

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL WISDOM-BASED TOURISM AND CREATIVE ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL GROWTH: EVIDENCE FROM KUNINGAN REGENCY

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Abstract. This study aims to formulate a sustainable development strategy for tourism and the creative economy based on local wisdom in Kuningan Regency. The region has significant potential supported by natural resources and cultural diversity; however, its development remains constrained by limited funding, low innovation capacity, and suboptimal community participation. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using data triangulation techniques, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed through thematic coding with the assistance of NVivo software. The findings identify four key strategic factors: (1) the integration of local wisdom into tourism products, (2) multi-stakeholder collaboration, (3) the utilization of digital technology, and (4) community-based environmental conservation. These factors collectively shape a holistic and adaptive development model that strengthens regional competitiveness while ensuring sustainability. This study contributes by providing a context-based strategic framework that can be applied to similar regions seeking to develop tourism and creative economy sectors in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Keywords: Tourism, Creative Economy, Local Wisdom, Sustainable Development, Strategic Framework

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan strategi pengembangan pariwisata dan ekonomi kreatif berbasis kearifan lokal yang berkelanjutan di Kabupaten Kuningan. Wilayah ini memiliki potensi besar yang didukung oleh kekayaan sumber daya alam dan budaya, namun pengembangannya masih menghadapi berbagai kendala, seperti keterbatasan pendanaan, rendahnya kapasitas inovasi, dan belum optimalnya partisipasi masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik triangulasi data melalui wawancara mendalam, focus group discussion (FGD), observasi, dan studi dokumen. Analisis data dilakukan dengan metode *thematic coding* menggunakan bantuan perangkat lunak NVivo. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi empat faktor strategis utama, yaitu: (1) integrasi kearifan lokal dalam produk wisata, (2) kolaborasi multipihak, (3) pemanfaatan teknologi digital, dan (4) konservasi lingkungan berbasis masyarakat. Keempat faktor tersebut membentuk model pengembangan yang bersifat holistik dan adaptif dalam meningkatkan daya saing sekaligus menjamin keberlanjutan pariwisata daerah. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi berupa kerangka strategi berbasis konteks lokal yang dapat diadaptasi oleh daerah lain dalam mengembangkan sektor pariwisata dan ekonomi kreatif secara berkelanjutan dan inklusif.

Kata Kunci: Pariwisata, Ekonomi Kreatif, Kearifan Lokal, Keberlanjutan, Strategi

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism and the creative economy are strategic sectors that contribute not only to economic growth but also to cultural preservation, community empowerment, and environmental sustainability. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has prioritized regions with high tourism potential, including Kuningan Regency, which is recognized for its capacity to integrate community-based tourism and creative economic activities (Kemenparekraf/Baparekraf RI, 2023; Fadillah & Indriyanti, 2023; Saefullah et al., 2024; Harirah et al., 2021; Auliya, 2020; (Kartika et al., 2019; Hannan & Rahmawati, 2020; Farhan & Anwar, 2016). Table 1 demonstrates the growing appeal of Kuningan as a tourism destination. In 2024, tourist visits reached 3,278,975, comprising hotel visitors (389,858), tourist attractions (1,762,362), and culinary establishments (1,516,222).

Table 1. Tourist visit data of Kuningan Regency in 2024

NO	Period	HOTEL		OBJEK		Restaurant
		Domestic Tourist	International Tourist	Domestic Tourist	International Tourist	Domestic Tourist
1	January - December	189,855	3	1,362,349	13	1,116,222
	Total		389,858		1,762,362	1,516,222
	Total			3.278.975		

Despite this potential, tourism development in Kuningan faces significant challenges. Globally, rapid tourism expansion has led to environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and social inequality (Haribudiman et al., 2023; Rasyid Ohorella & Prihantoro, 2021; Akbar & Safira, 2023). In response, sustainable tourism has emerged as a guiding principle emphasizing the balance between economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection (Andri & Dunan, 2023; Chaabane et al., 2019). Local wisdom is widely recognized as a strategic asset in sustainable tourism development (Arifin & Ardiansyah, 2020; Tong, 2022; Daud & Novrimansyah, 2022). However, its integration into tourism and creative economy practices remains superficial and fragmented. Cultural elements are often commodified without being embedded into coherent development strategies, resulting in limited impact on long-term sustainability (Wesnawa, 2022).

