

# Gateway to Disparity: The Tourism-Education-Culture Trilemma and Structural Inequality in West Manggarai Regency

## (A Political Economy and Sociological Analysis of Regional Development)

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**Abstract.** This study examines the developmental trilemma in West Manggarai, where tourism acceleration undermines educational progress and cultural authenticity. Using qualitative-descriptive analysis of the West Manggarai Educational Development Transformation Roadmap 2025–2045, supported by tourism data and cultural policy documents, the research identifies a pattern of “growth without inclusion.” Despite rapid development in Labuan Bajo as a Super Priority Tourism Destination, 80% of strategic positions are occupied by external workers, while local communities face educational limitations, reflected in an average of 8.12 years of schooling and less than 50% achieving minimum competency. Drawing on the Matthew Effect and alienation theory, the study reveals economic displacement, exclusion from decision-making, and cultural commodification, where traditions lose their philosophical meaning. It concludes that culture-based educational transformation is essential to foster inclusive tourism, strengthen local identity, and ensure sustainable, community-centered development.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Education, Culture, educational transformation, cultural capital, hybrid identity, Matthew Effect.

## 1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, global tourism has experienced rapid growth and played a central role in the economic development of various countries. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) report, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector contributed more than 10% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and became one of the largest employment sectors [1]. This trend shows that tourism is not just a service sector but also a strategic instrument for accelerating development in developing countries. In Southeast Asia, tourism has become a main pillar of sustainable development, driving investment, creating job opportunities, and strengthening cultural diplomacy [2]. However, various studies show that tourism growth not balanced with human resource development can create a paradox: regions gain macroeconomic benefits, but local communities do not always become the main beneficiaries [3].

This phenomenon is clearly visible in Indonesia, particularly in areas designated as Super Priority Tourism Destinations (DPSP). One of these is Labuan Bajo, the capital of West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. Its strategic geographical position at the entrance to Komodo National Park has made Labuan Bajo widely known as one of Indonesia's international tourism icons [4]. In recent years, massive investment flows for tourism infrastructure development, such as airports, ports, starred hotels, and convention centers, have transformed this small town into a world-class tourism gateway. The central government has positioned Labuan Bajo as “The New Bali” with the vision of making it a driver of national economic growth, particularly from the tourism sector [5].

This study's analysis of the *West Manggarai Educational Development Transformation Roadmap 2025-2045* provides a unique analytical lens absent from previous tourism studies in Labuan Bajo. While existing research examines tourism's socio-economic impacts (Sianipar et al. 2022) or environmental pressures on Komodo National Park (Hadiningrat et al. 2025), few investigate how educational planning documents themselves reveal systemic exclusion mechanisms. The Roadmap's data on the 8.12-year average schooling-equivalent to junior high completion-directly explains why locals cannot access strategic tourism positions requiring hospitality diplomas, international certifications, or foreign language fluency. This educational deficit perpetuates what Merton (1968) termed the Matthew Effect: external workers with pre-existing advantages (university degrees, English proficiency, networks) accumulate further benefits through high-wage tourism jobs, while locals without quality education remain trapped in low-skill positions. The “Komodo Gate” metaphor thus operates as a Matthew Effect mechanism, a gateway that paradoxically opens opportunities for outsiders while closing them for locals. Each tourism investment widens this gate for external capital and labor while educational stagnation keeps it shut for indigenous communities. By analyzing educational policy documents alongside tourism and cultural data, this research exposes how state planning inadvertently institutionalizes disparity through misaligned sectoral development, where tourism infrastructure races ahead while human capital development lags generationally behind.

The cultural dimension of this trilemma is equally critical yet often overlooked in tourism development discourse. West Manggarai possesses rich cultural capital; *caci* (ritual whip-fighting dance), *songke* (traditional ikat weaving), *compang* (sacred ancestral sites), and the *Wuat Wa'i* solidarity system; that have sustained community identity for centuries. However, tourism acceleration creates a paradoxical pressure: culture becomes simultaneously a marketable asset and an endangered heritage. When sacred rituals are staged as tourist performances, their philosophical meanings risk erosion. The *caci*, originally a ceremonial test of manhood tied to harvest celebrations and conflict resolution, increasingly becomes a 15-minute spectacle scheduled between hotel check-ins. Similarly, *songke* motifs carrying cosmological narratives are mass-produced as souvenirs, severed from their ritual contexts. This cultural commodification operates alongside educational deficits and tourism exclusion to form a genuine trilemma: advancing tourism without educational transformation accelerates cultural erosion; preserving culture without economic integration perpetuates poverty; improving education without cultural grounding produces culturally alienated youth. Unlike simple multi-sectoral challenges, this trilemma represents structural contradictions where progress in one dimension actively undermines the others, creating what Bhabha (1994) terms a “third space” requiring hybrid solutions that transcend binary choices between tradition and modernity, preservation and development.

