known as Maros Utara (North Maros) District. The name change was made based on considerations regarding historical value and regional identity. Maros Utara District itself was established under Article 5 of Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 28 of 1992, following its separation from Maros Baru District on May 23, 1992; its initial territory comprised six villages. Currently, Bontoa District consists of one urban village (*kelurahan*) and eight villages, subdivided into 37 neighborhoods (*lingkungan*) or hamlets (*dusun*).

Rammang-Rammang is located in Salenrang Village, Bontoa District, Maros Regency. Salenrang has held the status of an official village since 1992. It covers an area of 9.60 km² with a population of approximately 6,000 people and is situated 40 km from Makassar City—a one-hour journey via the Trans-Sulawesi Highway. The name "Salenrang" is derived from a traditional custom of the local people. Ancestors in the area had a habit of wearing a sarong by draping it diagonally across the body—extending from the back to the side—or slinging it over the shoulder. The term "Salenrang" stems from the word "Salendang," referring to the practice of draping or slinging a cloth or sarong across the back so that it hangs diagonally down the wearer's side. (Data source: Salenrang Village Office)

The transformation of Rammang-Rammang into the tourist destination known today did not happen overnight; rather, it was the result of a long process involving struggle, collective awareness, and the local community's commitment to environmental preservation. In 2008, the Rammang-Rammang area stood on the brink of ruin when three Chinese companies obtained permits to conduct limestone mining there. These mining activities, which continued for several years, threatened the survival of the highly sensitive karst ecosystem and caused deep concern among local residents who had lived alongside the area for generations.

Awareness of this threat spurred the local community into action. Together with university students and newcomers who cared about the area's fate, they fought through various channels to halt the mining operations. This struggle ultimately bore fruit in 2013, when the operational permits of the three mining companies were officially revoked. Since then, the residents have agreed to repurpose Rammang-Rammang into a nature tourism destination and have begun introducing it to a wider public.

The development of the Rammang-Rammang tourism area reached its peak between 2015 and 2017. During this period, new tourism facilities were constructed—largely thanks to support from donors such as Bank Indonesia—and visits by high-ranking state officials boosted the area's popularity at both national and international levels. This momentum also laid a crucial regulatory foundation for the area's sustainable management. In 2015, the community successfully advocated for the enactment of Maros Regent Regulation Number 80 of 2015 regarding the management of Rammang-Rammang; this was subsequently reinforced by Salenrang Village Regulation Number 6 of 2017,

establishing a legal basis for community-based management. Formal recognition of this long process was finally realized on June 17, 2021, when Salenrang Village officially received legal designation as a Tourism Village from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia. This status represents more than just administrative recognition; it reflects the community's success in establishing a community-based tourism management model that had already been in operation for nearly a decade.

The Rammang-Rammang tourism area is part of the Maros-Pangkep Karst region, characterized by a landscape of limestone mountain clusters, rivers, swamps, rice fields, and prehistoric caves. A major attraction here is the river tour aboard *jolloro* boats; visitors can admire the towering karst mountains while traveling along the river to Kampung Berua, one of the area's primary tourist destinations.

Beyond its natural beauty, Rammang-Rammang holds significant historical and cultural value. Several prehistoric caves in the area contain cave paintings and historical artifacts of great archaeological importance. These sites demonstrate that the region has long been a part of human life, dating back to prehistoric times.

There are several must-visit spots within the Rammang-Rammang area, including the Limestone Forest Park, Kampung Laku, Kampung Massaloeng, and Kampung Berua—home to Padang Ammarrung, Berlian Cave, Pasaung Cave (also known as KingKong Cave), as well as Bat Cave, Karst Cave, and Crystal Cave.

Economic Implications for the Surrounding Community

Rammang-Rammang is a karst area located in Salenrang Village, Bontoa District, Maros Regency. Over the past decade, it has undergone a remarkable transformation—shifting from an area nearly devastated by mining activities into one of South Sulawesi's most renowned nature tourism destinations. Prior to its development as a tourist destination, the area lacked significant economic activity beyond agriculture, fish farming, and plantations. Residents lived relatively isolated, simple lives with limited access to basic infrastructure such as electricity, communication networks, and adequate roads.

