

## **Local Economic Resistance and the Struggle Against Global Capitalism: Evidence from the Rammang-Rammang Tourism Area**

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### **ABSTRACT.**

*Contemporary economic systems increasingly prioritize accumulation and growth, reshaping social and cultural sectors, including tourism. While tourism is often promoted as a development strategy capable of generating prosperity, its market-oriented orientation frequently reproduces social inequalities and uneven economic benefits at the local level. This article examines the transformation of the local economy in the Rammang-Rammang tourism area, South Sulawesi, following community resistance against karst mining in 2007. Drawing on a critical qualitative approach, the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) following Norman Fairclough's framework to analyze how narratives of community-based tourism, empowerment, and local economy are produced, negotiated, and contested. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of policy texts, media narratives, and discursive artefacts related to tourism development. The findings indicate that post-resistance economic transformation in Rammang-Rammang does not evolve linearly toward an egalitarian community economy. Instead, tourism development becomes a contested arena in which collective practices and everyday forms of resistance coexist with emerging inequalities, concentration of economic access, and tendencies toward local capitalism. Although community-based economic practices and subsistence activities continue to function as mechanisms of autonomy and resistance, they remain fragmented and vulnerable to discursive and structural co-optation. This study argues that community-based tourism should be understood not as a purely alternative economic model, but as a dynamic space of negotiation between resistance, adaptation, and capitalist domination. The article contributes to critical debates on counter-economy, power relations, and equitable development in tourism-based communities in the Global South.*

**Keywords:** *Community-Based Tourism, Counter-Economy, Economic Resistance, Critical Discourse Analysis, Local Capitalism, Indonesia*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The modern economic system has increasingly shaped relational patterns that position accumulation and growth as the primary indicators of success. Within such a landscape, various social and cultural activities have gradually been compelled to adjust, including the tourism sector. Tourism, which was initially perceived as a space for recreation, environmental conservation, and local empowerment, has increasingly demonstrated its dependence on market logic and profit-oriented goals. It is therefore unsurprising that many tourist areas have undergone functional transformations that not only alter the economic structures of local communities but

also reshape social relations and cultural identities, which are often commodified in the process.

In many places, this sector has developed under the assumption that openness to the market would bring prosperity. In practice, however, tourism-based development narratives often leave behind significant inequalities. The economic opportunities generated are not always distributed equitably, and not all social groups occupy equal positions in decision-making processes, spatial control, or access to emerging economic resources. In this context, discourses on alternative forms of economy, or counter-economies that are more community-oriented, become crucial subjects for further examination. In Karl Polanyi's view, as articulated in *The Great Transformation*, economic practices can never be separated from social and political practices. Polanyi further argues that economic activities are always embedded in social relations; however, under capitalist economic systems, they can become disembedded from social values and norms (Savirani, 2025).

Community-based economic models have been introduced as a response to this reality. This approach presupposes the active participation of local communities, collective management of resources, and a more equitable distribution of outcomes. Rather than positioning communities merely as complementary actors in development, this model places them as the primary agents determining the direction and form of economic activities within their territories. Nevertheless, the implementation of this model in practice often encounters tensions between collective interests and individual aspirations, between the logic of needs and the temptation of accumulation, as well as between community resilience and pressures exerted by the dominant economic system.

Such phenomena can be observed in the Rammang-Rammang tourism area in Maros Regency, South Sulawesi. This area represents an important example of how local communities once resisted plans for karst mining in 2007. This movement marked a collective awareness of the importance of protecting living spaces and the environment. Following this resistance, the area was managed as a community-based tourism destination and was officially opened in 2012. Its popularity increased alongside the growth of social media, eventually earning recognition as one of the 75 best tourism villages in 2023.

However, these transformations have introduced new layers of complexity. Not all community members are directly involved in the tourism sector. A significant portion of residents remain dependent on agriculture or work outside the village. Inequalities in access to resources, education, and skills have resulted in uneven distribution of tourism benefits. Certain business actors with greater access to capital and networks have begun to dominate strategic spaces. Despite this, collective practices through tourism awareness groups (*pokdarwis*), climate village programs, and customary institutions remain active and continue to serve as foundations for the sustainability of the area.

These dynamics raise critical questions: does the emerging governance structure truly reflect the original spirit of resistance that fought for spatial rights and

collective sustainability? Or has that spirit been reduced by new economic interests, whether originating from local or external actors? In this context, the concept of a counter-economy becomes relevant as a framework for resistance and negotiation against the dominance of mainstream economic systems, emphasizing principles of autonomy, social justice, and sustainability.