However, behind the rapid tourism growth lies a paradoxical reality that cannot be ignored. First, there is a skill gap between the needs of the premium tourism industry and the quality of local workforce. Data shows that approximately 80% of strategic positions in Labuan Bajo's formal tourism sector are still dominated by external workers who possess international certification, foreign language skills, and professional expertise (Roadmap for the Transformation of West Manggarai Education Development 2025–2045). Meanwhile, most local workers can only fill basic positions with low wages, such as lower-level hotel workers, construction laborers, or non-technical staff. This condition reflects a situation often called “internal economic colonialism,” where local communities become spectators in their own land [6].

Second, although school participation rates in West Manggarai are relatively high, educational quality still faces a serious crisis. The Average Years of Schooling (AYS) of the population is only 8.12 years, far below the Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) of 12.59 years. More than 50% of students do not achieve minimum literacy and numeracy competency, with scores far below the national average (Manggarai Regency Education Report Card and East Nusa Tenggara Education Report Card, 2024). The teacher paradox also worsens the situation: although nearly all teachers have bachelor's degrees, only a small portion pass professional certification competency tests. Thus, schools function as spaces of formality but fail to become arenas of meaningful learning. The phenomenon of “schooling without learning” becomes a fundamental problem threatening the competitiveness of West Manggarai's younger generation in the global era.

Third, local culture, which has long been the identity strength of West Manggarai society, also faces serious challenges. On one hand, cultural elements such as *caci dance*, *songke weaving*, and the *Wuat Wa'i* tradition have great potential to be developed into tourist attractions and creative economy bases. Regent Regulation No. 40 of 2024 has even provided legal framework for incorporating local content into the school curriculum. However, on the other hand, tourism industrialization risks turning culture into mere commodities displayed for tourists' interests, no longer a living identity of the community. The threat of cultural homogenization due to globalization pressures and market demands becomes an unavoidable problem [7]. Thus, it is clear that West Manggarai's development faces a “development trilogy” dilemma: tourism as the growth engine, lagging education, and culture at the crossroads between preservation and commodification. If not managed integratively, this condition can deepen social inequality, accelerate cultural identity erosion, and marginalize local communities from mainstream development.

This article aims to analyze the interconnection between tourism, education, and culture in the context of sustainable regional development in West Manggarai. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the questions: how can educational transformation strategies bridge workforce skill gaps while strengthening local cultural identity to remain relevant amid globalization currents? How can tourism development be directed to be inclusive and provide real benefits to local communities, not just bring macroeconomic profits? Through analysis based on regional planning documents, human development theory, and economic-cultural perspectives, this article is expected to provide comprehensive understanding of the development trilogy problems and offer practical recommendations for more just, inclusive, and sustainable policies.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Human Resource-Based Development Theory**

The concept of HR-based development emphasizes that the progress of a nation or region is not solely measured by economic growth, but by the improvement of human quality as development actors. Amartya Sen (1999) through *Development as Freedom* emphasizes that development must be viewed as a process of expanding human capabilities to live lives they value [8]. Education within this framework is not merely a tool for social mobility, but a means to expand life choices, shape freedom, and strengthen people's bargaining power within economic structures.

From an economic perspective, Gary Becker (1993) introduced the concept of *human capital* as the accumulation of skills, knowledge, and competencies that increase labor productivity. Investment in education is considered a long-term investment capable of transforming individual and community productivity [9]. In the context of West Manggarai, tourism development will only bring sustainable benefits if supported by improved local HR quality. Otherwise, the resulting economic growth will actually widen the gap between local communities and more competitive migrants.

### **2.2 The Concept of Educational Transformation**

In educational literature, Tyack & Cuban (1995) distinguish between reform and transformation. Reform usually focuses on incremental improvements within the old framework, such as curriculum revision, additional learning hours, or changes in evaluation methods [10]. Meanwhile, transformation demands paradigmatic change: redesigning the education system to suit the needs of the times. The World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE-Qatar, 2022) study affirms that when education faces systemic crisis, the reform approach is no longer adequate; what is needed is comprehensive transformation [11]. This transformation includes three aspects: paradigm shift (from teacher-centered to student-centered), structural change (from centralistic to autonomous-contextual systems), and cultural change (from resistance to continuous innovation).

