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**Constructing Authenticity in the Geotourism Experience
in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geopark**
(Study on Batur UGGp and Rinjani-Lombok UGGp)

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The dissertation examines how authenticity is constructed, negotiated, and strategically mobilised within geotourism experiences in two Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGp): Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps. While authenticity remains central to tourism discourse, it is often treated either as a heritage attribute defined by experts or as an experiential quality perceived by tourists. Challenging this binary, the study interrogates authenticity as a relational and multi-scalar process shaped by tourism governance structures, stakeholder negotiations, and place-based cultural meanings, alongside touristic expectations in a competitive international market place. In doing so, it challenges persistent imbalances within geotourism scholarship, which remains dominated by Eurocentric frameworks and limited engagement with Global South contexts.

The aim of this research is to critically examine the authentication process in Indonesian UGGps to understand how multi-scalar governance is structured in ways that privilege particular interpretations of authenticity over others. This aim is guided by three objectives. First, to explore tourism suppliers' and key governance actors' authentication positions of geotourism practices and how they contribute to informing geotourism experiences. Second, to identify tourists' perceptions of authentic geotourism experiences. Third, to explore how competing stakeholder construction of authenticity in geotourism experiences are negotiated and strategically mobilised in attempts to shape destination distinctiveness.

Adopting a qualitative multi-case and multi-source design, the research integrates supply- and demand-side perspectives through semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders across governance scales (international to local) and analysis of tourist experiences (international and domestic). The findings show that authenticity functions not only as an experiential construct but also as a strategic resource in destination development. Within geopark contexts, authenticity is frequently mobilised to construct destination distinctiveness in an increasingly competitive geotourism landscape. However, this instrumentalisation generates tensions: efforts to standardise interpretation under global geopark frameworks can, ironically, dilute local specificity, while market-driven authenticity risks commodifying cultural practices and contrasts with visitor expectations. The study therefore positions authenticity as a paradoxical force that both enables differentiation (albeit with questionable effectiveness) and constrains it through institutional homogenisation.

This dissertation makes theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions to tourism and geotourism scholarship. Empirically, it offers global south insights into how authenticity is co-produced through the interaction of global heritage frameworks and local socio-cultural realities, crucial given the Eurocentrism of geotourism scholarship, alongside the growth in geotourism across the global south. Theoretically, it advances a relational understanding of authenticity that highlights the central role of governance and institutional power in geotourism authentication processes—bringing to question authenticity as necessarily either an objective institutionally defined attribute or experiential quality experienced by visitors.

Practically, the study provides implications for geopark governance and tourism planning, suggesting that geopark branding should be grounded in context-specific interpretation. Such an approach reflects local epistemologies and reconfigures knowledge hierarchies within geopark interpretation by placing geological science in dialogue with local ways of knowing.

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Authors' Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Amanda Fauziah

Signature

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Significance

In recent decades, growing interest in nature-based, heritage, and experiential forms of tourism has positioned UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGp) as increasingly prominent destinations at the intersection of geological conservation, education, and regional development (UNESCO, 2015; Rodrigues, Silva, & Pereira, 2025). Rather than functioning solely as protected areas, Global Geoparks are conceived by geoscience communities as dynamic territories that attempt to actively engage the public through geotourism experiences that communicate the significance of geological heritage alongside cultural, ecological, and social values (Štrba & Palgutová, 2024; Rodrigues, Silva, & Pereira, 2023; Dowling, 2011; Newsome & Dowling, 2010). Within this framework, geotourism is thought to serve as a central mechanism for translating landscape and complex geological processes into forms that can be experienced, understood, and valued by non-specialist audiences.

However, as the global network of geoparks continues to expand, a critical tension has emerged between designation and delivery. While UNESCO status formally recognises sites as possessing geological heritage of international significance, the meaning, value, and experiential quality of that designation does not solely dependant on how effectively geological features are communicated to visitors (Rodrigues et al, 2025). Rather, it is continuously constructed and negotiated through processes of interpretation, as different stakeholders attribute diverse—and at times competing—forms of value to geopark landscapes (Daugstad, 2008). These valuations are shaped not only by stakeholders' cultural background, lived experiences, and place-based attachments (Brown & Raymond, 2007; Scott, Carter, Brown, & White, 2009), but also by stakeholders' positionalities and power within governance structures; that is, their institutional roles, degree of authority, and proximity to decision-making processes influence how authenticity is understood. For some actors, for example, the primary importance lies in geological rarity, scientific value, and geoconservation objectives (Hadian, Barkah, Khadijah, Yuliawati, Aryanti, & Suhardiman, 2025; Anougmar, Meesters, Ree, & Compennolle, 2024). For others, cultural heritage, local livelihoods, scenic aesthetics, spiritual meanings, or recreational potential may be equally central (Jones, Shaw, Ross, Witt, & Pinner, 2016; Ernoul, Wardell-Johnson, Willm, Béchet, Boutron, Mathevet, Arnassant, & Sandoz, 2018).

These differing value orientations do not merely coexist; they actively structure the ways in which geotourism is conceived, organised, and experienced in practice. They inform the framing of interpretive narratives, the selection of sites and stories deemed worthy of touristic attention, and the modes of engagement through which visitors encounter the landscape. These choices are embedded within institutional priorities, governance structures, and broader socio-political contexts. As such, they raise critical questions about authority and legitimacy: who has the power to define significance, whose knowledge systems are validated or sidelined, and how visitors are positioned in relation to scientific, cultural, or experiential understandings of place.

And yet, despite the growing body of work on geoparks and geotourism, attention to governance structures and the ways power and positionality shape geotourism experiences remain surprisingly marginal. Much of the existing literature has centred on geoparks as instruments of geoconservation, sustainable development, and geoscience education, with strong emphasis on geological inventories, interpretive frameworks, and economic benefits derived from geotourism (Hose, 2000; Dowling, 2011; Farsani, Coelho, & Costa, 2012). More recent studies have begun to engage with community participation and visitor experience (Gordon, 2018a; Hajar, Ramlan, & Kholik, 2025; Jung, 2025), yet these strands often remain analytically siloed. As a result, limited attention has been paid to how geopark governance structures operate in practice—particularly non-Western contexts—and how asymmetries of expertise, authority, and positionality shape whose meaning of place are legitimised within geopark narratives.

Moreover, UNESCO Global Geoparks operate within an increasingly competitive global tourism marketplace. This context underscores UNESCO's explicit requirement that each Global Geopark demonstrates not only geological significance of international value but also a clearly articulated, that is distinctive, sense of place and character grounded in its unique geological landscapes and narratives, in distinction to other designated geoparks (UNESCO, 2015). Establishing a differentiated identity within each geopark is especially important given that some geoparks share broadly comparable geological features. Without a strong interpretive framework that foregrounds destination distinctiveness, thematic similarities across geopark risk weakening claims to uniqueness. This is significant because, despite their conservation and educational mandates, geoparks operate in practice as tourism destinations embedded within competitive visitor economies (Szilard, Kálmán, & Dávid, 2025). Their capacity to generate awareness, support local livelihoods, and sustain long-term relevance is closely tied to their ability to attract and engage visitors (Malatyinszki, Kálmán & Dávid, 2025). Distinctiveness, therefore, is critical not only for securing and maintaining

recognition within international conservation and education frameworks but also for ensuring competitiveness and relevance in an increasingly saturated tourism market.

This challenge is particularly pronounced in Indonesia, which has experienced rapid growth in geopark designations over the past decade, as a result of national development agendas that position geoparks as instruments for regional branding, sustainable tourism, and rural economic diversification (Cahyadi & Newsome, 2021). With 12 sites recognised as UNESCO Global Geoparks, Indonesia now ranks alongside Italy as the third-highest country worldwide in terms of the number of designated geoparks (Badan Geologi, 2025). While this expansion reflects the country's extraordinary geological diversity, it has also intensified challenges of differentiation, making it increasingly difficult for some geoparks to establish clear and compelling identities (Insani, Narmaditya, Habibi, A'Rachman, & Majid, 2023). This thesis takes focus with a notable example of this, whereby two sites have been identified as lacking distinctiveness due to their similarities: Batur UGGp and Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. Despite Rinjani's remarkable volcanic heritage, its proposed designation was initially withheld in 2016 after UNESCO evaluators determined that it lacked sufficient distinctiveness. Its primary features—volcanic landscapes and geological heritage—were considered too similar to those of the nearby Batur UGGp, which shares both geographical proximity and a comparable volcanic origin (Development Planning Agency of West Nusa Tenggara Province, 2017).

This thesis traces processes through which these two sites sought to render themselves distinct. To understand this process it is important to identify that under the UNESCO Global Geoparks framework, processes of differentiation are closely mediated through ideas of authenticity, particularly in how geological features are framed and communicated within geotourism experiences. This relationship is reinforced by the translational demands of geopark governance and geotourism communication, which require complex geological variability to be rendered intelligible to diverse audiences. Faced with this challenge, practitioners often rely on authenticity as a portable narrative device that condenses scientific authority, heritage legitimacy, and experiential value into a communicable form. In this sense, authenticity operates as a stabilising interpretive frame: what is presented as original, scientifically credible, rare, or locally grounded is assumed to stand apart because authenticity already encodes claims to uniqueness within accepted heritage logics. These narratives of authenticity thus become central for establishing destination distinctiveness, shaping how geoparks position themselves within a competitive global heritage and tourism landscape. Analysing authenticity therefore provides a means of understanding

differentiation as an outcome of both practice and institutional mediation, rather than as an intrinsic property of geological formations themselves.

Crucially, rather than being an inherent quality of heritage, authenticity is produced through processes of *authentication* in which different actors advance competing interpretations grounded in their values, experiences, and institutional positions (Waitt, 2000; Wall & Xie, 2005). These tensions often arise as stakeholders assert divergent claims about what should be recognised as authentic within unequal power relationships (Rickly-Boyd, 2022). In this sense, authenticity is a context-dependent outcome, continually shaped by governance arrangements, policy frameworks, and institutional hierarchies that mediating whose claims are recognised and translated into practice. Yet, its role within UNESCO geopark governance remains insufficiently examined in tourism scholarship. This study contributes by reframing authenticity as a governance-mediated process, demonstrating how institutional structures shape the recognition, negotiation, and mobilisation of authenticity in geotourism practice. In doing so, it advances a more integrated understanding of how authenticity is produced across governance, stakeholder, and experiential domains, and how it underpins the construction of destination distinctiveness in geopark settings.

Within this context, examining how multiple stakeholders within Indonesian UGGPs perceive and construct authenticity becomes an important gap requiring rectification. Despite the recognition that suppliers shape authenticity narratives (Lehto, O’Leary, & Morrison, 2020; Seeler, Lück, & Schänzel, 2021) and tourists actively interpret them, geopark scholarship rarely examined how these actors interact within specific governance contexts to co-produce authenticity in practice. This omission is particularly evident in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks, where multi-level governance, institutional authority, and local cultural dynamics intersect in complex ways. Existing studies tend to isolate either producer-driven or visitor-centred perspectives, leaving insufficient understanding of how authenticity is negotiated across stakeholders and how these negotiations shape geotourism development.

This research addresses this gap by analysing authenticity as a multi-stakeholder and governance-mediated process within Indonesian geoparks. By integrating the perspectives of governance actors, tourism suppliers, and visitors, it advances a more relational understanding of how authenticity is constructed, contested, and mobilised to shape geotourism experiences and destination distinctiveness. In doing so, the study responds to both a theoretical need for integrated authenticity frameworks and a practical needs for more reflexive and inclusive geopark governance in rapidly expanding Global South contexts.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to critically examine the authentication process in Indonesian UGGp to understand how multi-scalar governance is structured in ways that privilege particular interpretations of authenticity over others. To address this aim, there are three research objectives.

