



Community-based tourism and global quality of life dynamics: A systematic review of post-pandemic research trends

Ekky Elfira Kusumawardhani^{1,*}

¹ Independent Researcher.

*Correspondence: ekkyelfira@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: The quality of life of residents in rural areas remains a central concern of sustainable development. Community-based tourism (CBT) has emerged as a widely adopted strategy for improving rural livelihoods; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally reconfigured the economic, social, and environmental conditions within which CBT operates, necessitating a fresh synthesis of post-pandemic evidence. **Methods:** This systematic literature review (SLR) follows the PRISMA protocol and draws on 20 peer-reviewed articles published between 2021 and 2025, retrieved from two databases, Scopus and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Thematic Narrative Synthesis was employed as the analytical framework, guided by three Research Questions addressing research trends, quality of life indicators, and critical gaps. **Findings:** Research activity peaked in 2023, with a predominance of quantitative methods and study locations concentrated in Asia. Economic indicators (17 studies), social indicators (15 studies), and environmental indicators (12 studies) dominated the literature. While economic and social impacts were generally reported as positive, environmental outcomes revealed persistent tensions between tourism-driven economic gains and ecological degradation, a pattern inconsistent with the Triple Bottom Line framework underpinning this review. Psychological and subjective well-being dimensions remained largely underexamined. **Conclusion:** Existing research remains methodologically limited, predominantly cross-sectional, and geographically concentrated, leaving critical gaps in longitudinal, comparative, and psychologically-informed approaches. Future research should integrate mixed-methods and participatory designs to capture the multidimensional nature of residents' quality of life in the post-pandemic context. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This review contributes a theoretically grounded synthesis, informed by Rural Development Theory, Livelihood Theory, and Triple Bottom Line sustainability, of post-pandemic CBT research, revealing structural tensions across sustainability dimensions and proposing practical directions for community practitioners, policymakers, and development agencies to ensure equitable and holistic tourism-driven well-being.

KEYWORDS: development; quality of life; rural tourism.

1. Introduction

The quality of life of the population is a fundamental aspect of sustainable development. A good quality of life is a measure of the success of various development efforts. Improving the quality of life of the population is a primary goal of development throughout the world, encompassing numerous factors, from socioeconomic conditions and the condition of the residential environment to the level of satisfaction with the accessibility of public services.

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The varying characteristics of the areas where people live can also influence their quality of life. Residents in areas with significant resource potential and high accessibility will undoubtedly have a better quality of life than those in less developed areas. Therefore, the challenge of improving the quality of life of the population remains prevalent in rural areas far from the center of regional development. Access to employment, education and health facilities, transportation, public services, and even energy sources fundamental to daily life, such as electricity and clean water, tends to be more limited.

Development interventions in areas with these limitations are essential to strengthen various dimensions that can improve the quality of life of the population (Yusoff, 2020). These interventions must utilize the local potential available in each region. One particularly relevant strategy is the development of rural tourism. This strategy takes into account the local potential of each region. Rural tourism naturally involves various parties, including tourists, local residents, business owners, and the government (Chen, 2023). This can have both positive and negative impacts on various aspects of life. Changes in the social, economic, cultural, and physical environment are certainly significant and clearly felt by residents living near rural tourism locations.

Tourism development should indeed bring significant potential for local residents to improve their quality of life, from economic to environmental (Gracan et al., 2022). Rural or community-based tourism can enhance redistribution of wealth and enhance both material or nonmaterial things (Giampiccoli et al., 2022). Therefore, the impact of rural tourism development on the quality of life of these residents is a crucial topic of study to measure potential impacts and ensure sustainable development. While numerous studies have been conducted on the quality of life of residents and rural tourism development since the early 2000s, evolving conditions continue to make this topic relevant for further development. For example, when an event like the COVID-19 pandemic occurs, which has had various impacts on human life across the region, there are certainly differences between conditions before and after the pandemic (Jeon & Yang, 2021). A population's quality of life, previously considered good, can experience a drastic decline as the COVID-19 pandemic impacts all dimensions of human quality of life.