In the West Manggarai context, educational transformation becomes highly relevant. Data shows that although school participation rates are relatively high, learning quality remains low; more than 50% of students do not achieve minimum literacy and numeracy competency. Thus, education can no longer be understood merely as schooling, but must shift to meaningful, contextual learning oriented toward both local needs and global standards.

### **2.3 Culture-Based Development**

Culture is often viewed as static heritage, but cultural economists affirm that culture can also become development capital. Throsby (2001) introduced the concept of *cultural capital*, namely values, practices, and cultural expressions that have both economic and social functions [12]. Cultural capital not only functions as identity but can also become a competitive asset in the creative economy. Meanwhile, John Howkins (2001) in *The Creative Economy* emphasizes that culture-based innovation can create significant economic value [12]. Creativity rooted in local heritage can produce unique products and services, difficult to replicate, and relevant in global

markets. Richard Florida (2002) through *The Rise of the Creative Class* adds that cities or regions that successfully combine creativity, technology, and tolerance tend to become new economic growth centers [13].

For West Manggarai, cultural potential such as *caci* dance, *songke* weaving, or the *Wuat Wa'i* solidarity tradition can function dually: as a means of identity preservation and as an economic resource. However, cultural integration in development must be careful not to fall into excessive commodification that actually weakens the cultural meaning itself.

## **2.4 Sustainable Tourism and Its Relationship with Education**

Sustainable tourism emphasizes three dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental. This concept demands that tourism not only bring short-term financial profits but also maintain ecological balance and strengthen social cohesion. Within this framework, education plays a role as the main connector [14]. First, education can equip local communities with skills relevant to the tourism industry, such as foreign language abilities, service management, or community-based destination management. Second, education can instill critical awareness about the importance of preserving culture and environment so tourism remains sustainable. Third, education can build flexible dual identity: West Manggarai's younger generation remains rooted in local culture but is also open and competitive in the global arena.

## **2.5 Case Studies and the Concept of Hybrid Identity**

Bali's experience provides the most tangible example of tourism development paradox. On one hand, Bali's tourism has brought large foreign exchange and improved welfare. However, on the other hand, mass tourism creates environmental problems, cultural commodification, and economic dependence on the tourism sector. To address this, Bali began developing a community-based tourism approach emphasizing local culture-based tourism education [15].

Meanwhile, Yogyakarta presents a different model: combining higher education, culture, and creative tourism. As a student city, Yogyakarta integrates traditional arts and creative economy in curriculum and community development. This shows how education can function as a negotiation space between globalization and tradition [16].

In postcolonial theory context, Homi K. Bhabha introduced the concept of *Hybrid Identity* in his book 'The Location of Culture' (1994), which describes how local culture interacts with global culture. Identity is no longer seen as something static, but rather as the result of negotiation, encounter, and even resistance. Hybrid identity allows communities to maintain local cultural roots while adopting relevant global elements [17].

For West Manggarai, the hybrid identity concept is highly relevant. Education can become an arena for forming hybrid identity in the younger generation: they continue practicing Manggarai cultural values but also master global skills such as digital technology, foreign languages, and tourism management. Thus, the younger generation is not uprooted from its roots but is actually able to make culture a competitive advantage in the global world.

## **2.6 Matthew Effect and Alienation in Development Context**

To understand the inequality mechanism occurring in West Manggarai, two sociological concepts become highly relevant: Matthew Effect from Robert K. Merton and Alienation from Karl Marx. The Matthew Effect, formulated by Merton (1968) based on Matthew 25:29 (“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away”), explains how initial advantages tend to accumulate cumulatively [18]. In the context of education and tourism in West Manggarai, this phenomenon is clear: external workers who already have skills, international certification, and networks continue to get strategic positions and high wages, while local communities without access to quality education become increasingly marginalized. This gap is self-reinforcing: children from families already integrated into the tourism economy have better access to education, while children from lagging farming families remain trapped in the cycle of educational poverty [19].

Marx's concept of Alienation (1844) describes the condition where workers are alienated from their work products, work processes, their essence, and fellow humans in the capitalist system [20]. In West Manggarai, contemporary forms of alienation manifest in several ways: First, alienation from product, where local communities working in the tourism sector do not feel ownership over the tourist experiences they create; the results are enjoyed by external investors. Second, alienation from process, where they only fill low-skilled positions without control over how tourism is managed. Third, cultural alienation, traditions like *caci* and *songke* that were originally communally meaningful become tourist commodities foreign to the younger generation. Fourth, social alienation, economic inequality creates distance between marginalized local communities and the “new class” integrated into the tourism economy.

