

Phinisi as Living Maritime Heritage: Integration of Cultural Preservation and Sustainable Tourism in Tana Beru, South Sulawesi

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Abstract

Phinisi is a traditional sailing vessel and a living maritime heritage associated with the boatbuilding communities of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Its growing use in tourism creates opportunities to communicate maritime knowledge and support livelihoods, while also raising questions about cultural authenticity, community participation, and the continuity of traditional skills. This qualitative case study examines how Phinisi is maintained as living heritage and how its use in tourism intersects with cultural preservation and sustainable tourism in Tana Beru. The research use in-depth semi-structured interviews with boatbuilders, cultural practitioners, Phinisi owners and managers, a tour guide, boat crews, local residents, and tourists, supported by field observations and document review. There are 18 informants were selected purposively based on their direct knowledge of boatbuilding, heritage practices, or Phinisi-related tourism. Data were interpreted thematically by coding statements about heritage knowledge, transmission, tourism adaptation, community roles, authenticity, and sustainability, and comparing patterns across sources. The evidence presented most clearly supports three findings: Phinisi is valued through both the vessel and the knowledge and customs involved in its construction; tourism has shifted some uses of Phinisi toward experiential and cultural tourism; and community members contribute to heritage practices as well as tourism services.

Keywords: Phinisi, living maritime heritage, cultural preservation, sustainable tourism, community participations

A. Introduction

In societies whose historical, social, and economic development is intimately linked to the sea, maritime heritage plays a significant role in defining cultural identity (Delaney & Frangoudes, 2024). Traditional vessels are more than just tangible means of transportation; they represent indigenous knowledge, craftsmanship, social relationships, cultural values, rituals, and collective memories that are passed down through the generations. In this context, cultural heritage can be understood not only as something that needs to be preserved but also as a living practice that continues to evolve in response to current social and economic changes (Perwitasari et al., 2025). This view is especially pertinent to the Phinisi, a traditional sailing vessel connected to the maritime communities of South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

One of the most important examples of Indonesia's maritime cultural legacy is the Phinisi (Syafudin et al., 2024). "Pinisi, art of boatbuilding in South Sulawesi" was added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2017. (Poplawska, 2025) According to UNESCO, Austronesian boatbuilding and navigation have a lengthy history, which includes Phinisi boatbuilding and sailing. In places like Tana Beru and Bira, the tradition is ingrained in the social, economic, and cultural lives of communities, and knowledge and skills are passed down through family ties and labor divisions. Specialists with expertise in the technical, social, and ceremonial aspects of boatbuilding, such as Panrita Lopi and Sawi, are also part of the tradition.

Phinisi's significance goes beyond the actual vessel, as evidenced by its designation as intangible cultural heritage. The knowledge, abilities, customs, connections, and cultural connotations connected to the building and operation of the vessel are what give it its value. The preservation of raw materials, environmental sustainability, and the efficient transfer of information and skills to future generations are just a few of the challenges that UNESCO's safeguarding framework highlights as being closely related to the tradition's continuation. These issues show that protecting Phinisi calls for more than just preserving current boats; it also calls for preserving the cultural ecology that makes Phinisi-related knowledge and customs applicable and adaptable.

Simultaneously, Phinisi has grown to be connected more and more with modern tourism, especially maritime and experience travel. The ship is presently utilized to enhance tourism experiences in Indonesia's coastal and island locations, going beyond its original purposes. This change establishes a significant connection between tourism and cultural heritage. In addition to offering travelers transportation across maritime environments, Phinisi has the potential to develop into a cultural hub where guests can experience indigenous knowledge, traditional boatbuilding, local food, seafaring customs, maritime narratives, and community interactions (Rozaki, 2022). In this way, tourism can both raise public awareness of marine heritage and offer financial incentives for preserving customs.

Combining tourism and history also presents a challenging environmental issue. Economic benefits may result from the commercialization of cultural heritage, but there may also be conflicts about ownership, community involvement, cultural authenticity, and the significance of legacy. (Purwaningrum, 2019) It is possible that Phinisi's cultural aspects will be reduced to tourist attractions or visual symbols when it is marketed primarily as a tourism destination, failing to sufficiently preserve the customs and knowledge that make up the heritage itself. Therefore, Phinisi's continuous existence as a physical vessel should not be taken as proof of cultural survival.