Quality of life then tends to improve again after the COVID-19 pandemic gradually improves. In line with this, rural tourism development has also experienced changes between before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, research linking rural tourism development to residents' quality of life remains highly relevant today. To understand development trends and the latest findings from research on this topic, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) focuses on research from 2021 to 2025. Research prior to 2021 has arguably overlooked post-pandemic dynamics, digitalization, and the renewed emphasis on rural community resilience.

This SLR fills this gap by synthesizing findings from 20 selected scientific articles to provide a comprehensive overview of the contributions and challenges of rural tourism development in improving residents' quality of life in the post-pandemic era. Crucially, the post-pandemic context is not merely a temporal boundary for this review. It represents a theoretically significant juncture at which the assumptions underlying pre-pandemic CBT research require re-examination. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 have reconfigured the economic dependencies, social dynamics, and environmental pressures within rural tourism destinations, potentially altering how tourism development translates into quality of life outcomes in ways that earlier frameworks did not anticipate. Understanding these shifts demands a fresh synthesis that moves beyond confirming pre-existing findings toward identifying emergent patterns and theoretical tensions specific to the recovery period.

To structure this synthesis, three Research Questions (RQs) guide this review, (RQ1) What are the dominant research trends and characteristics of studies examining rural tourism development and residents' quality of life in the post-pandemic period (2021–2025)? (RQ2) Which quality of life indicators are most frequently examined, and what patterns of impact are reported across economic, social, and environmental dimensions? (RQ3) What critical research gaps remain unaddressed, and what directions should future

research prioritize? More specifically, this article has three corresponding objectives, (a) analyzing research trends and characteristics of studies conducted between 2021–2025, (b) identifying the most frequently researched quality of life indicators, and (c) formulating critical research gaps for future directions.

To guide the synthesis and interpretation of findings, this review draws on three interrelated theoretical frameworks. Rural Development Theory provides the foundation for understanding how tourism mobilizes local resources to address rural development gaps. Livelihood Theory, particularly the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, frames quality of life as a multidimensional outcome extending beyond income. Finally, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory serves as the evaluative lens for assessing whether tourism development produces balanced outcomes across economic, social, and environmental dimensions simultaneously. These frameworks collectively inform the thematic analysis and critical gap identification conducted in this review.

2. Methods

The literature review was conducted systematically using two journal databases. The journal databases used were Scopus and DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals). Scopus was chosen because it is one of the largest indexed and internationally recognized databases. The use of Scopus ensures that the research articles used in this SLR are of proven quality, having gone through a rigorous peer-review process. Furthermore, the DOAJ database was used to provide broader and more diverse coverage, particularly for studies published with open access. DOAJ selection is important to minimize publication bias, tends to be found in paid databases, while enriching the sample with regional journals in the social sciences. Other paid databases, such as Web of Sciences (WoS), could not be used due to access limitations. Therefore, a combination of Scopus and DOAJ was chosen as the optimal strategy to balance the need for credibility (Scopus) with the requirements for accessibility and broad coverage (DOAJ), despite the limited access of other paid databases, such as Web of Science (WoS).

The keywords used in the Scopus database were 'quality of life' OR 'well-being' AND 'rural tourism development'. Meanwhile, in DOAJ, due to advanced search limitations, the keywords 'quality of life' and 'tourism development' were used. Articles retrieved from DOAJ were then manually screened to identify articles specifically related to the context of rural tourism. Inclusion criteria for this SLR included publication years between 2021 and 2025, written in English, being research articles, and examining the relationship between rural tourism development and the quality of life of residents. Meanwhile, articles before 2021, literature reviews and articles not in English, as well as research articles that only discussed rural tourism development or the quality of life of residents, were excluded and not included in the list of findings.

In the results of the search in the Scopus database, there were 114 article titles that matched the keywords, then filtered based on the title and abstract, leaving 41 article titles. Furthermore, the results of the search in the DOAJ database contained 66 article titles that matched the keywords, and 6 articles that were excluded due to duplication with Scopus, then filtered based on the title and abstract to 10 article titles. Of the 51 article titles found, after filtering the full-text content of the articles according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 14 Scopus article titles and 6 DOAJ article titles were obtained, so there were 20 article titles that were most suitable for use in this systematic literature review. More clearly, the article selection flow can be described in the following diagram.