The combination of Matthew Effect and alienation concept explains why “growth without inclusion” occurs: the existing system structurally benefits those who already have capital (education, skills, networks) while alienating those without access. Without transformative intervention in education, this cycle will continue to reproduce, deepening intergenerational inequality.

## **3. Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach to examine West Manggarai's educational development planning within the tourism-education-culture trilemma. The qualitative design was selected due to the multidimensional complexity requiring deep interpretation of policy texts, development narratives, and strategic visions, while the descriptive component maps existing conditions and policy directions holistically [21]

The primary data source is the West Manggarai Educational Development Transformation Roadmap 2025-2045, specifically Part I (Existing Educational Conditions 2025) containing quantitative indicators and qualitative analysis of development challenges, and Part II (Vision, Mission, and Strategic Direction). To strengthen triangulation and address the tourism-education-culture trilemma comprehensively, this study incorporates secondary sources including West Manggarai's Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARDA), recent BPS statistical data on education participation and tourism workforce composition, and regional development policy documents. This multi-source approach enables cross-validation of

development priorities and identification of policy gaps between educational planning and tourism-cultural sector demands.

Analysis employs three complementary frameworks: (1) SWOT analysis identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in educational development within tourism-cultural contexts; (2) CIPP evaluation model assessing policy design from Context (formulation background), Input (resource allocation), Process (implementation mechanisms), to Product (human resource quality outcomes); (3) Focus Group Discussion insights from roadmap preparation capturing stakeholder perspectives (government officials, educators, traditional leaders, tourism actors, community representatives).

The study utilizes critical discourse analysis as the primary qualitative technique, examining power relations, ideological assumptions, and marginalization patterns embedded in policy language. This involves three stages: (1) textual interpretation analyzing policy visions, missions, and strategic directions for implicit biases regarding local knowledge systems; (2) structured data analysis transforming quantitative indicators into relational findings revealing educational disparities; (3) diagram visualization clarifying inter-variable patterns comparing West Manggarai's achievements against national targets and tourism workforce requirements. While the current study focuses on document analysis, future research incorporating field observations and community interviews would significantly strengthen empirical understanding of experienced alienation and educational disparities.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Tourism as Growth Engine**

Tourism has become the main locomotive of West Manggarai's economic development, especially since Labuan Bajo's designation as a Super Priority Tourism Destination (DPSP). Data shows that tourism's contribution to West Manggarai's GRDP continues to increase year by year, surpassing traditional sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and livestock. Supporting infrastructure, such as airport expansion, port construction, starred hotels, and convention centers, drives the acceleration of transformation of this small town at the western tip of Flores into a world-class tourism destination.

However, behind this economic success lies a significant paradox. Approximately 80% of tourism sector workers are filled by external workers brought in from other regions. This indicates a serious gap between global tourism industry needs and local workforce qualifications. Most West Manggarai communities only occupy low-skilled positions such as lower-level hotel staff, construction laborers, or informal workers, while managerial, technical, and professional positions are filled by external workers who have foreign language skills, international certification, and industry experience.

This phenomenon creates a dualistic economy [22]. This tourism-driven displacement manifests in three intersecting ways: physically, as prime agricultural lands are acquired for resort development; economically, as traditional livelihoods become unviable; and culturally, as sacred sites like Wae Rebo transform into tourist attractions, creating tension between cultural preservation imperatives and tourism education demands that schools struggle to reconcile. On

one hand, premium tourism develops rapidly, driving modern consumption, investment, and new job creation. However, on the other hand, the agricultural sector that has been the backbone of the local economy stagnates or even declines. Many agricultural lands are converted for tourism facility construction, while the younger generation leaves agriculture because it is considered unpromising [23]. Consequently, polarization occurs between those integrated into the premium tourism economy and those left behind in traditional sectors.

#### **4.2 Education in Systemic Crisis**

The education crisis in West Manggarai is clearly depicted in macro and micro indicators. First, Average Years of Schooling (AYS) only reaches 8.12 years, far below the national target of 9.13 years. This means the majority of the population stops at junior high school level, with a small portion continuing to senior high school or college. Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) is actually higher, at 12.59 years, but the gap between AYS and EYS shows serious problems in educational participation sustainability. Second, student competency achievement remains low. Data shows that less than 50% of West Manggarai students achieve minimum literacy and numeracy competency. Literacy scores are only 52.7 and numeracy 49.8, both far behind the national average (64.9 and 62.3). This condition shows the phenomenon of schooling without learning, where children do attend school but do not acquire basic skills needed to participate in the modern economy [24]. Third, there is a teacher paradox. Nearly 95% of teachers have bachelor's or diploma four degrees, but only about 25% have professional certification. This shows a gap between formal qualifications and substantive competence. This certification gap critically undermines tourism-education linkages: uncertified teachers lack hospitality pedagogy, international service standards knowledge, and foreign language proficiency needed to prepare students for premium tourism careers. Consequently, the curriculum cannot bridge the chasm between traditional Manggarai cultural knowledge and global tourism industry competency requirements, perpetuating external worker dependence. Teachers may have met administrative standards but have not fully mastered innovative pedagogy, digital literacy, and active learning methodologies needed to drive educational transformation.