When considering Phinisi as living maritime heritage, this issue becomes very significant. The idea of "living heritage" highlights how societies constantly practice, interpret, transmit, and change their legacy. According to this viewpoint, cultural preservation does not always include keeping Phinisi exactly as it was in the past. Instead, (Sain & Nurtina, 2024) preservation entails allowing the practice to adapt to modern circumstances while preserving the knowledge, values, abilities, social connections, and cultural meanings ingrained in the tradition. The ongoing participation of Panrita Lopi, Sawi, communities, and younger students in the dissemination of boatbuilding skills is demonstrated in UNESCO's documentation. (Ulfa et al., 2022)

The study asks: (1) How do heritage practitioners and community members describe and maintain Phinisi as living maritime heritage? (2) How is Phinisi being adapted for contemporary tourism, and what cultural opportunities or tensions do stakeholders identify? (3) What roles do community participation and cultural interpretation play in connecting Phinisi tourism with cultural continuity? The study contributes a qualitative, context-specific account of these connections while distinguishing findings supported by the available interviews from broader sustainability implications that require further evidence.

B. Literature Review

Living Heritage

Research by (Ainul et al., 2026) with title "A Phinisi as a Cultural Tourism Vessel of Local Wisdom for the Connectivity Supporting in IKN and Eastern Indonesia Region", based on the results of the study and planning starting from the concept to the technical aspects of Phinisi, it can be recommended that the Pinisi design operate in the eastern region of Indonesia, including the IKN. The Phinisi design is a mode of marine tourism transportation connecting the IKN, buffer areas, and the eastern region of Indonesia in realizing integrated marine tourism. The Phinisi design is themed ethno-tourism based on integrated maritime and adopts local cultural wisdom as a symbol of Indonesia's maritime glory in the past.

Heritage Tourism, Authenticity, and Adaptation

According to (Demmallino et al., 2026) the indigenous marine knowledge systems of the Tanjung Bira people, notably their mastery of phinisi boat navigation, reflect a profound synthesis of local experience with environmental awareness. These techniques, which have been handed down through the generations, allow mariners to use natural cues like winds, ocean currents, waves, and celestial bodies to navigate the dangerous waters of Indonesia's archipelago. The Tanjung Bira sailors' "better to sink than to return" mentality highlights the cultural importance of thorough mental and technical preparation before setting sail. This traditional knowledge system not only supports the preservation of cultural heritage but also offers valuable insights for contemporary maritime education and tourism.

Research by (David & Adi, 2025) explain that cruise has become an integral part of civilization humans, especially in Indonesia which is an archipelagic country and also reflects values culture, tradition and identity public maritime. However, modernization and globalization has bring challenge significant to preservation culture maritime, where many practice traditional start eroded by technology and change social. Research by (Siliutina et al., 2024) aims to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with the digitization of cultural heritage. It seeks to provide insights into the dynamic interplay between technological advancements and the preservation, documentation, and promotion of cultural landmarks.

Community Participation and Sustainable Tourism

According to (Hiswara et al., 2023) cultural preservation in the face of globalization is a pressing concern for diverse societies worldwide. This research delves into the complexities of sustaining cultural heritage in the rich and diverse landscape of Indonesian culture, a nation with a mosaic of traditions, languages, arts, and customs. Sustainable tourism therefore requires evidence about who participates, who decides, and how costs and benefits are distributed. In this study, these concepts are used as analytical lenses; claims about equitable benefit-sharing or environmental sustainability are made only where the field evidence can support them.

The literature points to three connected concerns: (1) the continuity of knowledge and practice that makes Phinisi living heritage; (2) the transformation of Phinisi into a tourism experience; and (3) the role of community members in interpreting, maintaining, and adapting the tradition. The study brings these concerns together in the Tana Beru case. Its proposed contribution is an interpretive connection among heritage knowledge, tourism adaptation, community involvement, and authenticity—not a tested causal model or proof that tourism has already delivered environmental or equitable economic outcomes.

C. Research Methods

This study used a qualitative case study design to examine Phinisi as living maritime heritage in its real-life cultural and tourism context (Baxter & Jack, 2008) because the study focuses on meanings, experiences, cultural practices, community viewpoints, and processes that are difficult to accurately describe through numerical measurement. The main data collection method was in-depth semi-structured interviewing, supplemented by field observations and document analysis. The field setting was Tana Beru, Bulukumba, South Sulawesi, a location associated with traditional Phinisi boatbuilding. This research was conducted in May 2026.