Objective 1. *To explore tourism suppliers' and key governance actors' authentication positions of geotourism practices and how they contribute to informing geotourism experiences in Indonesian UGGps.*

- 1.1. How do tourism suppliers and key governance actors perceive the authenticity of the geotourism experiences in Indonesian UGGps and how is this dependent on their positionalities?
- 1.2. How do different tourism suppliers and key governance actors influence and negotiate the processes of authenticating geotourism experiences in Indonesian UGGps, and in what ways does the governance structure privilege certain construction of authenticity over others?

Objective 2. *To identify tourists' perceptions of authentic geotourism experiences in Indonesian UGGps.*

- 2.1 How do tourists perceive the authenticity of their geotourism experiences upon their visit to Indonesian UGGps?
- 2.2 To what extent do Indonesian UGGps deliver geotourism experiences that correspond with tourists' expectations of authenticity?

Objective 3. *To explore how authenticity in geotourism experience contributes to shape destination distinctiveness in Indonesian UGGps.*

- 3.1 What role does authenticity play in shaping destination distinctiveness within geotourism experience in Indonesian UGGps?

1.3 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is organised into nine chapters, each of which contributes to answering the research aim and objectives.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) intersects three areas of literature that provide the foundations for this research, that are not commonly brought together in tourism scholarship: geopark governance, authenticity, and destination distinctiveness. It begins by tracing the evolution of geoparks from a conservation-oriented framework toward a more experiential and interpretive paradigm, which has shaped the development of geotourism within UNESCO Global Geopark context. The chapter then examines how geopark governance informs authenticity within geotourism practices and collectively contribute to the formation of destination distinctiveness. It is noted how the existing literature remains heavily skewed toward geosite inventories and geoscientific classifications, often overlooking the institutional dynamics and stakeholder involvement that shape geopark development, as well as the lived experiences produced through geotourism. As a result, the experiential and socio-cultural dimensions of geoparks remain underexplored, crucially in relation to how authenticity is constructed and experienced within geotourism settings. By foregrounding these gaps, the chapter establishes a foundation for analysing how authenticity is constructed and communicated within geopark contexts.

Chapter 3 (The Case Study Context) explains the rationale for selecting Batur UGGp and Rinjani UGGp as the research sites, highlighting their relevance to the aims of the study, specifically their geological and geographical similarity. This comparative contextualisation, that makes clear the challenge of distinctiveness, establishes a critical foundation for analysing authenticity and destination distinctiveness across the two geoparks in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 (Research Design and Methods) outlines the methodological framework guiding this dissertation. It justifies the adoption of an interpretivist paradigm, relativist ontological stance, and a constructivist-interpretivist epistemological perspective, which together underpin a qualitative research design grounded in ethnography. Crucially, the chapter explains how the empirical investigation is structured around two complementary studies. Study 1 focuses on tourism suppliers and key governance actors, examining how authenticity is defined, authorised, and operationalised within Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, it investigates how institutional priorities, interpretive practices, and stakeholder negotiations shape geotourism development. Stage 2

shifts to the demand side, exploring how tourists perceive, interpret, and experience authenticity. Using semi-structured interviews and online photo diaries, it captures visitors' lived meanings and engagements with place. The chapter then details the multi-source data collection strategy and outlines the thematic analysis procedures applied across both studies. Together, this design enables a multi-perspectival and contextually grounded examination of how authenticity is constructed, negotiated, and experienced across tourism suppliers, governance, and visitor domains.

Chapter 5 to Chapter 7 present a layered, multi-level analysis of Study 1, which investigates how authenticity is constructed, negotiated, and operationalised within Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks. **Chapter 5 (Contesting Frameworks: UNESCO Guidelines and Indonesian Geopark Governance)** lays the institutional and policy-level foundation by examining how authenticity is embedded within UNESCO's Operational Guidelines for Global Geopark. It focuses on how geological heritage of international significance, community-led development, and storytelling and interpretation are articulated as foundational principles of the geopark model. The chapter further explores how these principles are translated, negotiated, and occasionally contested within Indonesian governance structures. By unpacking UNESCO's policy discourse and drawing on insights from key actors within the geopark governance framework, the chapter provides the institutional context for understanding the power held by UNESCO in defining what is considered authentic, providing the foundation for understanding how this power plays out within each of the case study sites, in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 6 (Negotiating Authenticity and the Politics of Geotourism Experience) further presents the findings from Study 1 by examining how key tourism suppliers and key governance stakeholders participate in the authentication of geotourism experiences within Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks. Building on the scholarship and institutional foundations established in earlier chapters, the chapter foregrounds the empirical dynamics through which authenticity is negotiated and produced in practice at Batur and Rinjani UGGps. It analyses how governance frameworks, organisational structures, and stakeholder roles shape decision-making and prioritise particular values in geopark management. By focusing on power relations, authority, and expertise, the chapter highlights where influence is concentrated—showing how formal governance bodies, scientific experts, and UNESCO-aligned institutions often dominate the definition of what counts as 'authentic', while, ironically, local communities, small-scale tourism operators, and other on-the-ground actors occupy less formalised positions. These asymmetries of power and institutional authority

produce divergent authentication outcomes, revealing how contrasting governance arrangements directly shape which geotourism experiences are legitimised, promoted, and perceived as distinctive in the geopark context.

Chapter 7 (Interpreting Authenticity from the Perspectives of Tourism Suppliers' and Key Governance Actors) again presents findings from Study 1 by deepening the analysis of how authenticity is understood, constructed, and operationalised by turning focus to tourism suppliers and institutional stakeholders within Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks. Building directly on the governance analysis in Chapter 6, the chapter shifts the focus from institutional arrangements to their effect on the everyday production of authenticity in geotourism practices at Batur and Rinjani UGGps. It demonstrates that whilst authenticity is a governance-mediated outcome shaped by how power, authority, and legitimacy are distributed among actors, differences in governance structure between geoparks result in variations in the ways power relations, and thus constructions of authenticity come to be.

Chapter 8 (Rethinking Authenticity Through the Tourists' Perspective) presents the findings from Study 2 by examining how tourists perceive and interpret authenticity within geotourism experiences at Batur and Rinjani UGGps, ultimately contrasting with insights from earlier chapters. The chapter demonstrates that authenticity is a dynamic relational construct shaped by personal expectations, cultural backgrounds, and situational encounters with landscape. The findings reveal a persistent tension between UNESCO's normative emphasis on geological distinctiveness and the ways tourists actually experience geoparks. While Study 1 showed that tourism suppliers and institutional actors define authenticity primarily through scientific authority and UNESCO-aligned criteria, tourists often ground their sense of authenticity in romanticised, sensory, and affective engagements with nature. This contrast exposes a gap between formal, expert-driven constructions of authenticity and the lived, experiential ways visitors perceive and value geoparks, highlighting how distinctiveness is differently negotiated across institutional and tourist perspectives. By illuminating this divergence, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the multiple, sometimes conflicting, ways authenticity is enacted and interpreted in geotourism.

Chapter 9 (Conclusion) synthesises the findings to address the overarching research objectives. This chapter provided research contribution, practical contribution, limitation and future research. The study demonstrates that authenticity is not an inherent quality of landscapes but a relational, negotiated construct, shaped by the dynamic interplay between top-down governance structures and bottom-up local practices. It highlight the dominance

of Eurocentric conservation frameworks, the importance of extended visitor engagement, and the strategic role of authenticity in production destination distinctiveness. Practically, the findings suggest that integrating local knowledge with scientific expertise and designing experiences that encourage prolonged interaction can enhance perceived authenticity.

Having established the framing for this study and outlined the overall thesis structure, I now turn to Chapter 2, which presents a review of the key literature that underpins this research and situates the study within existing debates geotourism governance, authenticity, and destination distinctiveness.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews and synthesises the interdisciplinary literature that underpins this research, focusing on the authenticity of geotourism experiences within UNESCO Global Geoparks. Drawing on tourism studies, heritage studies, human geography, and geoconservation, the chapter positions geoparks as hybrid heritage-tourism spaces by the intersecting agendas of conservation, regional development, and global heritage governance. Rather than functioning solely as sites of geological protection, UNESCO Global Geoparks are understood as complex institutional formations through which geological heritage is identified, legitimised, interpreted, and transformed into tourism experience. The chapter therefore begins by examining the evolution of geoparks from conservation-oriented initiatives into globally recognised heritage destinations, paying particular attention to the governance structures, institutional authority, and knowledge frameworks that shape how geological value is defined and managed in practice. In doing so, it highlights the tensions that emerge between scientific expertise, UNESCO legitimacy, local participation, and community knowledge within geopark governance.

Building on this foundation, the chapter then explores geotourism as an interpretive and experiential practice. Moving beyond narrowly educational understandings of geotourism, the discussion engages with wider tourism and heritage literature concerning tourism experience, heritage interpretation, and destination management. Geotourism experiences are approached as socially and spatially mediated encounters in which abiotic, biotic, and cultural dimensions are selectively integrated and presented to visitors through interpretive infrastructures, visual representations, storytelling practices, and destination narratives. This section therefore introduces concepts such as the tourist gaze, visual framing, embodiment, affective engagement, and sense of place in order to examine how visitors encounter and make meaning from geopark landscapes. Attention is also given to debates surrounding the integration of scientific narratives with local cultural identities and everyday understanding of landscape, particularly in contexts where tourism development may privilege certain representations while marginalising others.

Against this backdrop, authenticity is positioned as the central analytical lens through which geotourism experiences are understood and evaluated. The chapter critically reviews the

major conceptualisations of authenticity within tourism and heritage scholarship, distinguishing between objectivist, constructivist, existential, and staged approaches. In doing so, it clarifies authenticity as a multidimensional concept that may be understood as the perceived genuineness and historical integrity of heritage materials and sites (material credibility), socially constructed representation, performative mediation, or embodied and affective experience. However, rather than treating authenticity as a fixed property inherent within heritage sites or tourism experiences, the chapter advances the concept of authentication to conceptualise authenticity as an ongoing relational process. From this perspective, authenticity emerges through the interaction of institutional practices, interpretive strategies, stakeholder negotiations, tourism performances, and systems of heritage governance. This analytical framing is particularly significant within UNESCO Global Geoparks, where scientific authority, local identity, and global heritage branding converge to shape which narratives, values, and experiences are recognised as legitimate or authentic.

The chapter finally examines how authenticity contributes to the production of destination distinctiveness within contemporary geopark settings. Authenticity functions as the interpretive mechanism through which places are recognised as unique, meaningful, and differentiated from other tourism destinations. Landscapes and experiences framed as original, rare, scientifically credible, culturally grounded, or experientially meaningful acquire symbolic value that supports destination identity and branding. In this sense, authenticity does not merely describe heritage value but actively participates in the strategic production of distinctiveness through processes of interpretation, representation, and governance. By bringing together debates on geopark governance, tourism experience, heritage interpretation, and authenticity, the chapter establishes the foundation for analysing how geotourism experiences are produced, negotiated, and legitimised within UNESCO Global Geopark.

2.1 UNESCO Global Geoparks as Heritage-Governance Spaces

The emergence of the geopark concept reflects broader transformations in international conservation and heritage governance, particularly growing concerns regarding the historical marginalisation of geological heritage within global protection frameworks (Brilha, 2018). During the 1970s, major international initiatives such as UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and the World Heritage Convention significantly expanded global conservation efforts by promoting the protection of natural and cultural heritage. However,

these frameworks predominantly prioritised biodiversity conservation, ecological protection, and sites considered to possess “Outstanding Universal Value”, resulting in geological heritage remaining comparatively underrepresented within international conservation agendas (Jones, 2008; Brilha, 2018). Although geological formations were often incorporated into protected landscapes, they were rarely recognised as heritage resources possessing independent scientific, educational, cultural, or aesthetic significance. In response, geoscientist and conservation advocates increasingly argued throughout the 1990s for the development of a more inclusive framework capable of recognising geodiversity and geological heritage as integral components of global heritage conservation.