The combination of these factors shows that West Manggarai's education system is in systemic crisis: access is relatively open, but quality still lags far behind. Without serious intervention, this system will continue producing graduates who are not competitive in the global labor market, especially the premium tourism sector.

#### **4.3 Culture as Strength and Threat**

West Manggarai's culture has a strategic position in the development trilogy. Traditions such as *caci dance*, *songke weaving*, and the *Wuat Wa'i* social solidarity system are not only identity heritage but also potentially become economic capital through tourism and creative economy. Local government has provided legal framework through Regent Regulation No. 40 of 2024, which integrates local content into the education curriculum. This is an important step in maintaining cultural sustainability while equipping the younger generation with strong local identity.

However, tourism industrialization also brings serious threats. Culture risks experiencing homogenization and commodification [25]. The trilemma's intersection becomes most visible in the lived experiences of Manggarai youth: they master Caci rituals and Songke patterns in

cultural education programs yet lack Tourism English proficiency demanded by hotels; they complete senior high school (approaching the 12.59 EYS target) but achieve only 49.8 numeracy scores insufficient for revenue management positions; they witness their cultural heritage monetized through tourism yet remain economically marginalized as spectators rather than beneficiaries. This triple alienation, from traditional livelihoods, from modern employment, and from their own commodified culture, creates a lost generation scenario where neither cultural preservation nor tourism integration succeeds, because educational transformation capable of bridging these domains remains unrealized. The roadmap's ambitions thus confront harsh empirical realities. Originally sacred cultural practices can be reduced to mere performances for tourists, losing their philosophical meaning. In the long term, this can weaken community social bonds and make culture merely “merchandise.” The biggest challenge is how to keep culture alive and meaningful for local communities while still being promoted as a sustainable tourism attraction.

#### 4.4 Findings Visualization

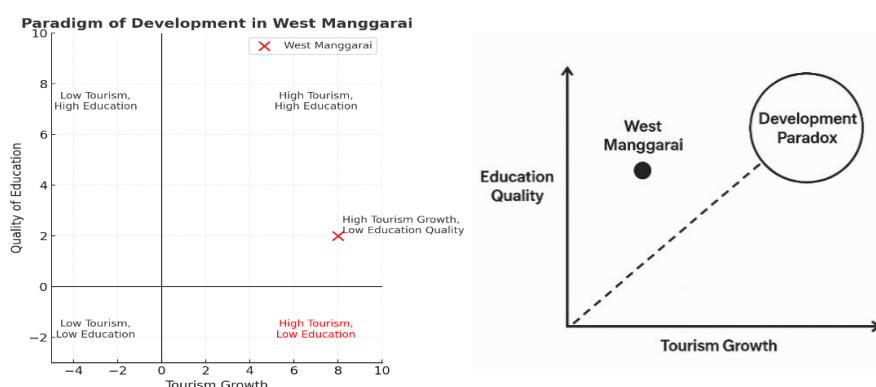
The table highlights significant disparities between West Manggarai and national education targets, confirming a systemic learning crisis that reinforces inequality and limits local participation in tourism-driven development.

Table 1. Comparison of Educational Indicators: West Manggarai vs. National Targets

Educational Indicator	West Manggarai	National Target
Average Years of Schooling	8.12 years	9.13 years
Literacy Score	52.7	64.9
Numeracy Score	49.8	62.3
Students Achieving Minimum Competency	< 50%	> 75%
Certified Teachers	25%	> 80%

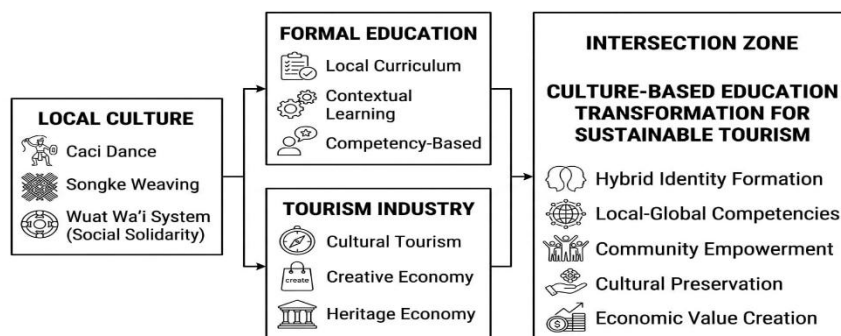
(Source: Roadmap for Educational Development Transformation, West Manggarai 2025-2045)

**Figure 1** illustrates the development paradox in West Manggarai, where rapid tourism growth is not matched by educational quality, positioning the region in a high-tourism, low-education quadrant that reinforces structural inequality and exclusion of local communities.