To ensure the methodological rigor of the included studies, a quality appraisal was conducted using five criteria adapted from established SLR frameworks, including the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) and principles outlined in Tranfield et al. (2003). Each study was evaluated based on (1) Objective Clarity, which assesses whether the study states clear and specific goals regarding rural tourism and residents' quality of life; (2) Methodological Rigor, which examines whether the analytical methods employed, such as SEM, regression, or thematic analysis, are appropriate and well-documented; (3)

Sampling Validity, which considers whether the sample size is sufficient and the selection process is representative; (4) Bias Mitigation, which evaluates whether the study explicitly addresses potential biases, including common method bias, cognitive bias, or sampling bias; and (5) Theoretical Depth, which determines whether the study grounds its findings in established theoretical frameworks such as Social Exchange Theory or Livelihood Theory. Each criterion was scored on a three-point scale: 1 = Inadequate, 2 = Moderate, and 3 = Robust/High, yielding a maximum overall score of 15. All 20 studies included in this review scored 10 or above, indicating an acceptable level of methodological quality and suitability for synthesis. The results of the quality appraisal are presented in Appendix 1.

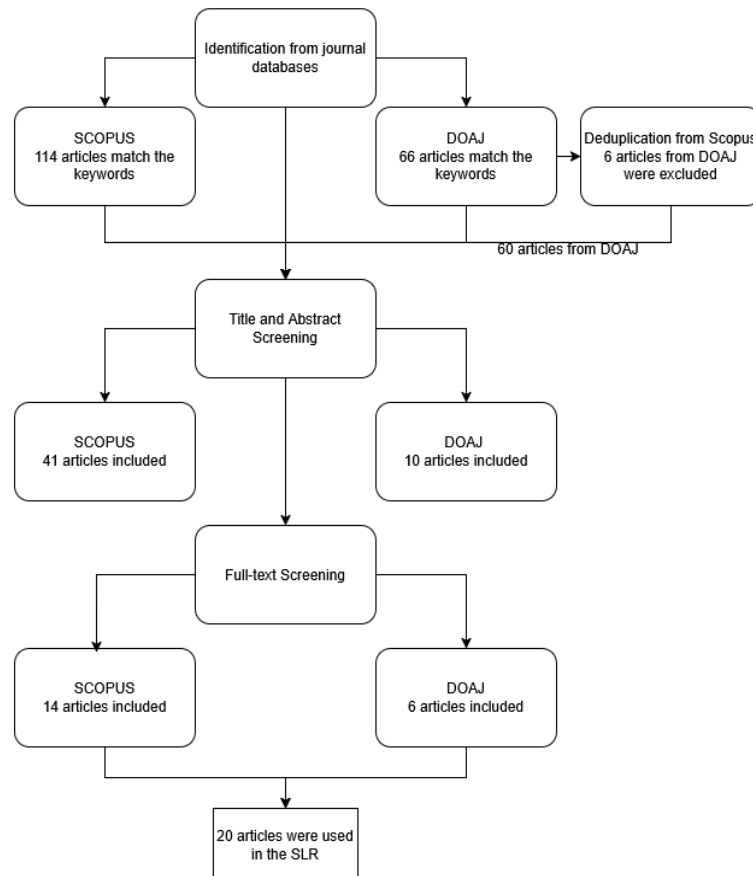


Fig. 1. PRISMA flow chart

The extracted data, entered into the data matrix (Appendix 2), was then prepared for analysis. Coding procedures were conducted in two stages. In the first stage, a structured extraction template was applied consistently across all 20 articles, capturing key information including author, year, country, research method, quality of life indicators examined, main findings, and reported limitations. In the second stage, a thematic coding process was conducted inductively, in which recurring indicators and patterns across studies were identified and grouped into overarching themes, namely economic, social, and environmental dimensions of quality of life. Each article was reviewed at least twice to ensure consistency in categorization. As this review was conducted by a single researcher, inter-rater reliability assessment was not applicable. To mitigate potential subjectivity in the coding process, coding decisions were reviewed iteratively against the original sources throughout the analysis.