From its inception, however, the geopark model was conceived as more than a scientific conservation initiative. Rather than separating conservation from development, geoparks sought to integrate geological protection with tourism, public education, and regional socio-economic regeneration (Brilha, 2018). In this sense, geoparks represented an alternative territorial model that positioned geological heritage as a resource capable of generating environmental, cultural, educational, and economic value simultaneously. This integrative philosophy perceived to be distinguished geoparks from many earlier protected area models by emphasising the interrelationship between landscapes, local communities, and development processes. Geological heritage was therefore framed not simply as an object requiring preservation, but as part of a lived and inhabited landscape.

The institutionalisation of this model accelerated significantly during the early 2000s through the establishment of transnational geopark networks. The formation of the European Geoparks Network (EGN) in 2000 represented one of the earliest coordinated efforts to formalise cooperation between territories possessing significant geological heritage (Zouros & Valiakos, 2010). This initiative was subsequently expanded through the creation of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) in 2004, which facilitated international collaboration and promoted the geopark concept beyond Europe. Through these developments, geoparks evolved from relatively localised conservation initiatives into internationally connected governance structures embedded within wider conservation, tourism, and heritage agendas. Importantly, these networks also reinforced the territorial nature of geoparks by emphasising clearly defined geographical boundaries, integrated management strategies, and the connection between geological heritage and regional identity.

A major institutional turning point occurred in 2015, when UNESCO formally established the UNESCO Global Geoparks designation under the International Geoscience and

Geoparks Programme (IGGP) (Jones, 2008; Lee & Jayakumar, 2021). This recognition represented more than a symbolic endorsement of geological heritage. UNESCO designation introduced a formalised global governance framework involving standardised evaluation criteria, periodic revalidation procedures and systems of international oversight. Consequently, collaboration across multi-level networks has become a defining feature of geopark governance, reinforcing interconnected management structures that linking local actors, scientific experts, national governments, and international institutions. Figure 2.1 illustrates the major global milestones in the historical development and worldwide expansion of the geopark concept.

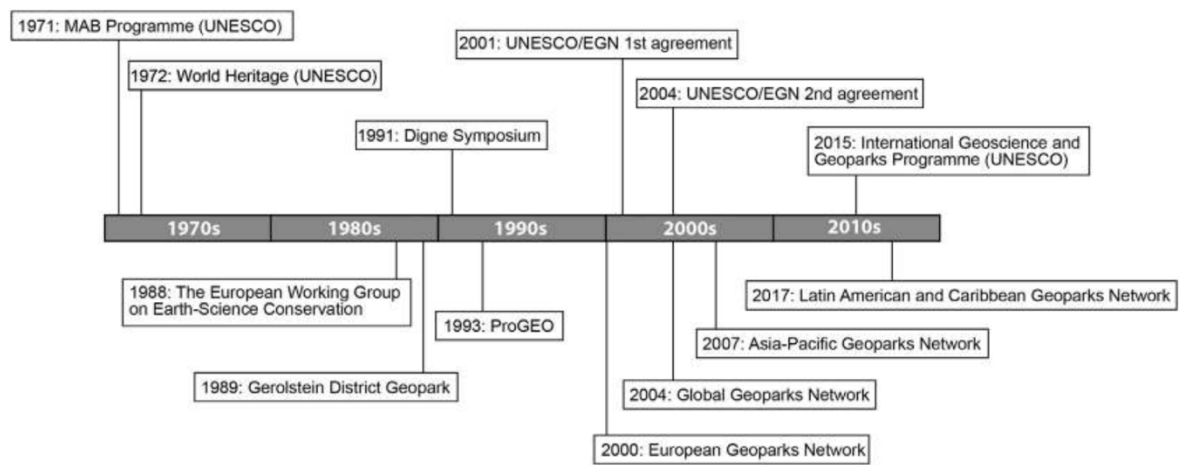


Figure 2.1 Global stage timeline for geopark development
(Source: Brilha, 2018)

Parallel to this institutional consolidation, the conceptual philosophy underpinning UNESCO Global Geoparks is said to have evolved substantially—shifting from geoscientific sites toward an attempt to recognise them as holistic landscapes in which geological processes, ecosystems, and human histories are deeply intertwined (Brilha, 2018; Du & Girault, 2018). In this sense, the geopark model is thought to represent a distinctive global initiative that is claimed to move beyond preservation alone, with the aim of integrating natural and cultural heritage within strategies intended to generate reciprocal benefit for both people and the environment. Consequently, in a world increasingly shaped by environmental degradation, climate change, and the erosion of cultural identity, the emergence of UNESCO Global Geopark offers a compelling alternative model for sustainable territorial development.

Rather than functioning as uniformly holistic or participatory initiatives, research demonstrates considerable variation in how geoparks are interpreted, managed, and

operationalised across different contexts. Some studies identify a continued emphasis on geoconservation and scientific education, whereas others highlight an increasingly tourism-orientation trajectory focused on destination branding, visitor growth, and regional economic development, suggesting that geopark development often departs from its stated integrative philosophy (Ruban, Mikhailenko, Yashalova, & Scherbina, 2023). In other cases, hybrid approaches attempt to reconcile these agendas (Hajar, Ramlan, & Kholik, 2025). Such variations suggest that geoparks do not operate according to a singular governance logic but instead reflect context-specific negotiations between conservation priorities, economic pressures, tourism ambitions, and institutional agendas.

Despite growing recognition of these differences, the underlying socio political and institutional drivers shaping geopark development trajectories remain insufficiently explored. Existing studies often describe variations in governance orientation without fully interrogating how such priorities emerge, acquire legitimacy, or become institutionalised within governance structures. Ruban et al. (2023), for instance, suggest that differing geopark orientations may reflect the visions and priorities of planners, managers, and institutional founders. However, because this was not the central focus of their study, their analysis remains largely descriptive, leaving unresolved questions regarding how these priorities are negotiated between stakeholders, embedded within governance structures, and reproduced through institutional practice.

A similar limitation can be observed in broader UNESCO-related governance literature. Mammadova, Smith, and Yashina (2021), in their study of UNESCO biosphere reserves, demonstrate how governance arrangements and patterns of community participation are shaped by historically embedded relationships between local communities and the state. Their findings reveal that participation is influenced not only by formal institutional design but also by wider socio-economic dependencies and political relations. In contexts where communities are economically independent and less reliant upon state support, participation tends to be limited or relatively passive. Conversely, where governments actively facilitate economic opportunities and provide development incentives, communities often demonstrate more sustained and enthusiastic engagement. These findings suggest that participation cannot be understood simply as a matter of governance structure alone but must instead be situated within broader political-economic contexts that shape relationships between state institutions and local populations.

Although Mammadova et al. (2021) focus specifically on UNESCO biosphere reserves rather than geoparks, their analysis remains conceptually significant because both

designations operate within UNESCO-led governance frameworks that seek to balance conservation and development objectives. At the same time, this distinction also highlights an important limitation within the existing literature: geoparks cannot be assumed to function according to identical governance logics simply because they share institutional affiliation with other UNESCO programmes. Geoparks may be structured, interpreted, and implemented differently depending on historical legacies, administrative systems, political priorities, and socio-cultural contexts. This underscores the need to situate geopark development within broader socio-political and institutional conditions rather than treating it as a purely technical or managerial process with predetermined outcomes.

Consequently, a significant gap remains in understanding how structural conditions, institutional power relations, and historically embedded governance cultures shape geopark development trajectories across different geographical contexts. Existing literature has yet to adequately explain why certain geoparks prioritise geoconservation, others pursue tourism-driven development, and others attempt to negotiate hybrid approaches that integrate conservation, tourism, and community objectives simultaneously. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond descriptive governance typologies toward a more critical understanding of geoparks as politically negotiated heritage-governance spaces in which competing forms of knowledge, authority, and development priorities are continuously contested and reconfigured.

These dynamics become particularly visible in debates surrounding participation and local involvement. UNESCO frameworks frequently promote geoparks as ‘bottom-up’ initiatives grounded in local participation and community empowerment (Ferraro, Schilling, Baeza, Oms, & Sa, 2020). This participatory orientation is widely celebrated for strengthening local stewardship by enabling communities to understand, manage, and benefit from geodiversity, while also strengthening their sense of ownership over geological resources that were previously marginalised or underrecognized (Farsani, Coelho, & Costa, 2012; Ferraro et al., 2020). However, despite this widely acknowledged importance of local perspective, Stoffelen (2019) highlights a notable gap in understanding the societal role of geoparks—specifically, whether the geopark model genuinely delivers value to the communities it is intended to serve. In geopark contexts, community insights are frequently overlooked during formal inventory and evaluation procedures, which tend to prioritise scientific or expert-driven assessment (Tavares, Henriques, Domingos, & Bala, 2015; Ólafsdóttir & Tverijonaite, 2018). This disconnect highlights a persistent gap between participatory ideals

and institutional realities, suggesting that the integration of local voices in geopark governance remains uneven and contested.

It is important to note that much of the existing literature on conservation assumes that the primary objective of local engagement is to secure compliance with externally defined conservation objectives, reflecting an underlying Eurocentric perspective (Winter, 2014; Wimbledon & Smith-Meyer, 2012; Gordon, 2018a). This perspective is often portrayed as inherently ‘top-down’, implying that western approaches rely on hierarchical, centralised decision-making, while non-western are presumed to operate through participatory, bottom-up mechanism. This binary, however, is both empirically and conceptually flawed. Evidence from European geoparks shows that governance has often been decentralised and participatory, engaging local stakeholders actively in decision-making (Farsani, Coelho, & Costa, 2012). Whilst, certain non-western geopark communities have also been found to rely on centralised, top-down authority structures (Simbaña-Tasiguano, Grefa-Shiguango, Cabascango-Chiliquinga, Sanchez-Cortez, & Rodriguez-Calvopina, 2025). Such patterns problematise the automatic association of western approaches with top-down control and non-western contexts with local empowerment, revealing how simplistic dichotomies obscure the diversity of governance practices.

Critically, the discourse around ‘Eurocentric conservation’ has long relied on abstractions that flatten context. Attempts to define conservation according to particular cultural or geographical frames often paradoxically decontextualise it, stripping away the social, historical, and political factors that shape practice on the ground (Winter, 2014). In this way, the literature risks reifying notions of difference—most notably the East-West divide—without interrogating how such categories are themselves embedded within national, geopolitical, and institutional agendas.

Broader scholarship on protected area governance further demonstrates that the meaningful incorporation of local knowledge can improve conservation outcomes, strengthen long-term community support, and enhance commitment to management objectives (Mascia, Brosius, Dobson, Forbes, Horowitz, McKean, & Turner, 2003; Pretty & Smith, 2004; Fu, Wang, Lu, Liu, Ma, Chen, & Liu, 2004; Azman, Halim, Liu, Saidin, & Komoo, 2010). Research on the Langkawi UNESCO Global Geopark in Malaysia, for example, found that communities receiving greater social and economic benefits were more likely to support geopark management initiatives (Azman et al., 2010). However, such findings—as also noted by Mammadova et al. (2021)—reveal that participation frequently remains embedded within

institutional structures directed by governmental authorities. This indicates that, rather than representing a strictly bottom-up approach, many geoparks operate under a hybrid governance model, in which both local communities and formal institutions actively contribute to development and management decisions.