Several key constraints exacerbate this situation. First, human resource capacity is uneven, particularly in adapting to digital transformation (Musaddad et al., 2019; Sugiyarto & Amaruli, 2018; Herdina et al., 2023). Second, government interventions frequently focus on regulatory aspects without addressing coordination challenges and long-term sustainability (Marijan, 2020; Rahayu & Yanis, 2023). Third, while multi-stakeholder collaboration is widely advocated (Suniastha Amerta, 2017; Haisah et al., 2024; Pemayun, 2018), coordination among

government, communities, industry, and academia remains limited and unstructured.

Moreover, digital technology adoption including artificial intelligence has opened new avenues for tourism marketing and destination management (Osin & Purwaningsih, 2020). However, existing research largely focuses on technological dimensions in isolation, with limited integration into broader frameworks incorporating cultural values and local wisdom.

At the local level, empirical studies from Kuningan demonstrate that tourism development based on local wisdom generates positive economic and cultural impacts. Nevertheless, these initiatives encounter structural constraints: limited financial resources, uneven community participation, and weak governance mechanisms. Previous research addresses these challenges in a fragmented manner—separately emphasizing cultural preservation, economic outcomes, or technological adoption—without offering an integrated operational strategy (Muawanah et al., 2020; Maturbongs et al., 2017; Aji, 2021; Yanan et al., 2024; Habibulloev et al., 2024; Saefullah et al., 2023; Megawati et al., 2023; Sutrisno, 2021; Sudrajat et al., 2023). Consequently, the main problem addressed in this study is the absence of a comprehensive and applicable strategy that integrates local wisdom, stakeholder collaboration, digital innovation, and environmental sustainability within a unified framework (Santiago et al., 2024; Aribawa & Widyatini, 2017; Soesanta et al., 2023; Nugroho & Numata, 2022; Nugroho & Numata, 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions: How can tourism and creative economy development strategies based on local wisdom be formulated in Kuningan Regency?, What are the key enabling and constraining factors? And How can sustainability be ensured within this development process? The novelty of this study lies in its multidimensional integration of cultural, economic, technological, and environmental aspects into a unified strategic model. Unlike prior studies that are predominantly descriptive or sectoral, this research proposes a comprehensive and implementable framework that aligns cultural authenticity with market demands and governance structures applicable to regions with similar socio-cultural characteristics.

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at formulating a strategic framework for developing tourism and the creative economy based on local wisdom in Kuningan Regency. This approach is particularly suitable for capturing the complexity of socio-cultural and economic phenomena, as it emphasizes in-depth understanding of processes, interactions, and stakeholder experiences (Goodwin et al., 2020).

The research was conducted through three sequential stages. The first stage involved mapping tourism potential using the Experience Economy perspective combined with the Creative Placemaking framework. This stage focused on identifying how local cultural values can be embedded into tourism experiences and creative economic activities. The second stage consisted of empirical analysis utilizing the Stakeholder Collaboration Model to examine the roles and interactions among government, private sector, and local communities. This stage was further strengthened by the Digital Tourism Framework to explore the role of technology in destination marketing and management. The final stage focused on developing sustainability strategies by integrating the concepts of Regenerative Tourism and the Inclusive Creative Economy, ensuring that development not only preserves resources but also enhances community participation and restores socio-ecological systems (Zusmelia et al., 2023).