According to (Yin, 2023), case study research is suitable for examining contemporary phenomena within their real-world contexts and is especially helpful when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly separated. The case study design was deemed appropriate because the research examines Phinisi within its real-life cultural and tourism context, particularly the interaction between traditional boatbuilding practices, heritage transmission, tourism utilization, community participation, and tourist experience. Participants were selected purposively because they had direct experience or knowledge relevant to Phinisi construction, cultural practices, tourism operations, community life, or visitor experience. The informant categories recorded in the current manuscript are listed in Table 1.

The research was conducted in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, particularly in areas associated with traditional Phinisi boatbuilding and maritime tourism, such as Tana Beru. The primary data collection method was in-depth semi-structured interviews. In-depth interviews were used because they allow participants to provide thorough explanations of their experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions surrounding Phinisi heritage and tourism. The interview guide covered: (1) the cultural meaning of Phinisi; (2) boatbuilding knowledge and intergenerational transmission; (3) changes in the use of Phinisi for tourism; (4) community roles and participation; (5) authenticity and cultural interpretation; and (6) perceived opportunities and challenges for sustainable tourism.

Table 1. Key Informants

No.	Informant's Name	Position/Role
1	Abas	Head Traditional Boatbuilder/Panrita Lopi
2	Pak Haji	Senior Cultural practitioners
3	Icha	Elbark's Phinisi Owner
4	Djanis	Elbark's Management
5	Ade	Orifo's Phinisi Owner
6	Aldi	Tour guide Tana Beru-Labuan Bajo
7	5 boat crews	Phinisi crews
8	5 people local communities	Tana Beru's local communities
9	2 tourists	Tourist who interest with boatbuildings

Source: Authors (2026)

The interview material was analyzed thematically. First, the researcher read the transcripts and field notes repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Second, meaningful passages were assigned initial codes, including traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, transmission, cultural meaning, tourism adaptation, community participation, authenticity, and commercialization. Third, related codes were grouped into candidate categories and themes. Fourth, the themes were checked against the source material and compared across informant groups. Finally, themes were interpreted in relation to living heritage and tourism-authenticity literature. The coding process should be documented with at least one worked example linking a raw quotation to its code, category, and theme.

Triangulation involved comparing interview accounts with observation notes and relevant documents where evidence was available. Differences between sources were treated as findings to examine, not automatically resolved in favor of one source. Table 2 summarizes the current analytical themes; it is a synthesis of the material presented in the manuscript.

D. Result

The results suggest that Phinisi should be viewed as a living marine heritage system with both tangible and intangible qualities (Tang & Meldawati, 2026), rather than just as a classic sailing vessel. The sailboat itself, with its design, building methods, materials, and unique sailing qualities, represents the tangible dimension. (Li, 2025) Traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, cultural values, rituals, maritime identity, social interactions, and intergenerational transmission are all included in the intangible dimension. This view is consistent with the 2017 UNESCO designation of Pinisi, a South Sulawesi boatbuilding art form, as a component of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Based on interview with all the informants, the researcher found that Phinisi as living maritime heritage is multidimensional and interconnected. The dimensions should therefore not be interpreted independently. This can be shown through table 2.

Table 2. Dimensions of Phinisi as Living Maritime Heritage

Dimension	Meaning in the Phinisi context	Indicative empirical evidence	Contribution to sustainable tourism
Traditional knowledge	Knowledge concerning boatbuilding, navigation, materials, measurements, and maritime practices	Knowledge possessed by <i>Panrita Lopi</i> and experienced boatbuilders	Maintains cultural continuity and authenticity
Craftsmanship	Practical skills involved in	Wood selection, hull construction,	Provides cultural learning

Dimension	Meaning in the Phinisi context	Indicative empirical evidence	Contribution to sustainable tourism
	constructing, repairing, and maintaining Phinisi	traditional techniques, finishing	and heritage-based tourism opportunities
Intergenerational transmission	Transfer of knowledge and skills from older to younger generations	Apprenticeship, family learning, participation of younger people	Supports long-term heritage continuity
Cultural values and practices	Rituals, beliefs, narratives, meanings, and customary practices associated with Phinisi	Boatbuilding rituals, launching ceremonies, cultural narratives	Strengthens cultural identity and interpretation
Community identity	Phinisi as a representation of maritime identity and collective memory	Community attachment and local narratives	Strengthens local ownership of tourism
Community participation	Involvement of local people in heritage safeguarding and tourism	Boatbuilders, crews, operators, cultural practitioners, residents	Supports inclusive and equitable tourism development
Maritime livelihoods	Economic relationships associated with boatbuilding, sailing, and tourism	Boatbuilding, sailing, tourism services, local businesses	Supports local economic sustainability
Tourism utilization	Contemporary use of Phinisi as a tourism experience	Sailing, liveaboard tourism, cultural interpretation	Connects heritage with visitor experience
Environmental responsibility	Relationship between Phinisi traditions, natural resources, and marine ecosystems	Sustainable material use, marine protection, responsible tourism	Connects cultural and environmental sustainability