**Fig. 1.** Illustrates the development paradox in West Manggarai.

Figure 2 illustrates the strategic convergence of local culture, formal education, and the tourism industry as a transformative pathway to overcome structural inequality. It highlights culture-



based education as a bridge for fostering hybrid identity, community empowerment, and sustainable, inclusive tourism development.

**Fig. 2.** Integrated Culture, Education, Tourism Framework for Sustainable Development

#### Figure Legend

- a. Box 1 (Left): Local Culture. Represents indigenous cultural assets, including traditional practices such as *Caci dance*, *Songke weaving*, and the *Wuat Wa'i* system of social solidarity, which form the foundational cultural capital.
- b. Box 2 (Top Center): Formal Education. Refers to institutional learning systems that integrate local curriculum content, apply contextual learning approaches, and emphasize competency-based education.
- c. Box 3 (Bottom Center): Tourism Industry. Encompasses sectors such as cultural tourism, the creative economy, and heritage-based economic activities that transform cultural resources into sustainable economic value.
- d. Box 4 (Right): Intersection Zone. Represents the convergence of local culture, formal education, and the tourism industry. This integration generates a culture-based educational transformation that supports sustainable tourism through hybrid identity formation, local-global competencies, community empowerment, cultural preservation, and economic value creation.

(Source: Synthesized from West Manggarai Educational Development Transformation Roadmap 2025-204)

#### 4.5 Critical Synthesis of Findings: West Manggarai's Development Crossroads

West Manggarai is currently at a crossroads that will determine the direction of its future development. This region's economic growth is driven by the tourism industry, especially after Labuan Bajo was designated as one of the national super priority destinations. Tourism has become the main economic engine, creating new jobs and attracting investment [26]. However, this dynamic contains a paradox: most local communities have not truly been integrated into the tourism value chain. Rather than becoming main actors, communities more often play roles as spectators or merely provide low-level services. Dependence on tourist flows also makes the economy vulnerable to external shocks, such as global crises or pandemics.

On the other hand, education as the main foundation of human development still faces serious challenges. Access and quality of educational services remain uneven, teacher capacity is still limited, and curricula are often not contextual to either local reality or global demands. This

condition has the potential to create a *lost generation*, namely a younger generation that fails to compete both locally and internationally [27]. Ironically, when tourism develops rapidly, local HR lags behind and many job opportunities are filled by workers from outside the region. If fundamental transformation is not immediately carried out in the education system, then West Manggarai's development sustainability will be fragile.

Meanwhile, local culture has extraordinary potential as a source of identity, tourist attraction, and social capital. Traditions such as *Caci dance*, *Songke weaving*, and the *Wuat Wa'i* solidarity system are invaluable wealth. However, this culture also faces serious threats: excessive commodification that reduces sacred values to mere commercial spectacle [28]. If culture is only viewed as a product for sale, then its essence as a source of meaning, solidarity, and life wisdom will erode.

The trilemma's intersection becomes most visible in the lived experiences of Manggarai youth: they master Caci rituals and Songke patterns in cultural education programs yet lack Tourism English proficiency demanded by hotels; they complete senior high school (approaching the 12.59 EYS target) but achieve only 49.8 numeracy scores insufficient for revenue management positions; they witness their cultural heritage monetized through tourism yet remain economically marginalized as spectators rather than beneficiaries. This triple alienation, from traditional livelihoods, from modern employment, and from their own commodified culture, creates a lost generation scenario where neither cultural preservation nor tourism integration succeeds, because educational transformation capable of bridging these domains remains unrealized. The roadmap's ambitions thus confront harsh empirical realities.

From these three dimensions, it is clear that West Manggarai's development requires an integrative strategy. First, education must transform to become more contextual, rooted in local culture, yet still prepare generations with global competencies. Second, tourism must be directed toward a sustainable model that not only pursues economic growth but also empowers local communities as main actors. Third, culture must be positioned not only as an attraction but also as a source of values that guides development direction. By connecting these three aspects synergistically, West Manggarai can escape the development paradox. The way forward is to make culture-based education a bridge that ensures tourism grows sustainably, communities are empowered, and cultural heritage remains preserved.