Informants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to identify initial informants based on specific criteria: (a) a minimum of two years of experience in tourism or creative economy sectors, (b) a strategic role in policy-making, community coordination, or business operations, and (c) willingness to participate. Initial informants included government officials, senior creative economy actors, and community leaders. Snowball sampling was then applied to recruit additional informants. Each initial informant was asked to recommend other individuals who met the same criteria and could offer complementary perspectives. This process continued until data saturation was reached, indicated by thematic repetition and no new information emerging from subsequent interviews. A total of 27 informants participated: 8 government officials, 12 creative economy actors, and 7 community representatives. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. Interview and FGD transcripts were processed through thematic coding with the support of NVivo software. The analysis focused on identifying enabling and constraining factors, patterns of stakeholder collaboration, and the integration of local wisdom into development practices. To ensure data validity, triangulation was applied by cross-verifying findings from interviews, observations, and documentary sources.

RESULTS

The findings of this study are derived from primary data collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and field observations involving key stakeholders, including local government officials, tourism and creative economy actors, community leaders, and academics. In addition, secondary data were obtained from policy documents, regional tourism statistics, and relevant previous studies. Data analysis was conducted using a *thematic*

coding approach with the assistance of NVivo software to identify key themes, patterns, and relationships in the development of local wisdom-based tourism in Kuningan Regency.

Community Perception of Local Wisdom in Tourism Development

The results indicate that the majority of informants perceive local wisdom as a critical factor in enhancing tourism attractiveness. This is reflected in dominant thematic codes related to destination identity, cultural preservation, and authentic tourist experiences. However, the findings also reveal a gap between potential and implementation, as local wisdom has not been fully integrated into sustainable economic strategies, particularly in terms of commercialization and promotion.

Government Strategies in Tourism Development

Data from interviews with government representatives and policy document analysis show that five main strategies have been implemented: cultural preservation, infrastructure development, digital promotion, community empowerment, and pentahelix collaboration. Although these strategies conceptually align with sustainable tourism principles, FGD findings indicate challenges in implementation, particularly regarding consistency, equitable development, and long-term orientation.

Community Engagement in Tourism and Creative Economy

Findings from observations and interviews suggest that community participation ranges from moderate to active, particularly through MSMEs, tourism villages, and cultural events. However, such involvement tends to be temporary and uneven across regions, indicating the need for more systematic and sustainable empowerment approaches.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration in Tourism Development

FGD analysis reveals that collaboration among government, private sector, and communities has emerged but remains partial and insufficiently institutionalized. Limited coordination and the absence of sustained collaborative platforms are key barriers to optimizing stakeholder synergy.

Constraint in Tourism Development

Based on the synthesis of primary and secondary data, the main constraints include limited infrastructure, low human resource capacity, weak destination branding, regulatory barriers,

minimal private investment, and socio-cultural challenges such as declining appreciation of local wisdom. These findings highlight that tourism development depends not only on potential resources but also on the readiness of supporting systems.

Community Resistance toward Tourism Development

Interviews with community leaders and FGD results indicate the presence of resistance stemming from concerns about cultural degradation, environmental damage, and unequal distribution of economic benefits. This resistance reflects critical awareness rather than outright rejection, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and sustainable development approaches.

Perceived Benefits of Tourism and Creative Economy

Most respondents acknowledge that tourism development generates both economic benefits, such as increased income and employment opportunities—and non-economic benefits, including cultural preservation and knowledge enhancement. However, these benefits are unevenly distributed and largely depend on the level of community involvement.

Sustainability of Tourism and Creative Economy in Kuningan

The findings suggest that sustainability is determined by four main factors: community participation, cultural and environmental preservation, product innovation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration supported by clear policies and equitable benefit distribution.

Utilization of Digital Technology

The data indicate that digital platforms are widely used for destination promotion. However, their effectiveness remains limited due to disparities in digital literacy and resource constraints. This underscores the importance of strengthening digital capacity to ensure long-term competitiveness.

Stakeholder Expectations and Roles

FGD results highlight that tourism development requires strong synergy among stakeholders. The government acts as a policy facilitator, communities as active participants, and the private sector as drivers of innovation. Long-term success depends on effective coordination, sustained collaboration, and shared commitment among all actors.