Comparative studies further reveal substantial variation in governance structures across geopolitical contexts. Evidence indicates that community involvement is particularly salient in countries with high social awareness of geological heritage and decentralised administrative systems (Whiteley & Browne, 2013; Miles, 2013; Orús & Urquí, 2020). As mentioned in the discussion earlier, many European geoparks have embraced this participatory approach, emphasising strong local engagement in both governance and day-to-day activities (Farsani, Coelho, & Costa, 2012). In contrast, research on geoparks in China highlights a markedly different governance model (Briggs, Newsome, & Dowling, 2022). Analysis by Ng (2017) show that national and regional governments take the lead in planning and regulation, playing a central role in the development of many Chinese geoparks, such as Jiuzhaigou UNESCO Global Geopark (Gu, Du, Tang, Qiao, Bossard, & Deng, 2013). This government-oriented approach has created a hierarchical administrative system, in which areas of geological heritage often already hold prior classifications under multiple governmental agencies (Briggs et al., 2022). By coordinating conservation, tourism development, and infrastructural investment through these overlapping mechanisms, the Chinese state can implement protective measures and large-scale development projects efficiently. However, this centralised system has historically limited direct community involvement in decision-making. Similar dynamics have been observed in Australia's National Landscapes Programme, where government institutions remained central despite attempts to encourage local engagement (Briggs et al., 2022). While the program aimed to engage local communities, it remained primarily government led. The initiative lasted ten years but ultimately collapsed when federal funding was withdrawn.

These examples demonstrate that geopark governance rarely conforms neatly to simplistic binaries between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches. Instead, governance arrangements are typically hybrid, relational, and shaped by specific historical, political, economic, and institutional conditions. The focus on geoparks in the Chinese context brings to light the pivotal role of governance structures in shaping how geoparks function and achieve their objectives—and yet such focus remains omitted in other geographical contexts. Moreover, such binary construction often overlooks the messy realities of hybrid governance arrangements that integrate elements of both approaches.

Taken together, these observations highlight a demand for more a critical, nuanced approach. Rather than assuming universal governance logics, it is necessary to examine how historical legacies, institutional arrangements, and power dynamics shape practice in specific contexts. Only by moving beyond reductive East-West comparisons and top-down versus bottom-up assumptions can we begin to appreciate the multiplicity of ontologies, epistemologies, and governance traditions that coexist globally.

Importantly, the significance of governance extends beyond questions of institutional organisation and management effectiveness. Governance structures influence not only how geoparks are managed but also how geological heritage is interpreted and experienced by different stakeholders. This broader role becomes particularly important when geoparks are understood not merely as conservation and development initiatives but also as tourism and heritage destinations where meanings are actively produced, communicated, and negotiated. In this sense, governance is concerned not only with the management of physical resources but also with the processes through which particular understandings of geology, culture, history, and sustainability are selected, authorised, and presented to visitors.

While early geopark discourse often emphasised geoscientific education and conservation objectives (Jones, 2008; Du & Girault, 2018), more recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of visitor experience, heritage interpretation, and destination management in shaping how geopark landscapes are encountered and understood (Weng, Liang & Bao, 2020; Nowacki, 2021). This shift reflects broader development within heritage studies, where heritage is increasingly understood not as a fixed collection of resources but as a process through which meanings and values are negotiated and communicated to particular audiences (Smith, Ristiawan, & Sudarmadi, 2026). From this perspective, this significance of geological features does not derive solely from their physical characteristics or scientific value. Rather, meanings emerge through interpretive processes that connect landscapes to wider narratives of place, identity, history, environmental stewardship, and sustainable development. In this sense, governance and management priorities directly influence how visitors engage with geological sites by determining which features are foregrounded, how interpretive narratives are constructed, and what forms of interaction are enabled or constrained.

The following section will thus explore how interpretation functions within geotourism experiences, focusing on the ways meaning is produced and negotiated through encounters with geological landscapes.

2.2 Geotourism Experience and Heritage Interpretation

From a tourism perspective, geoparks are deliberately positioned to transform geological sites into accessible and engaging destinations, a positioning that places interpretation at the centre of the touristic experience. This tourism-oriented positioning is strongly reflected in the academic literature, where geotourism is consistently framed as a pivotal instrument for promoting geoheritage and encouraging geoconservation (Newsome & Dowling, 2010; Štrba, Kolačková, Kudelas, Kršák, & Sidor, 2020; Gordon, 2018a; Bentivenga, Cavalcante, Mastronuzzi, Palladino, & Prosser, 2019). Within this body of work, geotourism is widely conceptualised as a form of sustainable tourism that foregrounds the interpretation and appreciation of geological features while simultaneously supporting environmental stewardship (Dowling & Newsome, 2006).

Central to this framing is the strategic transformation of geological features—ranging from relatively small-scale elements such as rock outcrops and fossil beds to larger landforms and entire landscapes—into meaningful tourism assets. Geoparks actively construct these features for tourist consumption, shaping how they are perceived and experienced. Geological sites are framed in ways intended to encourage visitor engagement, reflection, and appreciation of Earth’s deep history and dynamic processes (Hose, 2000, 2008; Dowling & Newsome, 2006, 2018; Farsani, Coelho, Costa, & Carvalho, 2012). This framing implies that encounters with geological phenomena are often mediated through interpretive narratives, site management strategies, and curated experiences, highlighting how geotourism relies on the production of perception as much as it does on the inherent qualities of the landscape.

Closely aligned with these perspectives is the widely recognised view that geotourism and interpretation are inherently intertwined, emphasising the importance of fostering understanding and learning about geoheritage and Earth sciences rather than focusing solely on their aesthetic or scenic qualities (Hose, 1995, 2000, 2011; Dowling & Newsome, 2006). Building on this foundation, Yuhora, Atsuko, Hiroyuki, & Kuniyasu (2014) introduce the concept of a ‘Geostory’ as an interpretive framework that conveys the interconnectedness between humans and the Earth, thereby making geoscientific knowledge more accessible to wider audiences, including non-specialist. This perspective aligns with the understanding of landscape as a dynamic system shaped by interactions between natural and anthropogenic processes, which are central to geopark interpretation (Reynard & Panizza, 2005). Accordingly, constructing integrated geological narratives that incorporate cultural and

capacity to commodify and package geological features framed as enabling public appreciation and, ultimately, protection. In this way, conservation goals become closely intertwined with tourism development and narrative construction.

This integrative ambition becomes particularly evident in how geological and cultural dimensions are operationalised within the geotourism experience. Přikryl and Török (2010), for example, bring attention to the use of natural stone in building construction, illustrating how geological materials become embedded in architectural traditions and cultural landscapes. This relationship was further explored by Del Lama, de La Corte Bacci, Martins, da Glória Motta Garcia, & Kazumi Dehira (2015), who traced the geological origins of building stones used in the historic centre of São Paulo, Brazil, and subsequently proposed a geotrail to highlight both the cultural and geological significance of urban stone heritage. Taken together, these studies demonstrate how abiotic materials can serve as a bridge between geoscience and cultural interpretation, with the aim of providing visitors with a multidimensional understanding of landscape and heritage through geotourism encounters. However, much of this work engages cultural features primarily through their material connections to the abiotic environment, placing comparatively less emphasis on the intangible dimensions of culture. As a result, cultural interpretation in geotourism encounters tends to remain grounded in tangible expressions, while symbolic meanings, social memory, and lived cultural experiences remain comparatively underexplored.

At the same time, despite claims of holism, the limited literature reveals an underlying hierarchy within these interpretive frameworks. This gap highlights the contribution of the present study in extending and building on Gordon's work. Geological significance is typically treated as the primary value of the site, establishing the abiotic dimension as the central organising principle. Biotic and cultural elements are then incorporated in ways that support, contextualise, or reinforce that geological focus, rather than functioning as equally generative sources of meaning (Gordon, 2018a). In practice, this often results in interpretive narratives that move outward from geological processes, situating ecological systems and human histories as derivative or illustrative layers. Consequently, the prioritisation of geological processes within geotourism models can marginalise cultural meanings and practices that emerge through lived engagement with the physical environment.

Interestingly, empirical evidence from a Czech geosite complicates assumptions about the inherent visibility of geological value. The study found that while visitors generally expressed support for the protection of geodiversity, they nonetheless considered the conservation of biotic elements to be more important than that of abiotic features

(Kubalíková, Bajer, & Balková, 2021). This finding is particularly significant given the geological heritage setting of the Czech study, where greater awareness to abiotic values might reasonably be expected. Instead, the results suggest a deeply embedded hierarchy in environmental perception that privileges living components of the landscape over non-living ones. This pattern has been linked to gaps in public knowledge and ineffective communication surrounding geological heritage (Croft, 2019).

Accordingly, awareness of geology value cannot be assumed to be self-evident but must instead be understood as socially constructed and shaped through communication and interpretation. It depends heavily on how landscapes are narrated, framed, and interpreted, and on the extent to which meaningful connections are forged between geological processes and human experience (Larwood & Worton, 2018). In this sense, the recognition of geological value is contingent upon interpretive strategies rather than simply the presence and the significant value of geological features themselves.

Translating this integrative ideal into practice, however, remains challenging. One of the most persistent obstacles in geotourism implementation is the effective interpretation of geological values (Bujdosó, Dávid, Wéber, & Tenk, 2015), a difficulty closely linked to the uneven distribution of scientific expertise within geotourism destinations. As Pásková, Zelenka, Ogasawara, Zavala, and Astete (2021) argue, the availability and diversity of expertise significantly shape how the ABC concept is operationalised. Empirical studies reinforce this claim: Fajriasanti and Karyawan (2021) show that in the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, geological expertise dominates, while biodiversity and cultural specialists remain underrepresented, resulting in an imbalanced interpretation of the ABC dimensions. This imbalance highlights a structural limitation of geotourism practice: the integration of abiotic, biotic, and cultural elements is not an automatic outcome of geotourism development but depends on institutional support, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the knowledge of those employed (Ren et al., 2013). Without these enabling conditions, interpretive narratives risk becoming fragmented and discipline-bound rather than holistic, falling back on a prioritisation of geological interpretation at the expense of other dimensions.

Compounding these interpretive challenges are the institutional dynamics among key stakeholders involved in geopark governance. Williams, McHenry and Boothroyd (2020) point to a persistent communication gap between geoscientists and government authorities, as the former possess the expertise required to adequately evaluate and interpret geoheritage effectively, while the latter hold the legislative authority to regulate nature conservation. In

practice, interpretive guidance is often filtered through governmental representatives, who in turn brief tour guides using simplified narratives and standardised examples of geotourism practices. While such mediation may enhance accessibility, it can also dilute scientific nuance. As Williams et al. (2020) argue, the limited involvement of geoconservation professionals in management planning may constrain the depth and accuracy of geological communication presented to the public.

At the same time, the absence of sustained top-down professional input from geologists or geoheritage specialists can shift management priorities toward tourism development rather than conservation. This dynamic may help explain some of the geopark development trajectories discussed earlier, where economic and recreational objectives gradually take precedence over long-term geological preservation (Fauzi & Misni, 2016). Moreover, in the valuation placed on geology that a geopark designation brings, there is an inbuilt requirement and thus prioritisation of professional conservationist knowledge, that can be at the expense of cultural epistemologies and locally embedded ways of knowing the landscape. The role of ‘experts’ in geotourism therefore extends well beyond mere scientific communication; it is perceived to play a critical role in balancing geoconservation objectives with tourism activities, so as to support the sustainable development of the geological sites. This dynamic further highlights the presence of hierarchical power structures among tourism actors within geopark governance, whereby western scientific conservationist geological knowledge is valued above other ways of knowing.