The data used were qualitative (findings and methodology) and simple quantitative (year frequency and method). The analytical approach adopted was Thematic Narrative Synthesis, selected over alternative methods for several reasons. Meta-analysis was deemed inappropriate given the methodological heterogeneity of the corpus, the included studies employed diverse designs ranging from quantitative approaches such as SEM and

regression to qualitative and mixed-methods designs, making statistical pooling inadvisable. Meta-ethnography, while suited for interpretive synthesis, is most applicable to purely qualitative corpora, whereas the majority of studies in this review are quantitative in nature. Thematic Narrative Synthesis, by contrast, accommodates methodological diversity and enables in-depth interpretive analysis of patterns, contradictions, and gaps across studies, aligning with the exploratory and descriptive nature of this review's three Research Questions.

The synthesis process was divided into three main Research Questions (RQs). A descriptive analysis calculating the frequency of years, methods, and locations was conducted to map research trends and answer the first research question. Furthermore, to answer the second research question regarding the most frequently studied indicators, a thematic clustering process was conducted that identified and grouped all indicators of Well-Being Impact (Economic, Social, Environmental, and other Quality of Life) that appeared in the literature. To answer the final research question regarding research gaps, a critical analysis was used to analyze consistent patterns from the limitations column in the findings (Appendix 2).

It is important to acknowledge several limitations inherent to this review. First, as the screening and coding processes were conducted by a single researcher, the risk of individual subjectivity cannot be fully eliminated, though iterative review against original sources was employed as a mitigation measure. Second, the exclusion of non-English articles may have limited the geographic and cultural diversity of the corpus, particularly for studies published in local languages across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Third, access to Web of Science (WoS) was unavailable due to institutional constraints, which may have resulted in the omission of relevant indexed studies. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this review.

3. Results and Discussion

A detailed systematic literature review process, as outlined in the PRISMA Diagram (Fig. 1), yielded a total of 20 studies that met the inclusion criteria. These articles were rigorously screened after going through a duplication elimination process, abstract/title screening, and full-text assessment (especially regarding the focus on the impact of Rural Tourism Development on the Quality of Life dimension). The selected studies with this specific topic are then presented in the following Appendix 2, which serves as the basis for further thematic analysis and synthesis. This initial step provides a clear foundation for understanding the scope and diversity of existing studies, enabling a systematic identification of key research trends and conceptual gaps within the field of rural tourism and quality of life.

3.1 Descriptive analysis of post-pandemic research trends

Based on the Appendix 2, the most research on rural tourism development and resident quality of life was conducted in 2023, with six publications. This high number of studies in 2023 can be considered quite relevant to the post-pandemic period, when conditions across all aspects of people's lives are changing. Following international travel restrictions (2020-2022), there has been a major shift in global tourism towards domestic, outdoor and rural tourism (Turtureanu et al., 2025). Community-based tourism (CBT) naturally becomes a primary solution due to its sustainable nature, small scale, community-based, and offering authentic experiences. In 2022 and 2024, five studies were conducted each year, followed by four in 2025. Notably, no studies meeting the inclusion criteria were identified from 2021, suggesting that academic responses to the pandemic's impacts on rural tourism and quality of life emerged predominantly from 2022 onward. This may indicate an increasing and continued strong focus on community-based tourism research and its impact on quality of life. In recent years, research on sustainable development has also increased globally to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This trend reflects how the

global tourism paradigm has shifted toward local empowerment and sustainability, positioning rural tourism as a strategic response to socio-economic disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Based on the location of the research, 11 studies were predominantly conducted in Asia. Many countries in Asia face significant development gaps between urban and rural areas. Community-based tourism (CBT) is seen as a key strategy for bringing direct economic and development benefits to remote or rural areas (Priatmoko et al., 2025). In Asia, community-based tourism is often explicitly promoted as a tool for improving population well-being, such as through poverty alleviation and job creation. Therefore, research focuses on measuring these positive impacts. For example, one study conducted by Mia et al. (2024) in Bangladesh (South Asia region) regarding Community-based tourism which is able to increase community empowerment and reduce poverty.

While research in Asia tends to focus on poverty alleviation and the utilization of cultural assets, research conducted in Europe (which is generally represented in the five research sites above) tends to focus on sustainable management and community support for more stable tourism development. The primary issue addressed is no longer simply increasing revenues, but rather maintaining environmental quality and maintaining its carrying capacity. Meanwhile, other less represented research sites, in Ghana (Africa) and Peru (South America), tend to develop and test effective management strategies and focus on the welfare and livelihoods of their populations. These variations suggest that while CBT principles are globally relevant, their implementation remains context-dependent, shaped by regional priorities and governance structures.