DISCUSSION

Community Perception of Local Wisdom

The findings demonstrate that local wisdom is widely perceived as a core determinant of tourism attractiveness in Kuningan Regency. This reinforces the perspective of *cultural-based tourism*, where cultural identity and traditional values function as primary pull factors that differentiate destinations in an increasingly competitive global tourism market (Richards, 2018). Traditions such as *Seren Taun* not only serve as instruments of cultural preservation but also represent experiential assets aligned with the growing demand for authentic tourism experiences.

However, the study reveals a critical gap between cultural potential and its economic realization. Despite strong recognition of its value, local wisdom has not been fully transformed into scalable economic outputs. This aligns with Smith & Robinson (2006) who argue that cultural assets require strategic packaging through creative industries, digital platforms, and destination branding to generate tangible economic benefits. Therefore, the challenge lies not in the existence of local wisdom, but in its transformation into value-added tourism products within a structured development ecosystem.

Government Strategies in Tourism Development

The five strategic pillars implemented by the Kuningan government—cultural preservation, infrastructure development, digital promotion, community empowerment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration—reflect the foundational principles of *sustainable tourism development* (Butler, 1999). These strategies indicate a comprehensive policy orientation that attempts to balance economic growth with cultural and environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, the findings highlight the presence of a *policy–practice gap*, where implementation tends to be fragmented, short-term, and often event-driven. This phenomenon supports the argument of Bramwell & Lane (2011), emphasizing that sustainable tourism requires long-term policy consistency and institutional commitment rather than sporadic initiatives. The persistence of this gap suggests that current strategies have not yet evolved into an integrated governance system. Consequently, there is a need to shift from program-based approaches toward systemic and outcome-oriented tourism management frameworks.

Community Participation

Community involvement in Kuningan can be categorized as moderate to active, reflecting the foundational principles of *community-based tourism (CBT)*, which positions local

communities as central actors in tourism development (Murphy, 1985; Okazaki, 2008). The presence of community engagement in homestays, MSMEs, and cultural activities indicates a positive trajectory toward participatory development. However, participation remains largely episodic and concentrated around cultural events and festivals. From a theoretical standpoint, this condition indicates that communities are still positioned as *beneficiaries* rather than *co-creators*. This limitation suggests that participatory mechanisms have not yet reached the level of shared decision-making or strategic influence. Strengthening community capacity through continuous mentoring, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial development is therefore essential to elevate their role into active stakeholders in tourism governance and innovation.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The collaboration observed among government, private sector, and community actors reflects an emerging application of the *pentahelix model*, which emphasizes synergy among government, academia, industry, community, and media (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Helix, 2017). While this model is conceptually present in Kuningan, its practical implementation remains uneven and predominantly event-based. This condition suggests that collaboration has not yet reached the level of *co-governance*, where all stakeholders participate equally in planning, implementation, and evaluation. The inconsistency across regions further indicates structural and coordination challenges. To address this, a more institutionalized collaboration framework is required, supported by clear role distribution, accountability mechanisms, and long-term partnership models. Without such strengthening, collaboration risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

Key Constraints in Tourism Development

The constraints identified in this study namely infrastructure limitations, gaps in human resource capacity, weak destination branding, regulatory complexity, limited private sector involvement, and socio-cultural challenges, indicate that Kuningan's tourism development is positioned within the development stage of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model (Butler, 1980). At this stage, destinations typically experience increasing recognition and growth potential; however, the transition toward consolidation is often constrained by structural inefficiencies and institutional weaknesses. The findings suggest that Kuningan has not yet fully capitalized on its growth momentum due to the lack of systemic integration among key development components.

From an analytical perspective, these constraints are not isolated issues but are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. For instance, limited infrastructure not only restricts physical accessibility but also reduces investor confidence, thereby contributing to low private sector participation. Similarly, weak human resource capacity particularly in digital literacy and service management directly affects the quality of tourist experiences, which in turn undermines destination branding and competitiveness. This aligns with Moscardo (Moscardo, 2008), who emphasizes that capacity building is central to enhancing the adaptive capability of tourism communities in responding to market and environmental changes.