As outlined in the general overview of the location, the transformation of Rammang-Rammang—from a site ravaged by mining into a celebrated nature tourism destination—occurred gradually starting in 2013. It peaked between 2015 and 2017 and culminated in official state recognition as a "Tourism Village" in 2021. This transformation served as the catalyst for the various social and economic changes experienced by the local community in and around Rammang-Rammang to this day.

One of the most tangible impacts of the growth of tourism in Rammang-Rammang is the shift in the local community's economic structure. Residents who once relied solely on rice paddies or fish ponds for their livelihoods now have access to a variety of new income-generating opportunities directly linked to the tourism sector. The emergence of new enterprises—such as food and beverage stalls, homestays, *jolloro* boat services, tour guiding, and the management of tourist caves—has provided a more stable and sustainable source of income for the majority of the area's residents.

This economic shift is directly felt by the community living near the tourist site, as expressed by Jumariah (over 60 years old)—a long-time resident of Kampung Berua who runs a small stall and sells coconuts—who stated:

“There have been so many changes, dear—a world of difference compared to before Rammang-Rammang became what it is now. Back then, those of us living here were limited to the same old work: rice farming and fish ponds. Even then, the produce from here [Kampung Berua] was just for our own needs, not for sale. The women would usually just sell *lipa* (Nipa palm) leaves or make roofing thatch from them. Now, thank God, there are plenty of other ways to earn a living. We have electricity now, and pipes and pumps have been installed for clean water, so life is much better.” (Adapted from an interview with Jumariah, 2025).

Jumariah's account reflects the fundamental economic transformation experienced by the people of Kampung Berua. Prior to the advent of tourism, economic activities were highly limited and focused on subsistence. With the growth of tourism, opportunities for livelihood diversification have expanded significantly, and the community's standard of living has improved markedly—including access to basic infrastructure like electricity and clean water that was previously unavailable.

This economic improvement is also experienced by Suryani (33), a small stall owner and cave guide in the tourism area. She shared her experience regarding the economic changes that have taken place:

“Thank God, the economy is much better; there are more jobs available since the arrival of tourism, especially for those of us who don't own or can't work on rice fields or fish ponds. As tourism grows, more visitors will surely come, meaning our income will definitely improve.” (adapted from an interview with Suryani, 2025).

Suryani's statement underscores that tourism development directly correlates with increased job opportunities and community income, particularly for those who previously lacked adequate agricultural land or fish ponds. This aligns with the view of Yoeti (2008) that tourism can serve as a driver for an inclusive local economy, providing benefits to various segments of society.

Mursalik (45), a *jolloro* boat operator and farmer, provides a broader picture of the economic impact experienced by the community of Kampung Berua, including the significant volume of money circulating in the area since the rise of tourism:

“Thank God, it has improved significantly. The money circulating here since tourism arrived runs into the billions. It is a far cry from the past when jobs were scarce; even if one had rice fields or fish ponds, the produce was usually just enough for personal consumption—unless one owned a vast area, which was mostly the case for people from outside the hamlet.” (adapted from an interview with Mursalik, 2025).

The circulation of money on a scale of billions in Kampung Berua demonstrates the significant economic impact of tourism on the area. Mursalik also emphasized that prior to the advent of tourism, access to broader economic resources was extremely limited for residents who did not own extensive agricultural land or fish ponds. This reflects the view of Bramwell & Lane (1993) that properly developed sustainable tourism can provide long-term economic benefits for local communities.

Obstacles in the agricultural and fisheries sectors have also driven the community to shift toward tourism. Mursalik added that many fishpond and aquaculture operations have been abandoned due to the frequent flooding that plagues the area:

“There is still no adequate space for waste collection and disposal. Many fishpond and aquaculture ventures failed to take off, so many sites were simply left unused. Flooding is also frequent during the rainy season; that is one of the factors causing these fishpond and aquaculture businesses to fail.” (adapted from an interview with Mursalik, 2025).