Source: Authors Synthesis (2026)

E. Discussion

Phinisi as Living Maritime Heritage

Tana Beru is widely renowned as one of the key hubs of traditional Phinisi boatbuilding in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi, where the construction of Phinisi continues to be conducted by local Panrita Lopi (traditional boatbuilders). The region is an example of a living marine heritage landscape where cultural values, nautical customs, boatbuilding expertise, and craftsmanship are passed down through the centuries. Instead of serving only as a location for manufacturing, Tana Beru offers a cultural setting where the creation of Phinisi is still ingrained in the identity and daily lives of the local population.



Figure 1. The Gate of Phinisi boatbuilding
Source: Authors (2026)

The results of the interviews show that Phinisi is more than just a traditional boat or a destination for cultural tourism; it is a living example of maritime heritage. The knowledge, abilities, attitudes, social customs, and identities connected to boatbuilding and marine pursuits all contribute to the cultural significance of Phinisi. The head of boatbuilders (Abas, interviewed in May 2026) stated:

"Phinisi is more than just the boat. We inherit the knowledge of how to create it, as well as the measurements, the procedure, the wood, and the customs that go along with it".

According to the interviewed, Phinisi's significance is found in both its physical form and the knowledge system that underpins its creation. The UNESCO living heritage perspective, which emphasizes that the value of intangible heritage is found in the knowledge and skills passed down through cultural practices rather than just in the final cultural object, is strongly supported by this finding.

The second dimension concerns intergenerational transmission. The interview findings indicate that the sustainability of Phinisi heritage depends heavily on the ability of older generations to transfer knowledge and skills to younger

generations. Bulukumba's cultural practitioners (Pak Haji, interviewed in May 2026) stated:

"If young people no longer learn how to build Phinisi, we may still have the boats, but the knowledge and skills behind them could disappear."

The quotation identifies a perceived risk of discontinuity between the physical survival of vessels and the continuation of the knowledge needed to build them. It provides evidence of a concern about transmission, but by itself does not establish how many young people currently learn boatbuilding or whether participation has declined over time. For tourism development, the implication is that interpretation and visitor activities should not substitute for transmission itself; initiatives intended to support heritage continuity should be designed with boatbuilders and younger community members.

Transformation of Phinisi into a Tourism Product

The evolution of a modern maritime tourism from a traditional tourism to a modern maritime tourism. The information should show how Phinisi's utilization has changed, especially with regard to travel, cultural events, lodging, and maritime exploration.

Table 3. Transformation of Phinisi in Contemporary Tourism

Traditional function	Contemporary tourism function	Emerging implication
Maritime transportation	Tourism transportation	Expanded economic function
Traditional vessel	Tourism attraction	Increased visibility of heritage
Community knowledge	Tourist interpretation	Cultural knowledge becomes experiential
Maritime lifestyle	Tourism experience	Opportunities for cultural appreciation
Local craftsmanship	Tourism product identity	Economic opportunities for artisans

Source: Authors (2026)

One significant step in the preservation and reinterpretation of nautical heritage is the conversion of Phinisi from a traditional marine vessel into a modern tourism offering. The results show that Phinisi is increasingly positioned as an experiencing tourism product through activities including sailing, liveaboard tourism, cultural interpretation, and marine tourism, in addition to being a mode of transportation or a symbol of maritime culture. This change exemplifies the dynamic nature of living legacy, which allows cultural practices to be modified for modern settings while maintaining ties to their original cultural meanings. The vessel's evolving role is the main indicator of Phinisi's transition into a tourist destination. Phinisi, which has historically been linked to sailing, transportation, trade, and maritime livelihoods, is now

more frequently included in travel experiences. Elbark's management (Djanis, interviewed in May 2026) stated:

"In the past, Phinisi was mainly used for sailing and transporting goods. Today, tourists come because they want to experience sailing on a traditional Phinisi and learn about the culture behind it."