Rather than interrogating these underlying power relations, attention has primarily focused on whether tourism actors at the local level possess the capacity to effectively communicate geoscientific knowledge to visitors. Hose (2011) and Migoñ, (2018), for instance, argue that successful interpretation depends upon the ability to translate complex geoscientific concepts into accessible and engaging narratives. Consequently, concerns have frequently centred on the perceived limitations of local tourism stakeholders, who are often considered to lack the technical expertise, training, and resources necessary to fulfil this role effectively (Aquino & Rivera, 2018), despite frequently serving as the *de facto* custodians and interpreters of geological heritage (Newsome, Dowling, & Leung, 2012). Framed in this way, debates surrounding interpretation become less about the coexistence of multiple knowledge systems through which landscapes might be understood and more about the extent to which local actors can reproduce and communicate authorised geoscientific narratives. Such perspectives implicitly position scientific expertise as the benchmark of legitimate interpretation, while alternative forms of local, experiential, cultural, and place-

based knowledge are often rendered secondary. This hierarchy reflects broader power relations embedded within the UNESCO Global Geoparks framework. Although UNESCO increasingly promotes community participation and the integration of local knowledge, geopark designation and evaluation remain strongly structured around the identification, protection, and interpretation of geological heritage of recognised scientific significance (UNESCO, 2023). As a result, geoscientific knowledge becomes institutionally privileged because it forms the basis upon which heritage significance is validated, management effectiveness is assessed, and international recognition is granted.

From a heritage studies perspective, this can be understood as a process of authorisation through which particular forms of expertise acquire legitimacy and authority in defining heritage meanings (Smith, 2025). The issue is therefore not simply whether local knowledge is included, but how different knowledge systems are positioned in relation to one another within governance structures. While local cultural narratives, experiential understandings, and place-based meanings may be incorporated into interpretation, they often remain framed within broader scientific narratives that establish the terms through which geological heritage is understood and communicated. Consequently, questions concerning interpretation are not simply matters of educational effectiveness but also authority, legitimacy, and the power to determine what knowledge counts, whose voices are recognised, and how landscapes are ultimately represented within geopark settings.

However, such critiques raise a deeper concern. As Migoñ (2018) notes, while interpretation is widely recognised as central to successful geotourism experiences, far less attention has been paid to how interpretation itself is constructed within geopark contexts—specifically, how decisions are made about what to foreground, what to marginalise, and what to omit altogether. When geological knowledge is privileged as the authoritative lens through which landscapes are understood, assumptions are simultaneously made about what constitutes legitimate knowledge and who is entitled to produce it. Interpretation, therefore, is not a neutral act of translation; it is a selective and political process that authorises certain meanings, legitimises particular histories, and stabilises specific claims to truth. Yet, there remains limited empirical insight into how such power relations are negotiated in practice across diverse geopark settings and how these negotiations shape the representation of geology, culture, and environment in geopark encounters.

This gap is significant because interpretive practices influence not only what knowledge is communicated but also how places are experienced and understood by visitors. Heritage and

tourism scholars have long argued that interpretation shapes how visitors see, understand, and value places by directing attention towards particular features, narratives, and meanings while rendering others less visible (Lisheng, Liang & Bao, 2020). From the perspective of the tourist gaze, tourism experiences are mediated through socially and culturally constructed ways of seeing that influence what visitors recognise as significant, authentic, or worthy of attention (Larsen & Urry, 2011). Visitors therefore do not encounter landscapes as neutral observers; rather, their experiences are shaped by interpretive frameworks, promotional imagery, guide narratives, broader cultural expectations, which intersect with their positionality, influencing what is noticed, valued, and remembered.

Consequently, geopark interpretation does more than communicate geological knowledge; it actively participates in producing particular understandings of landscape, heritage, and destination identity. Through these processes, certain features, stories, and meanings are foregrounded while others remain peripheral or invisible, shaping how visitors come to understand what is distinctive and valuable about a place. Interpretation therefore not only mediates encounters between visitors and landscapes but also influence whose knowledge, values, and representations become legitimised within geopark narratives. It is precisely at this intersection between interpretation, authority, and the legitimisation of knowledge that questions of authenticity emerge.

2.3 Conceptualising Authenticity in Tourism and Heritage

The concept of authenticity has generated extensive scholarly debate, reflecting its central yet contested position in tourism studies (Xie, 2011). Nevertheless, its enduring prominence can be attributed to its perceived importance in shaping and assessing tourist experiences (Moore, Buchmann, Månsson, & Fisher, 2021). Scholars have approached authenticity from multiple perspectives. Wang (1999), Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart (2008), for example, identify three major conceptualisations: objective authenticity, grounded in the measurable originality of objects; constructive authenticity, shaped by tourists' subjective interpretations, expectations, and socio-cultural imaginaries; and existential authenticity, which shifts attention from objects to the tourist's inner experience, emphasising feelings of self-discovery and personal meaning. In this sense, authenticity may be understood either as an inherent, verifiable attribute or as an experientially negotiated and individually assigned meaning (Wang, 1999).

Despite its early influence, the objective authenticity perspective has been criticised for its conceptual limitations, particularly its reliance on authoritative validation. As Rickly-Boyd and Vidon (2018) question, it remains unclear who possesses the authority to authenticate and for whose benefit authenticity is constructed. By privileging expert-driven or institutional standards, the objective approach risks naturalising authenticity as an inherent quality while obscuring the social, political, and relational processes through which it is defined (Wang, 1999). Such an orientation raises a fundamental theoretical question: in tourism contexts, does authenticity reside in the toured object, in its socially constructed meaning, or in the lived experience of the tourist? For this reason, the framework continues to generate debate (Chhabra, 2012).

The limitation of objective authenticity also gave rise to growing interest in how authenticity is represented and performed within tourism settings. MacCannell's (1973) concept of 'staged' authenticity challenged the assumption that authenticity could be located solely within the toured object by demonstrating how tourism experiences are frequently structured around performances designed to satisfy visitors' expectations of encountering the 'real'. Staged authenticity argued that tourists often seek access to the 'backstage' realities of destinations, believing these spaces to be more authentic than the carefully curated 'frontstage' experiences presented for tourist consumption. Yet the distinction between frontstage and backstage is often difficult to maintain in practice. Destinations do not simply reveal pre-existing cultures, heritage, and identities to visitors; rather, they actively select, interpret, and present particular representations of them. As a result, authenticity cannot be understood solely as an inherent quality of places or experiences. Instead, staged authenticity shifted scholarly attention towards the processes through which authenticity is constructed, represented, and negotiated within tourism encounters.

This perspective provided an important bridge towards constructivist understandings of authenticity. While staged authenticity draws attention to how authenticity is represented and performed within tourism settings, constructive authenticity shifts analytical attention towards how authenticity itself is socially produced and negotiated. Rather than treating authenticity as an inherent property of objects, constructive authenticity emphasises that perceptions of authenticity are shaped through the interaction between tourists' expectations, cultural assumptions, and imaginaries, and the ways in which destinations are represented by local communities, tourism operators, and other stakeholders (Tian, Wang, Law, & Zhang, 2020). From this perspective, authenticity does not reside within an object, site, or

cultural practice itself, but emerges through the meanings and values that different actors collectively attribute to it.

Empirical research illustrates the tensions that arise from this multiplicity of perspectives. Xie (2003), for instance, demonstrates that although tourists may express interest in heritage, they do not necessarily perceive it as authentic. This interpretive gap becomes particularly visible in geopark contexts, where authenticity is often framed through scientific or institutional authority. When authenticity is communicated primarily via expert knowledge, visitors may struggle to connect with the experience on an affective or cultural level. The result can be dissatisfaction among tourists who seek meaningful engagement, alongside frustration among heritage providers whose authoritative interpretations fail to resonate with audiences. In this way, divergences in how authenticity is constructed and evaluated can generate tension between supply and demand, potentially producing dissatisfaction on both sides. Nevertheless, critiques of constructive authenticity point to its tendency to privilege negotiated meanings while paying less attention to the embodied and experiential dimensions of tourism encounters, as well as to the evolving nature of culture and heritage through which authenticity is continually reinterpreted and performed (Xie, 2011).

It is precisely these limitations that informed the development of existential authenticity. Whilst staged authenticity is primarily concerned with the performance of authenticity and constructive authenticity focuses on its social construction, existential authenticity redirects attention towards the subjective experience of the tourist. Wang (1999) argues that authenticity in tourism is not necessarily grounded in the objective qualities of heritage nor solely in socially negotiated meanings, but in particular states of being and modes of engagement that emerge through tourism experiences. Conceptualised as existential authenticity, this perspective has gained increasing traction as tourism scholarship has moved beyond object-centred and representational concerns toward more phenomenological and embodied understandings of experience (Rickly-Boyd & Vidon, 2018). While objective authenticity looks for ‘truth’ in the object itself and constructive authenticity focuses on the object’s meaning, existential authenticity focuses on the subjective feeling of being ‘true to oneself’ during an experience (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). This affective and embodied turn has progressively reoriented tourism scholarship toward the interiority of the tourist, often at the expense of examining the social, institutional, and political processes through which authenticity is produced, negotiated, and authorised. Therefore, one central contribution of existential authenticity is that it enables scholars to explain how tourists can experience

meaningful and transformative encounters even in the absence of objectively authentic objects (Jin, Hoggen, & Shen, 2020).

However, the shift towards experiential authenticity has also attracted criticism, such as lacking a philosophical framework which lead to mystification and idealisation of tourism experiences (Young-Rae & Byung-Woong, 2014; Rickly-Boyd, Vidon, & Knudsen, 2021; Coşkun, 2021). By locating authenticity primarily within the tourist's subjective experience, existential authenticity can underplay the social, institutional, and political processes through which authenticity is produced, negotiated, represented, and authorised. As a result, questions concerning who defines authenticity, whose interpretations become legitimised, and how authenticity is embedded within broader governance structures often remain insufficiently addressed.

Nevertheless, the emergence and growing influence of existential authenticity reflected important limitations within earlier object-centred approaches. A growing body of literature has identified several reasons for this conceptual shift, particularly through two dominant strands of interpretation that collectively reoriented authenticity from object-based evaluation toward experiential understanding (Jin et al., 2020). At the most fundamental level, both strands emerged in response to a growing tension between theoretical model and empirical realities. Object-based approaches assume that authenticity can be verified through material criteria such as originality, accuracy, or expert validation. Yet an expanding body of empirical research demonstrated that tourists frequently report meaningful and transformative experiences even in contexts widely recognised as staged, reconstructed, or commodified. This disconnect revealed the explanatory limits of models that locate authenticity solely in objects.

The first strand reflect an ontological relocation of authenticity, redefining where authenticity resides. By conceptualising authenticity as a state of being—expressed through self-realisation, reflexivity, or genuine interpersonal connection (Kirillova, Lehto & Cai, 2017; Yi, Lin, Jin, & Luo, 2017)—it shifted the analytical focus from external verification to internal experience. Within this perspective, tourism becomes a liminal space in which individuals can temporarily step outside routine identities and reconnect with more authentic modes of being (Wang, 1999). Existential authenticity is thus framed as a response to the routinisation of everyday life and the regulatory pressures of social norms (Jin et al., 2020). In this formulation, authenticity is no longer treated as a property of objects but as a quality

of lived experience, thereby weakening the epistemic authority of object-based authentication.

The second strand represents an experiential reconfiguration of authenticity, foregrounding the conditions under which authenticity emerges. Rather than asking whether something is authentic, this perspective examines how authenticity is generated through immersion, affective resonance, and embodied engagement. In doing so, it destabilised the assumption that authenticity is fixed or materially anchored, instead conceptualising it as co-produced through relational and processual encounters between visitors, places, and narratives. Ideas such as ‘closeness to the original spirit’ (González, 2008) illustrate how authenticity can arise through embodied encounters with landscapes, heritage narratives, and intangible cultural meanings (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Naoi, 2004). Here, authenticity is understood as emerging through depth of engagement rather than objective validation. This perspective helps explain why tourists frequently report meaningful experiences in staged or commodified environments—an empirical paradox that object-oriented models struggle to resolve.