Based on the research methods used, the majority (14 studies) used quantitative methods, four used mixed methods, and two used qualitative methods. This indicates a preference for measuring tourism impacts through statistical data and surveys, but some studies tended to explore deeper insights through mixed methods or qualitative methods. The best method used in each study was the one that accurately answered the research objectives, although each study still had limitations in the information it could provide. For example, quantitative research has the disadvantage of explaining why and how residents perceive changes in their quality of life related to rural tourism development. On the other hand, quantitative methods are able to statistically measure impacts and causal relationships, compare groups, and more clearly measure trends.

In contrast, qualitative methods tend not to be generalizable to broader populations, are susceptible to researcher bias, and tend to have a more limited sample size. However, qualitative methods can provide a deeper understanding, explain why an impact occurs, and capture the individual experiences of residents who experience it directly. Similarly, mixed methods tend to require more in-depth resources, time, and expertise. Then, there is the challenge of integrating two different types of data effectively even though the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data becomes a force that is able to answer or explain more comprehensively the size of the statistical impact and explain why it can occur. Therefore, understanding the balance between methodological rigor and contextual insight is essential to fully capture how rural tourism development influences residents' quality of life (Hu et al., 2024).

3.2 Thematic synthesis of quality of life indicators

The quality of life indicators of the population studied in the 20 publications above were dominated by economic indicators (17 studies), social or sociocultural (15 studies), and environmental (12 studies). Economic indicators, such as increased household income and job creation, are the most obvious and easily measurable indicators for assessing the success of development interventions. Increased income from CBT demonstrates that tourism acts as an important economic diversifier, reducing community dependence on the primary sector (agriculture) and providing an alternative pathway to address the rural-urban development gap. Therefore, numerous studies have been conducted to demonstrate the effectiveness of CBT as a development tool, making it the most frequently used indicator.

These positive findings directly support Rural Development Theory and Livelihood Theory, especially in Asian countries with structural poverty issues. Although economic indicators are the easiest to measure, they still do not adequately reflect development success because they are considered relatively narrow (Elgin, 2024). Multidimensional measurements are needed that focus not only on economic conditions, but also on other indicators, such as social and environmental. This demonstrates how rural tourism development operates as a multidimensional system, in which economic progress, social cohesion, and environmental stability interact dynamically.

Social indicators (cultural pride, participation, and non-material quality of life) are crucial because, according to the CBT definition, tourism should be managed by the community. This theory states that communities will support or participate in tourism development (as seen in the Serbia and Kazakhstan studies) only if the benefits (economic, social) they receive outweigh the costs (crowding, pollution, inflation) they bear. Therefore, the study measured social benefits (e.g., improvements in public facilities) because these directly influence the community's willingness to continue and support the tourism industry. Furthermore, as a key pillar of sustainability, environmental indicators (waste management, pollution, degradation) are also closely related to the quality of life of residents living in and around the area. Such inconsistencies reveal that achieving balanced sustainability across the triple-bottom-line dimensions remains one of the central challenges in community-based tourism implementation.

The environmental indicators examined in the aforementioned studies tend to convey a less positive impression, unlike other economic and social indicators. While some studies aim for conservation, the findings suggest risks. Few studies explicitly note environmental degradation or low levels of resident satisfaction with environmental consequences. Contradictory findings (between economic benefits and environmental degradation) indicate results inconsistent with the Triple Bottom Line Theory of Sustainability, which assumes that all pillars must improve simultaneously. A closer examination of the reviewed studies reveals a consistent pattern: economic gains (measured through increased household income, job creation, and infrastructure improvement) are reported in 17 of 20 studies, whereas environmental improvements are noted in far fewer cases, with several studies explicitly documenting degradation. This asymmetry directly challenges the TBL premise, suggesting that in practice, economic development and environmental sustainability operate as competing rather than complementary forces within CBT models.