This sentence explain how experience value has replaced functional value. The boat itself becomes a component of the tourism experience, and other experiential elements include sailing, cultural tales, interacting with the crew, and seeing maritime scenery. From the standpoint of tourism experience theory, this change is significant. According to Wang (1999), a traveler's personal and interpersonal experiences can also contribute to their authenticity, which goes beyond whether a tourist attraction is objectively unique.

Phinisi can also as an experiential tourism product. The interviews further indicate that tourists are interested not merely in using Phinisi as transportation but in experiencing the cultural meanings associated with it. (Wahda a tourist from Makassar, interviewed in May 2026) state:

"The interesting part is not only being on the boat. I want to know how the boat was made, who built it, and why it is important to the local people."

This interpretation is consistent with Wang's (1999) conceptualization of authenticity. His work demonstrates that authenticity in tourism can be experienced through relationships and personal experiences rather than being determined exclusively by the physical authenticity of the tourism object.

Community Participation

A key element in turning Phinisi from a living marine legacy into a sustainable tourism destination is community involvement. Local communities participate as legacy bearers, boat builders, boat crews, tourism operators, cultural interpreters, entrepreneurs, and local stakeholders in addition to their position as tourism workers.

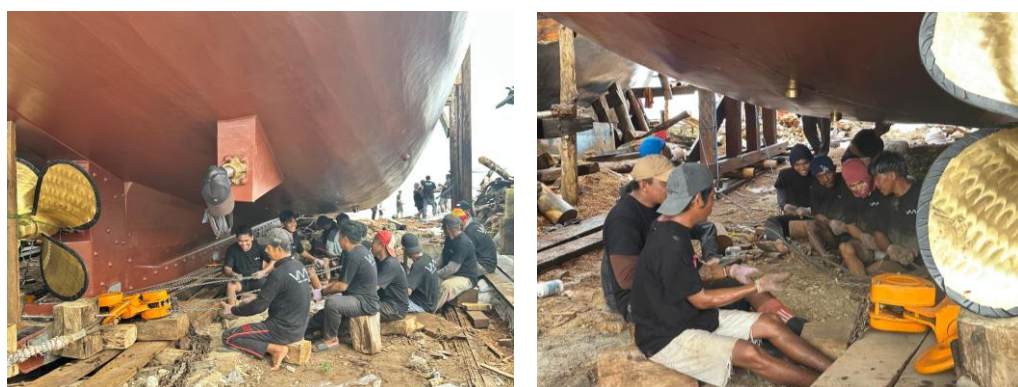


Figure 2. Boat Crews
Source: Authors (2026)

This finding is significant because the sustainability of Phinisi tourism depends on both the economic value created by tourism and the degree to

which the communities who preserve the heritage are actively involved in its growth. The first finding relates to the function of local communities in preserving and passing down Phinisi history. According to the interviews, local maritime communities and traditional boatbuilders have knowledge that is inextricably linked to their cultural identity. Traditional Boatbuilder/Panrita Lopi (Abas, interviewed in May 2026) stated:

"We are not only working to build the boat. We are also maintaining what our parents and grandparents taught us. If we stop doing this, the tradition will disappear."

This statement has a community participation in the community tourism. Locals actively preserve the customs and traditions that maintaining Phinisi's living legacy rather than merely offering services to visitors. Community participation occurs through several tourism-related activities, including boatbuilding, sailing operations, guiding, food provision, accommodation, transportation, handicrafts, and other tourism services. Local community (Mama Adya, interviewed in May 2026) stated:

"Tourism has opened opportunities for people here. Some work on the boats, some provide food, some become guides, and others sell local products."

This finding suggests that Phinisi tourism generates a local tourism value chain rather than benefits being restricted to boat owners or tourism operators. These accounts indicate that participants perceive a connection between tourism and opportunities to engage in boat-related work or services.

Cultural Preservation and Authenticity

The findings imply that cultural preservation and authenticity are important to sustaining Phinisi as living maritime heritage. Maintaining historic boatbuilding expertise, cultural meanings, rituals, craftsmanship, maritime values, and the participation of communities that continue to practice and teach these traditions are all important aspects of preservation, which goes beyond simply keeping the vessel's physical shape.