However, compared to previous studies, this research reveals a more complex interaction among structural, institutional, and socio-cultural factors. Earlier studies tend to examine these issues in isolation. For example, studies focusing on infrastructure highlight its role in improving accessibility and economic outcomes, while research on human resources emphasizes training and skill development as key drivers of competitiveness. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that improvements in one dimension alone are insufficient without parallel progress in other areas. This supports recent findings in sustainable tourism literature, which underline the importance of integrated and systemic approaches rather than sectoral interventions.

In terms of governance, regulatory complexity emerges as a critical constraint that differentiates this study from prior research. While earlier studies acknowledge the importance of policy support, they often assume that regulatory frameworks function effectively once established. The findings here challenge that assumption by showing that fragmented implementation and bureaucratic rigidity can significantly limit policy effectiveness. This aligns with more recent governance-oriented studies, which highlight coordination failure and institutional fragmentation as major barriers in regional tourism development.

The issue of weak destination branding also presents an important point of comparison. Previous studies commonly frame branding as a promotional activity aimed at increasing visibility. However, the findings of this study suggest that branding failure in Kuningan is not merely due to insufficient promotion, but rather the absence of a coherent value proposition that integrates local identity, cultural assets, and market expectations. This perspective extends prior research by repositioning branding as a strategic and integrative process rather than a tactical marketing tool.

Furthermore, socio-cultural challenges identified in this study provide additional nuance compared to earlier findings. While many studies emphasize the positive role of local wisdom in strengthening tourism identity and sustainability, this research highlights a declining appreciation of local values among certain community groups. This indicates that cultural sustainability cannot be assumed and must be actively maintained through institutional and economic incentives. This finding contributes to the literature by showing that the relationship between tourism development and cultural preservation is not automatically synergistic, but requires deliberate alignment.

Overall, compared to previous studies that tend to adopt partial or sector-specific perspectives, this research offers a more integrative understanding of tourism development constraints. The combination of structural, institutional, and socio-cultural analysis provides a more comprehensive explanation of why tourism potential does not always translate into optimal outcomes. Addressing these constraints therefore requires a multidimensional strategy. Capacity building must be linked with digital transformation and service innovation; regulatory reform must enhance coordination and reduce bureaucratic barriers; branding must integrate cultural identity with market positioning; and stakeholder collaboration must be institutionalized to ensure continuity. Without such integration, the TALC model predicts a risk of stagnation. Conversely, a coordinated approach can accelerate the transition toward the consolidation stage, where tourism systems become more resilient, competitive, and sustainable.

Community Resistance

Community resistance in Kuningan reflects concerns related to cultural degradation, environmental damage, and unequal benefit distribution. This aligns with the concept of *social carrying capacity*, where tourism development exceeds the tolerance level of local communities (Saveriades, 2000). Importantly, resistance in this context does not indicate rejection but rather critical awareness of potential negative impacts. According to Tosun (2000), such resistance can be mitigated through participatory planning and inclusive decision-making processes. By involving communities in policy formulation and implementation, social legitimacy can be strengthened, and potential conflicts can be minimized. Thus, resistance should be viewed as constructive feedback that can guide more balanced and sustainable tourism development.

Perceived Benefits and Inclusivity

The study confirms that tourism and the creative economy generate both economic and non-economic benefits, including income generation, job creation, cultural preservation, and increased creativity. However, these benefits are unevenly distributed, highlighting a gap in inclusivity. This finding is consistent with the concept of *inclusive tourism*, which emphasizes equitable access to opportunities and fair distribution of benefits (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). The uneven distribution suggests that current development models have not fully addressed structural inequalities. Therefore, targeted policies are needed to expand participation among marginalized groups and less-developed areas, ensuring that tourism contributes to broader socio-economic development.