To understand the complexity of changes in Rammang-Rammang, an approach is required that goes beyond economic data or policy analysis, and instead examines the discourses and power relations that are formed. In this regard, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis provides a useful framework to trace how development narratives are constructed, how local actors respond to them, and how the meaning of community-based economics is produced within unequal relations.

In addition, James C. Scott's approach to everyday forms of resistance is essential for unpacking the hidden survival strategies embedded within practices of adaptation. Many residents appear to be "adapting" to change, yet beneath this surface they continue to maintain traditional economic practices, resist dependence on external investors, or build informal, community-based structures.

Slavoj Žižek's critique of the new face of the economy that conceals old forms of domination is also relevant to this analysis. What appears as the success of community-based tourism may in fact represent a new form of co-optation, wrapped in narratives of locality and empowerment.

Through this critical inquiry, this study seeks to unravel—or reread—the relationships between local economies, the state, and capitalism in a post-resistance context: whether such relationships genuinely challenge dominant economic hegemony or merely constitute a new arena of contestation for power and capital. The ultimate objective is not to reject development, but to ensure that development is carried out in a fair, inclusive manner that strengthens communities. Furthermore, this study examines whether the form of community economy developed in Rammang-Rammang is capable of functioning as a counter-economy, and whether community-based tourism areas can truly serve as a form of *delinking* (Amin, 1990), or instead become new sites of capitalism in a more localized and concealed form.

Issues of economic equity are critically important, as they represent a key pillar of sustainable development, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia, which continues to face disparities in welfare across regions and social groups. In the tourism sector, development narratives often emphasize increased regional income or job creation, while failing to adequately consider whether economic benefits are distributed equitably across all layers of society. This research seeks to examine how processes of economic equity unfold—or are hindered—in the Rammang-Rammang tourism area, particularly following its transition from a space dominated by ecological resistance movements into a nationally recognized tourism destination.

As a prominent tourism village, Rammang-Rammang should ideally serve as a positive example of successful community-based development. However, empirical realities reveal disparities in participation within the tourism sector. Not all residents

have equal access to emerging economic opportunities due to limitations in capital, networks, skills, or social position. This is the core issue of economic equity explored in this study: whether the community-based tourism model is truly capable of creating a fair distribution of welfare, or whether it instead reproduces new forms of economic exclusion concealed behind empowerment narratives.

Beyond identifying dominant actors in area management, this research also examines how economically marginalized residents construct forms of resistance or adaptation as survival strategies. These micro-level forms of resistance—such as continuing subsistence agriculture, independently producing handicrafts, or rejecting the involvement of external investors—signal an awareness of the importance of community economic autonomy as a means of advancing distributive justice. In this regard, the counter-economy approach becomes relevant for assessing whether community efforts to preserve local social and economic structures can serve as viable alternatives to dominant, centralized, and exploitative systems.

This research proposal not only traces the historical and economic transformation of Rammang-Rammang, but also identifies emerging signs of micro-resistance and examines whether such discourses are capable of fostering more just social structures. Amid the penetration of dominant economic forces into even the most remote villages, it is essential to safeguard spaces for alternative economies rooted in collective values and local wisdom. Accordingly, this study is entitled: **“Economic Resistance in the Rammang-Rammang Tourism Area: Designing an Alternative Counter-System amid the Dominance of the Global Economic System.”**

Thus, this research is highly relevant to the thematic issue of economic equity, as it does not merely address access and benefit distribution in quantitative terms, but also examines the cultural, structural, and symbolic dimensions of inequality. Equity in this context is not only a matter of numerical distribution, but also of power, space, and meaning within development processes. Therefore, through an interdisciplinary approach and critical reflection, this study is expected to contribute both academically and practically to the formulation of more just and community-oriented tourism village development policies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW and HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

Community economy refers to a form of economic organization grounded in the values of collectivity, solidarity, and local sustainability. Within this framework, local communities are not merely treated as objects of development, but as principal actors who possess authority over resource management and the direction of economic growth. This concept emerged as a response to dominant economic systems that frequently marginalize local communities and concentrate benefits in the hands of a limited number of actors (Gibson-Graham, 2020).

Community economy is also part of a broader narrative of resistance against inequality and structural exclusion embedded in mainstream economic systems. It creates space for value-based economic practices such as mutual cooperation,

equitable asset redistribution, and ecological sustainability—dimensions that are often overlooked within conventional economic frameworks. In this context, the development of community-based tourism represents a concrete articulation of community economy in practice.

The concept of a counter-economy (alternative or counter economy) refers to economic practices that are deliberately constructed to challenge the hegemonic logic of capitalist economies. It emphasizes the creation of alternative economic structures that are not oriented toward capital accumulation, but toward fair and inclusive value distribution. Counter-economies often emerge from experiences of resistance—both overt and covert—against practices of exploitation and marginalization (Graeber, 2021).