Figure 3. Laying of 'Lunas'
Source: Authors (2026)

The lunas, or keel, has both structural and symbolic significance in Phinisi boatbuilding. The main longitudinal foundation of the hull is the vessel. On the other hand, the lunas might be seen symbolically as standing for the Phinisi tradition's continuity, strength, direction, and foundation (Alamsyah et al., 2022). The positioning of the lunas is linked to customary knowledge and rituals in the cultural framework of traditional boatbuilding in South Sulawesi, demonstrating the intimate connection between boatbuilding, community values, and nautical beliefs. Therefore, the lunas signifies more than just the beginning of a physical vessel; rather, it is the beginning of a cultural process that unites knowledge, artistry, identity, and inherited customs. Because the value of the lunas is preserved by the customs and expertise of those who continue to construct Phinisi, they are especially pertinent to the idea of living marine heritage.

This viewpoint is in line with the idea of living heritage, which maintains the significance of heritage when it is still performed, passed down, and modified by its communities rather than being viewed only as a static cultural artifact. In the context of tourism, this becomes particularly crucial because the transformation of Phinisi into a tourism product can simultaneously generate opportunities for cultural transmission and impose pressures toward commercialization.

The continuation of traditional knowledge is one of the most crucial aspects of cultural preservation. Phinisi offers cumulative knowledge concerning boat design, wood selection, construction processes, sailing activities, and cultural traditions linked with boatbuilding. Traditional Boatbuilder/Panrita Lopi (Abas, interviewed in May 2026) stated:

"Phinisi is not only the boat. What we preserve is also the knowledge of how to build it, how to choose the wood, and the traditions that accompany the construction."

According to this research, preservation is more than just keeping an old vessel intact; it should also be seen as the continuation of information, skills, practices, and cultural meanings. Maintaining the physical continuity of the younger heritage may not guaranty.

The use of Phinisi in tourism also creates a potential tension between preservation and commercialization. Tourism requires adaptation to visitor expectations, market demands, safety standards, and service quality. However, excessive modification may reduce the cultural meanings that make Phinisi significant as heritage. Elbark's Owner (Icha, interviewed in May 2026) stated:

"Tourism is important because it gives Phinisi greater recognition, but we should not change everything simply because tourists want something different. There are traditions that need to remain meaningful."

This statement indicates a perceived tension between market adaptation and cultural meaning. This issue is important because authenticity does not necessarily mean that heritage must remain completely unchanged. Living heritage naturally evolves. The critical issue is whether adaptation remains connected to the cultural values and communities that sustain the heritage.

From the perspective of Wang (1999), authenticity in tourism should not be reduced to a simple distinction between “original” and “inauthentic.” Tourist experiences can also involve emotional, social, and existential dimensions.

E. Conclusion

With an emphasis on cultural preservation, tourism adaptation, community involvement, and authenticity, this study looked at Phinisi as living maritime heritage in Tana Beru, South Sulawesi. Three main conclusions are supported by the interview material in the manuscript. First, according to heritage practitioners surveyed, Phinisi is more than just a physical vessel; its value encompasses boatbuilding expertise, craftsmanship, methods, materials, and customs. Second, it appears from interviews that some visitors view Phinisi as both a sailing ship and a chance to learn about maritime culture. Third, participants describe community involvement in heritage practice and tourism-related services, although the available data do not quantify income, establish equitable benefit-sharing, or demonstrate the extent to which residents influence tourism decisions.

The findings indicate that the transformation of Phinisi into a contemporary tourism product creates opportunities to strengthen the visibility and economic value of maritime heritage. Phinisi-based tourism can provide employment, support local businesses, encourage cultural interpretation, and create opportunities for communities to benefit from tourism activities. However, tourism development also creates challenges, particularly regarding commercialization, authenticity, unequal distribution of benefits, and the continuity of traditional knowledge.

One important link between sustainable tourism and cultural preservation is community involvement. Local communities are not simply tourism workers or service providers but also heritage bearers, cultural interpreters, practitioners, and custodians of Phinisi traditions. Stronger community empowerment and more incentives for preserving cultural traditions can result from meaningful involvement in tourism planning, management, interpretation, and benefit sharing.

Additionally, the study demonstrates that authenticity is more than just keeping Phinisi in its traditional form. Phinisi can accommodate modern tourism while maintaining its cultural significance since it is a living legacy. Authenticity can be reinforced when tourists are allowed to experience the vessel together with its tales, traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, cultural traditions, and the communities that sustain them. As a result, tourism adaptation should preserve a significant relationship with Phinisi's traditional values and heritage bearers.

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