Taken together, these developments mark a decisive reconfiguration of authenticity debates. Authenticity was no longer conceptualised as an inherent property of objects awaiting verification, but as an experiential condition emerging through engagement. Accordingly, the analytical emphasis shifted from questions of authentication—concerned with material originality and historical accuracy—to questions of meaning, affect, and lived experience. It is this gradual but cumulative relocation of authenticity—from objects to encounters, from verification to phenomenology—that underpins the move toward experience-centred understandings of tourism.

This experiential turn foregrounds tourism as a space for self-reflection, personal transformation, and alternative modes of being. Such dynamics are particularly evident in nature-based tourism contexts, including geoparks, where encounters with unfamiliar landscapes disrupt habitual ways of seeing, feeling, and interacting with the world. Rather than passively consuming predetermined narratives, visitors actively engage in processes of meaning-making through sensory, emotional, and embodied encounters with place (Xie, 2011). From this perspective, authenticity emerges not solely through the interpretation of heritage objects or the validation of expert knowledge, but through affective forms of engagement that generate feelings of connection, wonder, reflection, or belonging.

The experiential turn has also encouraged greater attention to embodiment and sense of place within tourism scholarship. Experiences of authenticity are increasingly understood as arising through bodily immersion in particular environments, including the physical act of moving through landscapes, engaging with environmental conditions, and participating in everyday practices that connect visitors to place. Such experiences draw attention to the role of the body as an active participant in meaning-making, recognising that tourism encounters are not only interpreted cognitively but are also felt through movement, sensation, and emotional response (Månsson, 2010). In this sense, authenticity can contribute to the development of a sense of place (Zhou, Chen, & Wu, 2022), whereby visitors form emotional and symbolic attachments to particular environments through lived experiences rather than through formal interpretation alone (Shaykh-Baygloo & Soltani, 2026; Zhu, Han, Zhuang & Wang, 2025).

However, the capacity of authenticity to generate such attachment is neither fixed nor universally experienced. The affective, embodied, and relational dimensions of authenticity are shaped by individual dispositions and social positioning. Wang (1999) argues that different tourist profiles shape how authenticity is evaluated, while demographic variables such as age, gender, education, income, and place of residence may further influence these perceptions (Littrell, Anderson, and Brown, 1993; Waite, 2000). Yet empirical findings remain inconsistent. Budruk (2008), for instance, found that older tourists tend to prioritise authenticity and interpret it through preferred tourism styles, whereas Waite (2000) reported higher perceived authenticity among younger visitors. These contradictions suggest that authenticity is not simply experienced but actively negotiated across generational and socio-cultural contexts.

Further studies emphasise that encounters involving spontaneity and everyday local practices are often perceived as more authentic. Blapp and Mitas (2018) shows the unplanned interactions rooted in daily life are frequently interpreted as more authentic, partly because organised tours limit opportunities for direct engagement (Xie, 2011). Similarly, Tiberghien, Bremner, and Milne (2017) conceptualise existential authenticity as emerging through spontaneous, intimate, and reciprocal hosts-guest interactions. Within this framing, authenticity is generated less by the intrinsic qualities of places than by the immediacy and perceived sincerity of social encounters. Such interactions may produce cognitive shifts through enhanced cultural understanding alongside emotional resonance derived from meaningful interpersonal exchange.

Whilst valuable in making sense of the tourist experience, relational accounts of authenticity require careful critical interrogation. The emphasis on intimacy and reciprocity risks obscuring the uneven power relations that structure many host-guest encounters. Opportunities for 'authentic' interaction are often mediated by tourism economies, where local communities may be compelled to perform accessibility, warmth, or cultural openness in ways that align with visitor expectations (Azizi, 2024). What is framed as spontaneous may therefore be carefully staged, economically motivated, or shaped by structural inequalities. Conran's (2006) work illustrates this tension: tourists often equate authenticity with access to intimate and personalised encounters. While such encounters may indeed foster a sense of existential authenticity, the valorisation of intimacy raises important questions: whose authenticity is being prioritised, and at what cost? The pursuit of closeness may inadvertently commodify social relations, transforming everyday practice into consumable experiences and placing emotional labour demands on host communities.

Taken together, these insights reveal both the value and limitations of relational understandings of existential authenticity. While they highlight the importance of social proximity and affective engagement, they also demonstrate how authenticity is shaped by asymmetrical power relations, performative expectations and the commodification of intimacy. A more critical reading therefore suggests that existential authenticity is not simply discovered through interpersonal touristic encounters but produced within broader socio-economic and cultural structures that shape how such encounters are staged, negotiated, and experienced (Stepchenkova, Lee, & Kim, 2024). For this thesis, authenticity is understood primarily as a socially constructed and negotiated phenomenon. While material attributes, heritage resources, and scientific evidence remain important, what is regarded as authentic emerges through interactions among diverse stakeholders whose interpretations are shaped by cultural values, institutional priorities, power relations, and sociohistorical contexts.

Despite its recognised importance for visitor satisfaction and engagement, authenticity remains underexplored within geotourism research. Contrasting with the broader authenticity scholarship, much of the existing geotourism literature adopts a supply-oriented lens, focusing on how geological heritage is developed and leveraged for tourism (Dowling & Allan, 2018). Consequently, limited attention has been paid to how visitors themselves perceive and experience authenticity within geotourism contexts (Aquino et al., 2017; Boley & Nickerson, 2013), with only a small number of studies directly addressing this gap (e.g. Allan, 2012; Dowling & Allan, 2018; Fung & Jim, 2015; Hurtado, Dowling, & Sanders, 2014), whilst there are no identified sources that consider authenticity in geotourism from

both a supply side and demand side perspective—an interesting oversight, given the various ways these groups are approached within the different authenticity scholarship. This imbalance underscores the need for more visitor-centred research that examines authenticity as lived, negotiated, and interpreted within geotourism experiences.

At the same time, bringing the preceding discussions into conversation reveals a deeper conceptual tension. In the previous section, the literature on interpretation is largely grounded in a normative, expert-driven framework concerned with the accurate communication of geological, biological, and cultural knowledge. Here, authority rests on scientific credibility and institutional legitimacy, and the central task is ensuring that visitors encounter heritage through authorised interpretive narratives. Tourists are thus positioned primarily as recipients of expert knowledge, while authenticity is implicitly equated with fidelity to scientifically validated meanings.

By contrast, the authenticity literature introduces a markedly different orientation. Particularly within experiential and existential approaches, the analytical focus shifts from epistemic accuracy to lived experience. Authenticity becomes associated with personal resonance, embodiment, and emotional engagement rather than expert validation. In this framing, interpretive authority is decentralised and dispersed across individual subjectivities. Yet this shift often sidelines questions of geological significance, institutional authority, and knowledge hierarchies, placing the tourist's experience at the centre without fully interrogating whose definitions of authenticity are being privileged or marginalised, nor how the tourist might engage with such constructions of authenticity.

This juxtaposition exposes a deeper analytical divide: one body of literature privileges authorised knowledge and normative interpretation, while the other foregrounds experiential meaning and visitor subjectivity. In practice, however, geotourism unfolds precisely at the intersection of these logics—through authentication. Geological heritage is scientifically validated and institutionally legitimised, while simultaneously being rendered meaningful and authentic to visitors. It is at this intersection that the present study is situated. Rather than treating interpretation and authenticity as separate debates, this research brings them into dialogue in order to examine how interpretive authority and experiential authenticity interact in practice. In doing so, it shifts the focus from choosing between expert knowledge and visitor experience toward analysing the process through which meanings are negotiated across multiple actors by turning attention to the authentication of geoparks through geotourism.

Framed in this way, authenticity becomes inseparable from questions of authority and power. What comes to be considered authentic is never self-evident, nor is it an individualised experience alone. It is rather shaped by those who possess the capacity to define and legitimise meaning. Declaring something authentic involves the attribution of status and is therefore inherently political (Xie, 2011). Within tourism contexts, authenticity claims are rarely neutral. Ateljevic and Doorne (2005) conceptualise authenticity as relationally negotiated between producers and consumers, while Cohen and Cohen (2012) highlight the multiplicity of actors involved, including policymakers, tourism providers, local communities, and visitors, each bringing different values and forms of authority. Authenticity thus becomes embedded within broader socio-political contexts in which power relations shape whose narratives are legitimised and whose are marginalised.

These debates have prompted a further conceptual reorientation within tourism scholarship. Rather than treating authenticity as an inherent property of places, objects, or experiences, a growing body of research calls for a shift toward examining processes of authentication as a result of increasing attention towards longer-lasting experiences that have greater impact on tourists' happiness (Amaro, Caldeira, & Seabra, 2023; Rickly-Boyd, Sharma, & Canavan, 2025; Xueying & Terasaki, 2026). From this perspective, authenticity is not something waiting to be discovered but something actively produced through discourse, representation, and institutional practice. The fact that some actors possess the authority to authenticate while others do not highlights the central role of power and social processes in shaping authenticity (Penrose, 2020). The analytical focus therefore moves from authenticity as a static outcome to authentication as a dynamic and relational process embedded in power relations. In this context, authentication explores how authenticity is constructed, negotiated, and contested within geopark settings, where multiple stakeholders exercise different forms of authority over how geological heritage is interpreted and legitimised.

The concept of authentication provides a useful analytical lens for understanding how authenticity is constructed within contested environments. Cohen and Cohen (2012) define authentication as the social process through which the authenticity of an attraction is affirmed and recognised. They distinguish between two primary modes of authentication: hot and cool authentication. Hot authentication refers to informal, performative processes grounded in belief, emotional resonance, and embodied experience. It is often implicit, emerging through shared meanings, rituals, and affective engagements rather than formal verification. In contrast, cool authentication is based on formalised knowledge systems, such

as scientific expertise, institutional endorsement, or technical validation, where authenticity is justified through rational and authoritative criteria.

Within a geopark context, the geotrail can be understood as a subtle but significant site of hot authentication. Hot authentication operates through lived, embodied experience rather than formal verification or institutional endorsement. While geotrails are typically framed as educational infrastructure designed to communicate scientifically validated geological knowledge, they also function as performative spaces that actively shape how authenticity is experienced. The trail choreographs movement through the landscape—where they pause, what they are invited to touch, observe, or contemplate. It actively shapes the conditions under which authenticity is experienced. This dynamic becomes particularly visible when geotrails integrate symbolic or narrative elements such as local legends, origin stories, or culturally meaningful metaphors (Wang, 2021), layering affective resonance onto scientific explanation. In France's UGGps, for example, the self-guided cave trail discussed by Stolz and Mergerle (2022) transforms karst geology from abstract geological process into an immersive encounter. In this context, hot authentication emerges through immersion: the atmosphere of darkness, humidity, echo, and enclosure. Here, authenticity is felt through sensory disorientation and embodied presence.

While geotrails foreground experiential authentication, geoparks are simultaneously embedded within institutional regimes that privilege a different logic of authenticity. At the institutional level, UNESCO primarily exercises its authority through cool authentication: expert delegations are dispatched to conduct on-site evaluations, assess compliance with established criteria, and ultimately endorse or withhold the UGGp designation. Scientific assessments of geoheritage typically rely on expert-led procedures (Badang, Ali, Komoo, and Leman, 2017). This power of cool authentication extends beyond the initial designation process to the periodic revalidation of geoparks, during which UNESCO ensures that destinations continue to meet the required standards of conservation, education, and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). This evaluative framework rests on the assumption that authenticity is inherent in the landscape's physical features and can therefore be objectively identified and measured.