The social pillar, while moderately well-represented, similarly reveals uneven outcomes, with community participation and cultural pride frequently cited as benefits, yet equitable benefit distribution and long-term social cohesion remaining largely unexamined. Taken together, these patterns indicate that the majority of reviewed studies inadvertently prioritize the economic pillar of TBL, leaving the environmental and deeper social dimensions undertheorized and undermeasured. Findings from studies in Spain and Serbia indicate a conflict between development and environmental conservation. Increased tourist visits driven by economic benefits often exceed the environmental carrying capacity of destinations. Critically, this contradiction is not merely a matter of degree but reflects a structural tension inherent in market-driven tourism models, where economic incentives consistently override environmental governance mechanisms. Studies from Asia present a more varied picture, while several report neutral or positive environmental perceptions among residents, these findings should be interpreted cautiously, as positive scores may partly reflect lower baseline environmental expectations rather than genuine ecological sustainability. This research is important in highlighting that ecological sustainability is the most vulnerable and difficult-to-maintain pillar in the CBT model, which in turn creates significant gaps in environmental management strategies.

3.3 Critical research gaps and future research directions

Building upon the thematic synthesis above, several research gaps emerge that limit our comprehensive understanding of how rural tourism affects residents' quality of life.

Based on the research findings, there are still limitations or gaps that can be addressed through further research. The majority of studies (predominantly conducted using quantitative methods) only measure quality of life in general or through basic pillars (economic, social, and environmental), thus lacking a clearer picture of the population's quality of life. This is because quality of life is a multidimensional concept with more specific dimensions than the general economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Costa et al., 2021). For example, psychological indicators, or subjective well-being, tend to be under-explained in these studies. Tourism development has a complex and two-way impact on the psychological and emotional dimensions of the community, including stress and subjective happiness. Because the majority of studies use quantitative methods, these variables are often difficult to measure clearly. While quantitative measurements can still be made, residents' perceptions and well-being will be more comprehensive when measured using qualitative methods.

Measuring subjective happiness and stress levels is crucial for truly depicting the residents' quality of life (Kerstetter et al., 2022) in greater depth as a result of changes in the economic, social, and environmental conditions surrounding them. For example, rising prices for goods and services (especially food and property) due to tourist demand can make it difficult for local residents to meet basic needs. Furthermore, overcrowding, traffic jams, and noise pollution disrupt daily routines, especially in locations experiencing a seasonal surge in visits. Socially, differences in tourist behavior, dress, or habits that conflict with local norms can create tension and discomfort. Communities also face the potential loss of access to previously public or sacred spaces due to their commercialization or tourist dominance. Furthermore, there is the potential for financial and psychological stress due to the tourism industry's highly sensitive nature to external conditions (e.g., pandemics, economic crises). However, on the other hand, communities can also have a positive psychological perception of the impacts of these changes or developments. This highlights the importance of integrating psychological well-being into future models of tourism impact assessment, ensuring that residents' lived experiences are not overshadowed by economic metrics alone.

Tourism revenue is often used to build or improve infrastructure and public facilities (roads, clean water, electricity), which can directly improve quality of life and comfort (Akbar & Yang, 2021; Mamirkulova et al., 2025). Stable employment, new business opportunities, and increased income, which provide a sense of financial security (material well-being), are also key components of happiness, closely related to residents' quality of life. When CBT is implemented well, residents feel in control of their resources and decision-making processes, resulting in a sense of security and comfort. Furthermore, encounters with tourists can enrich their outlook on life, provide learning opportunities, and enhance the quality of social interactions within the community. Therefore, it is crucial to understand residents' perceptions of how tourism development impacts their comfort and security in the environment.

Not only are the research variables or indicators limited, but some of the studies found were limited to a single, very specific location. For example, studies conducted by Ganaie et al., Liu, Samadi et al., and Ghorbani et al., which tended to cover only one village area. This Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model is highly dependent on unique contexts (such as local governance, culture, and the role of traditional leaders). The lack of cross-site comparative studies makes it challenging to identify universal factors that cause CBT to succeed or fail in improving the quality of life of residents, regardless of the local context. Findings from one village (e.g., Andro Village in India) cannot be directly applied to other villages, even within the same country, due to the unique nature of CBT. In other words, the results or findings of these studies are quite difficult to generalize or replicate in other areas due to the limited CBT model. Hence, comparative and cross-cultural studies are essential to identify universal mechanisms driving CBT success, beyond local peculiarities.