Within Indonesia's social landscape, the concept of counter-economy has gained increasing attention alongside the emergence of local practices such as people's cooperatives, community-managed tourism villages, and the revitalization of customary economies. However, critical questions arise when such counter-economic initiatives become co-opted by local elites or state institutions seeking to integrate them into national development programs. At this juncture, it becomes essential to examine whether community economy genuinely embodies a counter-hegemonic spirit or has shifted into a form of "local capitalism" wrapped in participatory rhetoric (Žižek, 2020).

James C. Scott (2019), in *Weapons of the Weak*, explains that resistance does not always manifest in the form of revolutions or open demonstrations. There exist hidden forms of resistance (infrapolitics) that are enacted through everyday practices, such as tax avoidance, minor acts of sabotage, or the formation of informal economic structures. This concept is highly relevant for understanding how residents in areas such as Rammang-Rammang may not explicitly reject dominant structures, yet continue to preserve local economic values through symbolic and everyday practices.

Meanwhile, Slavoj Žižek (2020) emphasizes that resistance can be absorbed and inverted by dominant systems, transforming it into new forms of co-optation. In this process, narratives of locality or community are often instrumentalized to generate legitimacy for systems that remain exclusionary. This suggests that not all initiatives labeled as "community-based" genuinely promote social justice. Such conditions underscore the importance of adopting a critical approach to deconstruct the discourses that underpin social transformations at the local level.

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach developed by Norman Fairclough (2013) provides an essential framework for tracing the relationships between language, power, and social practices. Fairclough argues that discourse both reflects and reproduces specific social structures. In the context of community-based tourism, it is therefore crucial to analyze how discourses of "empowerment," "locality," and "tourism development" are constructed and mobilized by various actors to redefine who is entitled to economic resources.

CDA enables researchers to uncover how language is used to normalize inequality, frame development as inevitable, and obscure unequal power relations behind popular terms such as “tourism village,” “self-reliant community,” or “local economic revival.” Through this analytical lens, it becomes possible to identify whether the narratives of resistance that once emerged in Rammang-Rammang remain alive or have undergone significant shifts in meaning.

Several previous studies have examined the dynamics of community economy and local resistance. Research by Irham (2021) demonstrates how tourism transformation in Bali has led to community fragmentation and the domination of strategic economic spaces by local elites. Similarly, a study by Pradana & Hidayat (2020) in the Baduy customary area illustrates how community economic systems can withstand the pressures of modernization when supported by strong internal social control.

Nevertheless, research specifically focusing on Rammang-Rammang remains very limited, particularly with regard to the relationship between resistance to extractive industries, post-conflict economic transformation, and the emergence of new forms of inequality within community-based tourism systems. This gap creates significant opportunities for this study to contribute to the development of social science scholarship and local political economy analysis.

This study employs a critical qualitative approach using Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The research site is the Rammang-Rammang karst area in Bontoa District, Maros Regency, South Sulawesi, selected due to its role as a space of socio-economic transformation following resistance to extractive industries.

Data are collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis of village policies, conflict archives, media coverage, and discursive artifacts such as banners, murals, tourism brochures, and social media narratives. Data analysis follows the three dimensions of CDA—textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice—by situating the findings within theories of resistance, ideological critique, and community economy.

## **METHODS**

This study adopts a critical qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of power relations, economic practices, and discursive dynamics that shape local economic transformation in the Rammang-Rammang tourism area following resistance to the mining industry. This approach is chosen because the issues examined are not merely technical or quantitative in nature, but are closely related to meanings, ideologies, and social practices embedded in the development of community-based tourism.

The research design employs Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which conceptualizes language and discursive practices as integral components of power relations and social structures. CDA is used to trace how discourses surrounding “tourism villages,” “community empowerment,” and “local

economy” are produced, circulated, and interpreted by various actors, as well as how these discourses contribute to the formation or reproduction of economic inequality at the local level.

The research site is the Rammang-Rammang tourism area, located in Bontoa District, Maros Regency, South Sulawesi. This area was purposively selected due to its strong history of ecological resistance against proposed karst mining in 2007 and its significant transformation into a community-based tourism destination since 2012.

Data collection was conducted using multiple techniques. First, in-depth interviews were carried out with key informants, including local tourism managers, members of tourism awareness groups (*pokdarwis*), customary leaders, village officials, and residents who are either directly or indirectly involved in tourism activities. Second, participant observation was employed to examine economic practices, patterns of social interaction, and the distribution of space and access in everyday tourism activities. Third, document analysis was conducted on village policy documents, mining conflict archives, media coverage, tourism promotional materials, and other discursive artifacts such as banners, murals, and social media narratives.