Despite its conceptual relevance, the hot-cool authentication framework remains relatively underexplored in tourism studies (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). In their formulation, the distinction operates as a productive analytical binary: hot authentication refers to experiential, socially embedded processes of validation, whereas cool authentication denotes formalised, institutional forms of legitimation grounded in expert authority. While

analytically useful, this binary can also risk reifying a separation that is rarely so clear-cut in practice. Empirical realities tend to be far more entangled, with authentication emerging through layered and relational processes rather than discrete categories.

Importantly, the hot-cool distinction also resonates with broader debates on power and governance in tourism and heritage contexts, whereby positioning these modes as oppositional risks overlooking the ways in which they are mutually constitutive. Institutional validation frequently draws legitimacy from experiential or localised meanings, while embodied experiences are often shaped by prior institutional framing. Recognising this interdependence invites a shift away from binary thinking toward a more relational understanding of authentication. Rather than separated categories, hot and cool authentication can be conceptualised as poles along a continuum, with most empirical cases occupying hybrid positions. From this perspective, authenticity emerges through ongoing negotiation, where different actors, epistemologies, and scales of authority intersect. This framing foregrounds the inherently messy and dynamic nature of authentication, highlighting how authenticity is not simply discovered or imposed but continuously assembled through interaction.

This study therefore builds on and extends Cohen and Cohen's framework by empirically tracing how both modes of authentication coexist and interact within the geopark context. It demonstrates that experiential and locally grounded forms of meaning-making are not displaced by institutional processes but are instead entangled with them. By foregrounding this asymmetry, the study moves beyond a simple binary and instead highlights the uneven power relations that shape how authenticity is negotiated and consolidated in practice.

However, these processes carry broader implications: the uneven authorisation of particular authenticities is not merely symbolic but actively shapes how places are represented, valued, and differentiated. Authenticity operates both as a lens for understanding how places are experienced and as a mechanism through which destinations assert uniqueness and negotiate their position within competitive tourism markets. By selectively legitimising certain narratives, practices, and experiences, authenticity becomes a strategic resource in the production of distinction. Drawing on this critical standpoint, the following section shifts from considering authenticity as a process of validation to examining its role in shaping destination distinctiveness.

2.4 Authenticity and Destination Distinctiveness

In a highly competitive global tourism market, destinations must differentiate themselves to attract visitors, and geoparks do so by emphasising their unique combination of geological, ecological, and cultural heritage (Newsome & Dowling, 2010; Louis, Talib, Chan & Kamlun, 2025). While geoparks host distinctive geological formations and rich historical and cultural traditions, research has predominantly focused on their educational significance (Jiang, Wang, Liu, He, Ye, Deng, & Zou, 2023), leaving limited insight into how they communicate tourism appeal and construct destination distinctiveness. Understanding how distinctiveness is produced in geoparks requires considering both the material and social dimensions of place, as well as the processes through which certain experiences are legitimised as meaningful and ‘authentic’.

A central mechanism through which geoparks assert their uniqueness is authenticity. By framing geological features, traditional practices, and local narratives as authentic, geoparks signal that the experiences they offer are not only educational and immersive but also unreplicable elsewhere, and thus worthy of unique visits by domestic and international visitors. In this sense, authenticity is strategically mobilised: it functions simultaneously as a marketable resource and an experiential lens, shaping visitor perceptions and reinforcing the destination’s unique identity so as to attract visitors. Yet, as discussed in the earlier section, authenticity is never neutral. The features highlighted to visitors—whether geological sites, cultural performances, or community rituals—are selectively curated, reflecting the priorities and power relations of multiple stakeholder (Chhabra, 2005). This selective authorisation demonstrates that distinctiveness is co-produced, emerging from the interplay between the inherent qualities of the place and the negotiation of what is legitimised as authentic.

This co-production of place is most clearly enacted through the ‘insider-outsider’ dynamics of landscape engagement (Daugstad, 2008). Local actors and tourism suppliers, as insiders, sustain the landscape and cultural heritage through their knowledge, cultural practices, and everyday routines, actively performing local identity through rituals, storytelling, guiding, or maintenance of sites. From this perspective, landscape are inhabited and produced rather than merely observed, and knowledge of place is situated, experiential, and relational, formed through long-term engagement, sensory familiarity, and social ties. Meanwhile, tourists, as outsiders, encounter these practices temporally, often through curated or visually mediated experiences. Yet as Maoz (2005) emphasises, this relationship is mutually constitutive: locals adapt performances, interpretive tours, and presentations to align with

visitor expectations, while tourists' attention, feedback, and interpretation shape which aspects are emphasised or staged. Through this iterative interaction process, authenticity emerges relationally, and the geopark's distinctiveness is constructed from these performative, co-produced, and negotiated processes, making its assets meaningful and recognisably unique to visitors.

These dynamics reflect broader debates in tourism scholarship concerning the relationship between uniqueness and authenticity. While some literature treats destination distinctiveness primarily in terms of uniqueness, a substantial body of scholarship demonstrates that authenticity and uniqueness are mutually reinforcing. Experiences perceived as unique often associated with personality traits and the concept of the authentic self, such as self-identity, self-development, and self-realization (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Chan, To, & Chu, 2016; Park, Kim, Kim, Lee, & Giroux, 2021). In tourism contexts, Wang (1999), Kolar and Žabkar (2010), Kim and Jamal (2007), Ramkisson and Uysal (2010), show that unique experiences are frequently perceived as authentic, while Noy (2004), Rickly-Boyd (2012), and Zeng, Go, and de Vries (2012) emphasise that highlighting distinctive attributes enhances perceived authenticity.

For geoparks, this implies that destination distinctiveness and authenticity are co-constitutive. The more unique and immersive the experiences offered, the more authentic they are perceived, and vice versa, creating a feedback loop that reinforces the destination's identity and appeal, and thus how many visitors are attracted. Critically, this process embedded in the negotiation of power among actors: which features are emphasised, how they are performed, and whose narratives are legitimised all shape the production of authenticity and, in turn, distinctiveness. By situating authenticity as relational, performative, and strategically mobilised, and attending to the authentication process whereby relations between multiple supply and demand side actors are considered, this framework provides a lens for understanding how geoparks position themselves within competitive tourism markets, and the power relations involved in such processes.

2.5 Summary

The review of the literature highlights several interconnected research gaps that justify further investigation into authenticity of geotourism experience for destination distinctiveness.

First, within geopark and geotourism scholarship, there is limited empirical understanding of how hybrid or multi-level governance configurations are enacted in practice, particularly in non-western geopark settings. While geoparks are built on collaborative governance ideals, research offers limited insight into how these structures shape development trajectories, geological representation, and tourism priorities. Moreover, although community participation is widely emphasised, local perspectives are often marginalised in both practice and scholarship. This issue is closely tied to the persistent challenge of translating integrative interpretation into practice, reflecting knowledge hierarchies and uneven distributions of scientific expertise within geotourism destination that require further attention.

Second, in relation to authenticity and authentication, the literature reveals a conceptual divide between authorised, institutionally driven interpretations and experiential, visitor-centred understandings of authenticity. Although authenticity is increasingly recognised as relational and negotiated, there remains limited empirical research examining how different modes of authentication coexist and interact in practice. This gap is particularly significant, where geological heritage requires scientific legitimation while simultaneously being rendered meaningful to meet the demand of visitor—with a lack of research integrating both supply side and demand side actors.

Third, there is insufficient theoretical and empirical insight into how authenticity contributes to destination distinctiveness in geoparks. Little is known about how authenticity is mobilised, negotiated, and performed to shape distinctive destination.

Together, these gaps highlight the need for an integrated approach that examines how authenticity is constructed across multiple actors and scales, and how it shapes both geotourism experiences and the distinctive positioning of UNESCO Global Geoparks.

Chapter 3 The Case Study Context

This chapter presents the contextual foundation of the case studies employed in this research. Building on the theoretical insights established in the literature review, it situates the study within its empirical settings, recognising that geopark governance and geotourism development are shaped by place-specific environmental, institutional, and socio-cultural conditions. By outlining these contextual dimensions, the chapter grounds the research in its real-world context and provides the necessary background for interpreting the analysis and findings presented in subsequent chapters.

To support this contextual approach, the chapter also establishes the relevance of a case study orientation. Case study research is particularly valuable for investigating phenomena that are emerging, complex, or insufficiently understood (Travers, 2001), especially where the phenomenon cannot be meaningfully separated from its context (Schoch, 2020). Within tourism studies, case study approaches have been widely used to examine destination development and alternative tourist experiences that are inherently place-dependent (Xiao & Smith, 2006). This orientation aligned closely with the focus of the present study, as the construction and negotiation of authenticity within geopark governance are embedded in specific institutional arrangements, stakeholder relationships, and cultural settings. A case study perspective therefore enables an in-depth and contextually grounded examination of how governance and authenticity are co-constructed in practice (Yin, 2009).

This study adopts a purposive multiple-case design, enabling the deliberate selection of information-rich cases that are both theoretically and empirically relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling prioritises cases capable of providing in-deep insight into the phenomenon under investigation, rather than seeking statistical generalisation (Patton, 2002). As noted by Schoch (2020), this approach is particularly effective in multiple-case studies, where meaningful comparisons relies on selecting cases that share key characteristics while also exhibiting important variations. In this study, cases were selected to enable a comparative analysis of how destination distinctiveness is developed under broadly similar structural conditions, as shaped by UNESCO frameworks and national governance structures, yet differentiated by contrasting management practices and experiential configurations.

The selected case studies are Batur UNESCO Global Geopark and Rinjani UNESCO Global Geopark (Figure 3.1). These geoparks represent highly relevant comparative cases for examining the opportunities and challenges associated with developing destination distinctiveness.

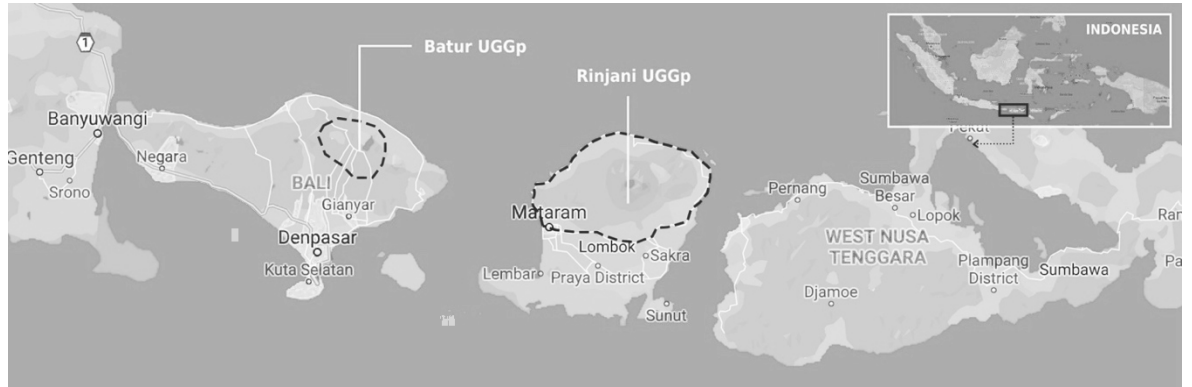


Figure 3.1 Map of the Case Studies
(source: Google Maps; Author, 2022)

As UNESCO Global Geoparks, both destinations operate within the same international governance framework and are subject to comparable evaluation criteria, conservation objectives, and sustainable development principles. At the same time, their geographical proximity and perceived similarities have been noted within UNESCO evaluation contexts, raising questions about how each geopark articulates, constructs, and communicates its distinctiveness in practice, despite common structural conditions. This tension provides an important analytical entry point for examining how authenticity is negotiated and authenticated, and how destination distinctiveness is articulated and legitimised across these settings. By examining Batur UGGp and Rinjani UGGp as purposively selected comparative case studies, this chapter establishes a robust contextual foundation for analysing destination distinctiveness.