The limitations of the studies identified also stem from the choice of research methods used. Research that predominantly uses quantitative methods tends to be less able to provide a comprehensive explanation of the impact of rural tourism development on the

quality of life of residents living in the surrounding area. Furthermore, research that uses quantitative methods tends to only analyze impacts occurring at a specific point in time. Rural tourism development is a process that requires time to exert influence or impact, particularly on the quality of life of residents (Pasaco et al., 2023). Therefore, longitudinal research, conducted over a period of years, is essential to truly observe changes in the quality of life of these residents over time. Qualitative research methods tend to be more appropriate and effective. This is because qualitative approaches, such as through in-depth interviews and direct participation of local residents, can provide explanations of how and why these processes and their impacts occur.

Research examining the link between rural tourism development and residents' quality of life has yet to empirically test the effectiveness of governance models that ensure the equitable distribution of quality of life. Residents' quality of life can improve if governance structures or decision-makers are inclusive (Carcaba et al., 2017). If governance is not inclusive, the benefits of rural tourism development tend to be enjoyed only by certain well-connected groups, such as those with accommodations and certain traditional leaders. On the other hand, local residents without these connections or resources tend to experience only negative impacts, such as inconvenience due to price increases, environmental pollution, and so on. Existing research, then, tends to only identify social indicators, such as resident participation, without providing further explanation as to whether such participation successfully provides residents with power or control over available resources. This underscores the need for governance models that promote inclusivity and equitable benefit-sharing, ensuring that tourism-driven growth translates into genuine improvements in well-being.

Based on the 20 research findings analyzed, no research has yet robustly examined the relationship between macro-level policies and changes in quality of life at the micro or village level. Rural tourism development also often driven by government initiatives, such as infrastructure development and tourism promotion, the majority of research tends to only measure the result of improving the quality of life of residents after tourism development, failing to test the effectiveness of the interventions. For example, if the government provides training (macro policy), research fails to measure whether the training actually results in higher returns (micro improvements in quality of life) compared to those who do not receive the training. Improvements in quality of life do not come from tourism itself, but from how it is managed. If government policies are inappropriate, they will only accelerate the emergence of new problems.

Strategies to mitigate the risks of negative impacts of rural tourism development, such as environmental degradation and psychological discomfort experienced by local residents, also require further research. Existing studies have successfully identified the economic benefits and risks of environmental degradation, but have not clearly provided examples of strategies to mitigate these risks. This also indicates that improving the quality of life of these residents is still not sustainable, as environmental damage will destroy the basis of tourism itself. For example, studies conducted in Spain and Serbia indicate that environmental degradation can directly threaten the health and material well-being of local residents, such as issues with water and air quality, and the cost of addressing these issues.

Based on the limitations of existing research, research linking rural tourism development to the quality of life of residents remains open to further development. While numerous studies on similar topics have certainly been conducted since before 2021, research that comprehensively encapsulates several research focuses (such as the tourism development process, changing quality of life conditions, and strategies for improving it) tends to be scarce. Furthermore, conditions, which naturally change over time, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, allow for further development of this research. Future research would benefit from sequential mixed-methods designs, combining quantitative measurement with qualitative explanation, as well as longitudinal approaches to capture cumulative changes in quality of life over time.

Research focused on evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and policies is also crucial, for example, by identifying specific intervention programs such as village fund

enhancement programs for tourism or intensive training programs, and comparing the quality of life of residents in villages receiving the intervention (treatment group) with those not receiving it (control group), thereby demonstrating the causal effectiveness of the policy. Furthermore, given the limitations of the research conducted in Spain and Serbia, further research focused on testing environmental governance models at the micro level is needed. For example, examining the impact of Participatory Action Research (PAR), which aims to develop and measure the effectiveness of waste management systems designed by communities themselves, not just by the government.

Further research could also explore more specific dimensions of residents' quality of life. Such research could explicitly include and validate psychological scales (such as stress, anxiety, or sense of belonging) in the context of rural tourism. This would provide data on the psychological costs of tourism (e.g., stress from interactions with tourists or pressure to maintain authenticity), which are currently lacking in the literature. Furthermore, research could measure how tourism affects residents' sense of security. A surge in tourist arrivals is often associated with an increase in petty crime or changes in social dynamics that make vulnerable groups (such as women or the elderly) feel less secure. These are crucial dimensions of quality of life, yet they have not been explored in depth in research. Collectively, these directions emphasize that the future of rural tourism research must move beyond measuring short-term gains and focus on fostering holistic, resilient, and equitable development outcomes.