Data analysis followed the three dimensions of Fairclough’s CDA:

1. textual analysis, to examine linguistic choices, terminology, and narratives used in tourism development discourse
2. discursive practice analysis, to understand the processes of discourse production and consumption by the actors involved
3. social practice analysis, to relate these discourses to broader political-economic structures, including the relationships between local communities, the state, and the logic of capitalism

The empirical findings are then interpreted with reference to the theoretical frameworks of community economy, counter-economy, James C. Scott’s concept of everyday resistance, and Slavoj Žižek’s critique of ideology, in order to ensure a reflective and contextualized reading of local economic dynamics in Rammang-Rammang.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the analysis indicate that economic transformation in Rammang-Rammang in the post-resistance period has not progressed in a linear manner toward a fully egalitarian community economy. There are clear indications that the strong narrative of ecological resistance that characterized the early period has gradually shifted alongside the intensification of tourism and the increasing penetration of market logic into local economic life.

Discursively, the narratives of “tourism village,” “community empowerment,” and “local economy” dominate the official management discourse of the area. These narratives frame tourism as a natural continuation of the community’s struggle, as well as a pathway toward collective prosperity. However, in practice, community participation in the tourism sector appears uneven. Evidence suggests that access to

strategic business spaces, tourism facilities, and marketing networks tends to be concentrated among specific groups possessing greater social and economic capital.

At the same time, collective economic practices rooted in community values persist, such as the shared management of certain areas, the continued role of customary institutions, and the sustainability of subsistence agricultural practices. These practices can be interpreted as forms of everyday resistance that function to preserve residents' economic autonomy from full dependence on the tourism sector. Nevertheless, such resistance remains fragmented and is not always articulated in overtly political terms.

These findings suggest that community-based tourism in Rammang-Rammang constitutes an arena of contestation between counter-economy and local capitalism. On the one hand, the history of resistance against mining provides a moral and symbolic foundation for community economic practices. On the other hand, the penetration of market logic and the demands of accumulation create opportunities for the reproduction of new power relations at the local level.

From Scott's perspective, residents' adaptive practices—such as maintaining subsistence agriculture or resisting dependence on external investors—can be understood as forms of everyday resistance. However, as Žižek cautions, such resistance risks being neutralized when it is absorbed into dominant development narratives. Consequently, the community economy in Rammang-Rammang does not exist entirely outside capitalism, but rather operates within a complex field of negotiation.

This article demonstrates that community economy in the context of community-based tourism cannot be understood simply as an alternative that stands in direct opposition to capitalism. In Rammang-Rammang, community economy functions as a space of negotiation among resistance, adaptation, and co-optation. Although certain values of collectivity and sustainability are still maintained, there are strong indications of unequal access and the emergence of local capitalism within the tourism economic structure. These findings underscore the importance of a critical approach in interpreting community-based tourism—not merely as a development solution, but as a contested arena of power relations.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study demonstrates that economic transformation in the Rammang-Rammang tourism area following resistance to karst mining cannot be understood simply as the success of a fully alternative community economy. While the history of ecological resistance provides a moral, symbolic, and discursive foundation for the emergence of community-based tourism, in practice this transformation unfolds within a complex process of negotiation with market logic and local capitalism. The findings indicate that the form of economy that has developed occupies a gray zone between counter-economy and local capitalism. Collective practices, community-based management, and everyday forms of resistance continue to persist as efforts to safeguard economic autonomy and social sustainability. However, these practices

tend to be fragmented and vulnerable to co-optation, particularly when discourses of empowerment and tourism villages are mobilized to legitimize the concentration of access, resources, and economic space among certain groups. This research also reveals unequal participation and economic exclusion affecting residents who lack social capital, economic resources, or network access within the tourism sector. In this context, community-based tourism does not fully liberate communities from relations of domination; instead, it carries the potential to reproduce new power relations at the local level in more subtle and participatory forms. Accordingly, this article emphasizes that community-based tourism should be understood as an arena of contestation among resistance, adaptation, and economic domination, rather than as an alternative development model that is automatically fair and inclusive. The concept of counter-economy in Rammang-Rammang has not yet been fully institutionalized as an economic structure capable of achieving delinking from dominant capitalism, but it nevertheless remains an important space for micro-level resistance and social negotiation. These findings underscore the importance of adopting a critical approach in the formulation of tourism village development policies, particularly to ensure that such policies move beyond empowerment narratives and seriously address the distribution of power, access, and economic benefits in more substantive terms. In this way, tourism development can genuinely strengthen local communities, rather than merely introducing capitalism in a more localized and concealed form.

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