Stevi (27), a tour guide who also manages a café and guesthouse, offers a broader perspective on Rammang-Rammang’s economic development from the viewpoint of someone working in the tourism industry. He highlights the infrastructure improvements that have supported the area’s economic growth:

“The residents’ economy has certainly improved since the area became a tourist destination. Rammang-Rammang has also gained fame as Maros’s premier tourist spot, especially among international visitors. Around 2017, there were many new and upgraded facilities—roads, jetties, boats, bridges, and so on. A cellular tower was also installed in 2021 during Sandiaga Uno’s tenure, making communication much easier; residents can now freely communicate via WhatsApp, and online payments are simple, which is a huge help for both tourists and locals.” (adapted from an interview with Stevi, 2025).

The development of communication infrastructure—such as the BTS tower inaugurated in 2021—serves as a tangible example of how tourism drives the construction of basic facilities that were previously unavailable. Hamka (41), a farmer, shrimp entrepreneur, and Deputy Head of Rammang-Rammang Hamlet, offers a perspective on the accompanying demographic shifts:

“Things have changed completely. Since tourism arrived, more facilities have been built to support it—including roads—which benefit not only residents living right next to the tourist sites but also those living further away. Many people are arriving to settle here, and others are returning from working away; consequently, the population of Salenrang has grown rapidly.” (Adapted from an interview with Hamka, 2025)

Hamka’s statement illustrates that the economic impact of tourism extends beyond those directly involved in the sector, reaching the wider community through broader infrastructure development. The phenomenon of returning migrants and new arrivals in Salenrang Village demonstrates that the economic opportunities created by tourism are significant enough to draw people back to their hometowns or encourage them to settle in the area.

However, the economic growth resulting from tourism is not evenly distributed across all segments of society. Hamka explains that there are indications that the economic benefits tend to be enjoyed primarily by residents living near the core tourism area:

“Unlike those living near the river and the tourist sites, residents outside that immediate area do not experience the benefits as directly. Because our location is closer to the main road, we have easier access to electricity, and our rice fields are larger, allowing for higher sales volumes. Our shrimp ponds are also less prone to flooding and easier to manage compared to the ponds located further inside (near the tourist sites). So, for those living outside the core area, the effect is more indirect.” (Adapted from an interview with Hamka, 2025).

According to Hamka, the impact he experienced was more indirect compared to that felt by residents living near the river and tourist attractions. This situation aligns with what Goodwin & Santilli (2009) term the risk of “elite capture” in Community-Based Tourism development—a tendency wherein groups with easier access to tourism resources stand to gain greater benefits. Nevertheless, further study is required to assess the extent to which this disparity has a systemic impact on the Rammang-Rammang community as a whole.

Beyond economic shifts, the development of tourism in Rammang-Rammang has also brought about significant changes in the community's social life. One of the most notable positive impacts is the strengthening of social solidarity and community cohesion among residents, particularly through increasingly frequent *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) activities aimed at maintaining the cleanliness and beauty of the tourist area.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the anthropological investigation into the development of Rammang-Rammang tourism in Maros Regency reveals a complex socio-cultural landscape undergoing rapid transformation. The shift from a traditional, subsistence-based agrarian lifestyle to a dynamic ecotourism economy has introduced significant changes in the community's social fabric, spatial meanings, and economic structures. While tourism has inevitably triggered issues of cultural commodification and renegotiation of communal spaces, it has not completely eroded local identity. Instead, the local community demonstrates a remarkable degree of agency. By embedding their ancestral values—specifically the ethos of *siri' na pacce* (honor and collective solidarity)—into modern tourism management, the inhabitants have successfully mitigated external commercial pressures, transforming tourism into a tool for both economic survival and cultural revitalization.

Ultimately, this study underscores that the sustainability of heritage sites like Rammang-Rammang hinges on recognizing local communities as active cultural custodians rather than passive stakeholders. Ecotourism cannot be measured solely by economic metrics or infrastructure growth; its true success lies in how well it preserves the intricate relationship between the people and their ancestral karst landscape. Moving forward, policymakers, local authorities, and tourism planners must prioritize community-based tourism models that honor local knowledge and kinship networks. Ensuring that the voices of the Rammang-Rammang inhabitants remain central to future developments will not only protect this unique global karst ecosystem but also safeguard the living cultural heritage that makes it truly exceptional.

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