Beyond academic contributions, the findings of this review carry concrete implications for community practitioners, policymakers, and development agencies involved in rural tourism initiatives. First, community facilitators and local governments should prioritize the establishment of participatory governance structures, such as community tourism committees with genuine decision-making authority, to ensure that economic benefits are equitably distributed rather than captured by elite groups. Second, capacity building programs targeting local residents, particularly in financial literacy, environmental stewardship, and hospitality management, are essential prerequisites for sustainable CBT implementation, as evidenced by the governance gaps identified across the reviewed studies. Third, social innovation approaches, such as community-led environmental monitoring systems and resident-designed carrying capacity protocols, should be integrated into tourism development plans from the outset, rather than introduced reactively after degradation has occurred. Finally, development agencies and funders should condition tourism investment support on the inclusion of quality of life baseline assessments, enabling longitudinal tracking of resident well-being across economic, social, environmental, and psychological dimensions. These practical measures collectively ensure that rural tourism development translates into genuine, equitable, and sustained improvements in residents' quality of life, moving beyond economic metrics toward holistic community well-being.

4. Conclusions

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) aims to synthesize empirical evidence on the relationship between rural tourism development and the quality of life of local residents, focusing on the last 5-year period, namely 2021 to 2025. Specifically, this SLR has succeeded in mapping existing research trends and characteristics, identifying the most researched quality of life indicators, and formulating critical research gaps for future research directions. Based on the results of journal searches in two databases, namely Scopus and DOAJ, 20 research article titles were found that were most relevant and in accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Across the 20 articles reviewed, quantitative methods predominated (14 studies), research locations were concentrated in Asia (11 studies), and research activity peaked in 2023, consistent with the post-pandemic recovery period. The most frequently studied research indicators were economic indicators (17 studies), social or sociocultural indicators (15 studies), and environmental indicators (12 studies). On the other hand, more specific

and subjective quality of life indicators, such as psychological conditions or perceived levels of resident satisfaction, were only found in a small proportion of the studies conducted. This then becomes one of the research gaps that is still being identified and requires further research to develop. In addition to the lack of clearly described quality of life indicators, research limitations also lie in the lack of examples of solutions provided to prevent or address problems that may arise from the relationship between rural tourism development and the quality of life of these residents. These existing studies also tend to examine problems at a single point in time, whereas development itself is a process that requires a certain period of time to be studied comprehensively and in-depth.

Based on these limitations, research on this topic can still be developed further, even though it has been conducted extensively before, due to the ever-changing nature of the situation. Therefore, research that can be conducted includes research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the rural tourism development process and how it can change the quality of life of residents, research that examines the effectiveness of interventions carried out to develop tourism and improve quality of life, and research that can provide solutions or policy models to ensure effective development and improvement of quality of life and mitigate potential risks such as environmental degradation. These findings carry practical implications for stakeholders and policymakers involved in rural tourism development. Local governments should prioritize participatory governance structures that ensure equitable benefit distribution, while capacity building programs in environmental stewardship and community enterprise management should be embedded as core components of CBT initiatives, not afterthoughts. Development agencies are encouraged to require baseline quality of life assessments prior to tourism investments, enabling longitudinal monitoring across economic, social, environmental, and psychological dimensions. Collectively, these measures reflect a shift from tourism as an extractive economic tool toward a vehicle for holistic and equitable community well-being. Ultimately, this synthesis highlights the evolving role of rural tourism as a pathway toward community resilience and inclusive well-being in the post-pandemic context. Future studies should integrate longitudinal and participatory approaches to ensure that tourism truly enhances the multifaceted dimensions of residents' quality of life.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly to assist in improving grammar, clarity, and academic tone of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication

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Biography of Author

Ekky Elfira Kusumawardhani, an independent researcher with a Master's degree in Geography from Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). Her work focuses on tourism and rural development, quality of life, and socio-spatial analysis. She actively explores how spatial patterns, local livelihoods, and development dynamics shape well-being in rural regions, contributing insights useful for research, planning, and policy discussions.

- Email: ekkyelfira@gmail.com
- ORCID: 0009-0002-6141-2212
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: N/A