## **5. Discussion And Analysis**

This research's findings reveal that West Manggarai faces a complex development trilemma: tourism develops rapidly, but education lags behind, and culture is at the crossroads between preservation and commodification. This discussion will analyze how these three dimensions are interconnected and why transformative intervention in education becomes key to breaking the structured inequality cycle.

### **5.1 Growth Without Inclusion Paradox: Matthew Effect in Tourism Context**

The tourism boom's Matthew Effect cannot be understood in isolation from educational deficits and cultural commodification; these three forces create a trilemma where rapid tourism growth simultaneously demands skilled labor (which education fails to supply) while eroding cultural authenticity (which tourism simultaneously exploits and destroys).

Data shows that although tourism has become West Manggarai's economic growth engine, about 80% of strategic positions are still dominated by external workers. This phenomenon can be explained through Merton's (1968) *Matthew Effect* concept, where those who already have initial capital, in the form of skills, international certification, and networks, continue accumulating advantages, while local communities without access to quality education become increasingly marginalized. This gap is *self-reinforcing*: children from families already integrated into the tourism economy have better access to quality education, while children from farming or fishing families remain trapped in the educational poverty cycle [29]. This alienation manifests both physically through land acquisition for hotel construction displacing farming communities, and intellectually as school curricula fail to equip students with five-star hospitality skills, creating a double marginalization that reinforces the Matthew Effect across generations.

This condition contradicts Sen's (1999) HR-based development concept, which emphasizes that true development is the expansion of human capabilities to live lives they value. In West Manggarai's context, local communities actually experience narrowing life choices: they cannot compete in the premium tourism sector due to skill limitations, while traditional sectors like agriculture stagnate due to land conversion and youth migration. As a result, a dualistic economy emerges that deepens social inequality [22].

Furthermore, Marx's (1844) alienation concept becomes relevant for understanding local communities' experiences. They experience alienation from work products (tourism results enjoyed by external investors), alienation from work processes (no control over tourism management), and cultural alienation (traditions like *caci* and *songke* become commodities foreign to the younger generation) [20]. Without transformative intervention, this alienation cycle will continue reproducing across generations.

## 5.2 Educational Crisis as Root of Structural Inequality

West Manggarai's educational data reveals a systemic crisis threatening development sustainability. Average Years of Schooling is only 8.12 years, far below the national target of 9.13 years. More worryingly, competency achievement shows that less than 50% of students reach minimum literacy and numeracy standards, with scores of 52.7 and 49.8 respectively, far behind the national average of 64.9 and 62.3. This condition confirms the *schooling without learning* phenomenon identified by the World Bank (2018): children do attend school but do not acquire basic skills needed to participate in the modern economy [30].

The teacher paradox worsens the situation. Although 95% of teachers have bachelor's or diploma four degrees, only 25% have professional certification, far below the 80% national target. This shows a gap between formal qualifications and substantive competence. In Gary Becker's (1993) *human capital* perspective, investment in teacher education should increase learning productivity. However, without mastery of innovative pedagogy, digital literacy, and active learning methodologies, this investment does not produce expected quality transformation. This 70-percentage-point gap between degree holders and certified professionals directly impacts graduate quality: uncertified teachers cannot deliver competency-based tourism education, perpetuating the cycle where 80% of strategic tourism positions remain inaccessible to local youth, transforming the Komodo Gate into a Gate of Disparity [31].

Tyack & Cuban's (1995) study distinguishes between educational reform and transformation. In West Manggarai's context, incremental reform approaches, such as curriculum revision or additional learning hours, are no longer adequate [32]. What is needed is paradigmatic transformation: from *teacher-centered* to *student-centered*, from centralistic systems to autonomous-contextual, and from resistance toward continuous innovation [10]. Education must shift from merely *schooling* to meaningful, contextual *learning* oriented toward both local needs and global standards.

### 5.3 Culture as Development Capital or Market Commodity?

West Manggarai's culture, such as *caci* dance, *songke* weaving, and the *Wuat Wa'i* solidarity system, has dual potential: as identity that strengthens social cohesion and as economic capital in tourism and creative economy industries. Throsby's (2001) *cultural capital* concept emphasizes that culture not only functions as static heritage but also as a competitive asset that can create economic value [33]. Regent Regulation No. 40 of 2024 integrating local content in curriculum is a strategic step to ensure cultural sustainability across generations.