Sustainability and Digital Transformation

The increasing use of digital platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp Business, and TikTok indicates a transition toward *smart tourism*, where technology enhances destination competitiveness and visitor engagement (Gretzel et al., 2015). Digitalization plays a strategic role in expanding market reach, improving information accessibility, and supporting creative economy activities. However, the uneven adoption of digital technology highlights a digital divide among stakeholders. This suggests that technological availability alone is insufficient without adequate digital literacy and strategic integration. As emphasized by Buhalis & Amaranggana (2015), successful smart tourism requires the alignment of technology, innovation, and human capacity.

Therefore, digital transformation in Kuningan must move beyond basic promotion toward a more integrated ecosystem, including data-driven marketing, digital storytelling, and platform-based tourism management. Such transformation is essential to ensure that digitalization contributes to long-term sustainability rather than remaining a short-term trend. This finding implies that without strategic investment in digital literacy and equitable access to technology, the digital divide among stakeholders will widen, reinforcing existing inequalities in tourism benefit distribution. Practically, local government should prioritize community-based digital training programs and develop affordable internet infrastructure in rural tourism areas. From a policy perspective, these results underscore the need for a regulatory framework that integrates digital transformation into regional tourism master plans, ensuring that technology adoption aligns with local wisdom preservation rather than replacing it

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that local wisdom functions as a core strategic asset that significantly shapes tourism attractiveness, cultural preservation, and the development of creative economic activities. Empirically, the study confirms that the integration of local values into tourism products enhances destination identity and contributes to sustainable value creation. The study further identifies that tourism development in Kuningan has been driven by several key factors, namely cultural preservation initiatives, infrastructure development, digital promotion, community engagement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. These elements collectively represent the foundational components of a sustainable tourism framework. However, the results reveal that their implementation remains fragmented and uneven, indicating that the existing development model has not yet achieved a fully integrated and adaptive system.

In relation to community involvement, the findings indicate that participation has reached a moderate level, particularly in MSME activities, tourism villages, and cultural events. Nevertheless, participation is still limited in scope and continuity, which affects the equitable distribution of tourism benefits. This suggests that strengthening inclusive participation mechanisms is essential to ensure that tourism development contributes more broadly to local welfare. The study also finds that digital technology has begun to play a role in supporting tourism promotion and creative economy activities. However, its utilization remains relatively basic and uneven due to variations in digital literacy and resource availability. This condition limits the potential of digital transformation as a driver of competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted solely in Kuningan Regency, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-cultural and economic characteristics. Second, the qualitative approach using interviews and FGDs relies on participants' subjective perceptions, which may introduce potential response bias. Third, the cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time, preventing the observation of long-term dynamics and changes in tourism development. Fourth, the study did not quantitatively measure the economic impact of local wisdom-based tourism, such as income generation or employment multipliers. Future research should address these limitations by conducting comparative studies across multiple regions, employing mixed-method approaches, and incorporating longitudinal designs.

Overall, the study concludes that achieving sustainable tourism and creative economy development in Kuningan requires a more integrated strategy that aligns local wisdom, community participation, digital innovation, and institutional collaboration. These findings directly address the research objective by providing an evidence-based framework for strengthening the role of local wisdom in building a competitive and sustainable tourism ecosystem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, this study proposes a more integrated and holistic development approach. Future strategies should prioritize equitable access, continuous capacity building, and the strengthening of digital ecosystems. In addition, sustainable tourism development in Kuningan requires a shift from fragmented, event-based initiatives toward a long-term, system-oriented framework grounded in collaboration. From a practical perspective, the government should reposition its role as a facilitator by ensuring policy consistency, improving infrastructure, and enabling inclusive participation. Local communities should be empowered as key actors in cultural preservation and tourism innovation, while the private sector is expected to contribute through investment, technological adoption, and the development of creative products. The pentahelix collaboration model must be institutionalized to ensure sustained synergy among stakeholders. In conclusion, the future of tourism and the creative economy in Kuningan depends on the ability to integrate local wisdom, community participation, digital innovation, and collaborative governance into a cohesive development model. Such an approach will not only enhance destination competitiveness but also ensure social equity, cultural sustainability, and long-term economic resilience.

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