However, tourism industrialization brings serious risks: excessive commodification that reduces culture to mere commercial spectacle. When originally sacred cultural practices become performances for tourists, philosophical meaning and communal values can erode [25]. In the long term, this can cause cultural homogenization due to global market pressures, where local culture is forced to adapt to tourist tastes rather than maintain its authenticity. Yet commodification is not purely destructive; for many *Caci* performers and *Songke* weavers, tourism provides crucial livelihood survival amidst declining agriculture. The critical question is not whether to commodify but how to balance economic necessity with cultural authenticity, ensuring communities retain control over cultural representation and benefit distribution.

Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) *hybrid identity* concept offers a way out of this dilemma. Hybrid identity allows West Manggarai's younger generation to maintain local cultural roots while adopting relevant global elements. Education can become an arena for hybrid identity formation: students continue practicing Manggarai cultural values but also master global skills such as digital technology, foreign languages, and sustainable tourism management [17]. Thus, culture is not only passively maintained but transformed into a competitive advantage in the global economy.

### 5.4 Integration of Tourism, Education, and Culture: Toward Sustainable Development

**Figure 2** on Cultural Integration Scheme in Education illustrates how the three domains, local culture, formal education, and tourism industry, can be strategically integrated. The convergence zone at the diagram's center represents culture-based educational transformation that serves sustainable tourism while preserving local identity and empowering communities.

Bali and Yogyakarta's experiences provide important lessons. Bali develops *community-based tourism* emphasizing local community empowerment as main actors, not merely low-level service providers. Meanwhile, Yogyakarta successfully integrates higher education, culture, and creative tourism, making the city a tradition-based innovation center [16]. These models show that sustainable tourism requires three pillars [34]: education that equips communities with

relevant skills, cultural preservation that is not merely symbolic, and inclusive tourism governance [35].

For West Manggarai, this integrative strategy demands paradigm change [36]. First, education must be directed to produce graduates who not only master global competencies but also have deep understanding of local culture and sustainability values. Second, tourism must be developed with a community-based approach, where local communities do not merely become objects but subjects of development. Third, culture must be positioned as a source of values guiding development direction, not merely commercial attractions. Hybrid Identity operationalization requires concrete curricular action: schools must simultaneously teach Tourism English for hotel industry competitiveness while preserving Manggarai oral literature transmission, integrating Songke geometric patterns into mathematics lessons, and using Caci philosophy to teach conflict resolution, thus making culture both heritage and competitive advantage. Without culture-based educational transformation oriented toward sustainable tourism, West Manggarai will remain trapped in paradox: economic growth without equity, modernization without roots, and development without sustainability. Therefore, education must become a bridge ensuring tourism grows inclusively, communities are empowered, and cultural heritage remains preserved.

While the 2025-2045 Roadmap ambitiously targets educational transformation, critical assessment reveals implementation gaps: without addressing the teacher certification crisis (25% vs 80% target) and establishing industry-education partnerships, the roadmap risks becoming aspirational rhetoric unable to dismantle the entrenched 80% external worker dominance within the 20-year timeframe.

## **6. Conclusion And Recommendations**

This study reveals that West Manggarai is at a critical development crossroads, facing a complex trilemma between tourism acceleration, educational stagnation, and cultural preservation dilemmas. Labuan Bajo's designation as a Super Priority Tourism Destination has driven significant economic growth but created a "growth without inclusion" paradox where 80% of strategic positions are controlled by external workers, while local communities are marginalized in low-skilled roles. This phenomenon is reinforced by the Matthew Effect mechanism that deepens structural inequality across generations. The root problem lies in systemic educational crisis. With Average Years of Schooling of only 8.12 years and less than 50% of students achieving minimum literacy-numeracy competency, the education system fails to equip the younger generation with relevant skills to compete in the global tourism industry. The teacher paradox, 95% holding bachelor's degrees but only 25% professionally certified, shows a gap between formal credentials and substantive competence, producing the schooling without learning phenomenon.

Meanwhile, local culture faces a dual threat: on one hand potentially becoming economic capital through the cultural capital concept, but on the other hand risking excessive commodification that erodes philosophical meaning and communal values. Tourism industrialization can reduce sacred traditions like caci dance and songke weaving to mere commercial spectacles, creating cultural alienation for the younger generation. The way out of this trilemma requires paradigmatic transformation, not merely incremental reform. Education must become an integrative bridge that: (1) equips students with global competencies without uprooting them

from local cultural roots; (2) forms hybrid identity that enables the younger generation to make culture a competitive advantage; (3) promotes inclusive and sustainable community-based tourism. Without immediate transformative intervention, West Manggarai risks experiencing modernization without roots, growth without equity, and unsustainable development, making local communities spectators in their own land.

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