3.1 Batur UNESCO Global Geopark

Batur UNESCO Global Geopark is situated in the northeastern part of Bali and was inscribed in the UNESCO Global Geoparks network in 2012, becoming the first site in Indonesia to receive this designation. The geopark is located in the most popular international tourist destination in Indonesia and covers an area of 366.4 km², occupied by 15 villages in the Kintamani district, Bangli Regency, Bali Province. Economic activities in the region are primarily centred on agriculture and tourism (Miharja, Alisjahbana, Agustini, Sari, &

Pardede, 2023), which are closely intertwined with the geopark's development objectives of supporting local livelihoods through sustainable practices. Although Rosyidie, Sagala, Syahbid, and Sasongko (2018) argue that farming activities within the Batur UGGp are poorly aligned with geopark objectives, agriculture remains an integral component of the local socio-economic system.

Batur UGGp presents a complete volcanic landscape, encompassing caldera walls, cones and craters, geothermal phenomena, a lake, lava flows, pyroclastic flows, and tephra (UNESCO, 2020). In total, the area comprises 21 geological sites (Figure 3.2). The landscape is characterised by two overlapping calderas that together illustrate the region's complex geological evolution (Agastya, Paripurno, Prastistho, Murwanto, Prasetya, & Nugraho, 2024), forming a double-caldera system which one caldera is nested within another (Figure 3.3). This double-caldera system is considered one of the finest caldera landscapes in the world (Samodra, Herlina, & Cahyadi, 2018). According to the self-evaluation document, Batur UGGp shares the same geological unit and has comparable geological characteristics with Rinjani UGGp, given their proximity of less than 200 km (Management Body of Batur UGGp, 2026).

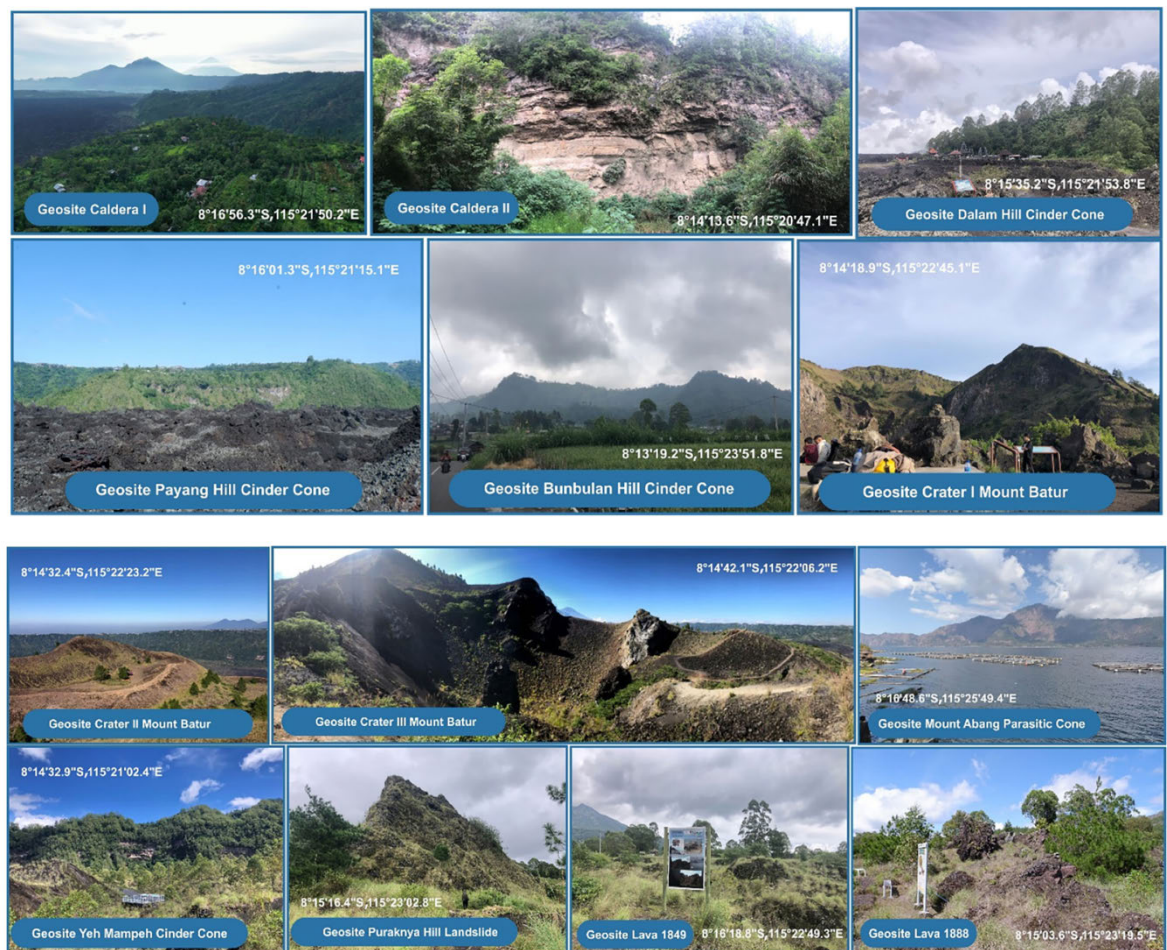




Figure 3.2 Geological sites within Batur UGGp
(source: Agastya et al., 2024)

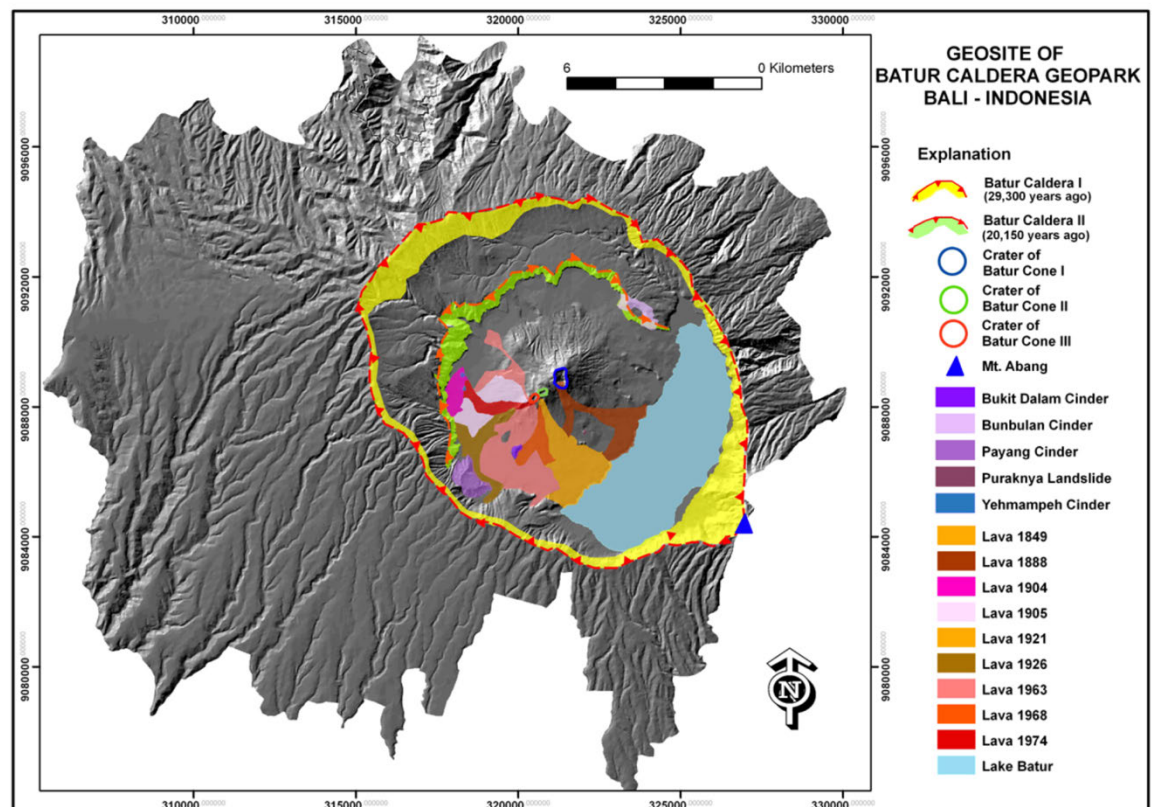


Figure 3.3 Batur complex geological evolution
(source: Management Body of Batur UGGp, 2026)

In addition to its geological significance, Batur UGGp encompasses a wide range of cultural and archaeological sites, reflecting the strong interrelationship between the volcanic landscape and the cultural life of local communities. In total, the geopark includes 30 cultural and archaeological sites. The area is also rich in intangible heritage, expressed through

performing arts, rituals, and festive events that continue to be actively practiced by Balinese society. In accordance with Balinese cultural and religious traditions, the geopark contains numerous Hindu places of worship (temples) that are integrally connected to the volcanic landscape, including Toya Bungkah Temple, Ulun Danu Temple, Petirtaan Temple, and Abang Temple. One of the most well-known cultural sites within Batur UGGp is the Trunyan Burial site (Figure 3.4), which has been designated as a cultural heritage object and is protected under national law.

The number of tourists (domestic and international) has continued to increase since Batur UGGp was designated a UNESCO Global Geopark. The destination's popularity peaked at 1.230.573 visitors in 2019 and fell to a low of just 170.166 visitors in 2021 due to the COVID-19 situation in Indonesia (Tourism and Culture Office of Bangli Regency, 2022). Consistently, through ticket sales in the four top tourist destinations in Batur UGGp areas (Panelokan, Penulisan, Terunyan Village, Batur climbing area), showed that international tourists are more interested in climbing the top of Batur active volcano/Batur climbing area (Rosyidie et al., 2018). Although quite a large number of visitors come to the Batur UGGp site at an approximate of 300 people per day for sunrise trekking on Mount Batur (Arjana, Ernawati, & Astawa, 2019), the majority of tourists visit Batur only to make the climb, and only a few stay overnight to explore and enjoy the site of Batur geotourism (Arjana, Ernawati and Astawa, 2017). A study by Sagala, Rosyidie, Sasongko, and Syahbid (2018) found that most visitors, both local and international, prefer a one-day trip to Batur Geopark rather than staying overnight, as the area is located along the main road connecting southern and northern Bali, located approximately one hour's drive from Ubud—one of Bali's main tourism hubs.

Jung (2025) argues that the UNESCO designation marked a significant shift by enhancing Kintamani's visibility and perceived value within Bali's tourism landscape, thereby encouraging a new form of local entrepreneurship. As Bali's foremost coffee-production area, Kintamani—particularly the Batur area—emerged as a key site for the development of upscale coffee establishments. Residents increasingly capitalised on this momentum by establishing cafés along Penolakan Main Road, a strategic vantage point offering views of the caldera (Figure 3.4). Collectively, these developments have contributed to diversifying the local tourism economy, moving beyond trekking-based activities towards more experiential visitor experiences that foreground both landscape aesthetics and local agricultural identity.



Figure 3.4 Cafés along Penolakan Main Road
(source: *blog.bookingtogo.com*, 2026)

Batur UGGp provides three geotrails for visitors to explore the entire geopark region. Two geotrails have volcanic geological aspects, and the other takes a cultural focus (Samodra et al., 2018). One of the geotourism activities in the Batur UGGp is Batur Summit Geotrails. Yuliawati, Pribadi, and Hadian (2016) explained that the Batur Summit Geotrails are paths to several volcanic peaks and craters through walking. Batur volcano, which is still active, has a unique phenomenon, named “caldera in caldera” that is rarely found elsewhere (Rosyidie et al., 2018, p. 5). Arjana et al. (2019) argue that geotrail in Batur can be categorised into two groups: geotrail packages for amateur geotourists and geotrail for professional geotourists, in which amateur geotourists prefer lighter activities, such as hiking, to enjoy views and landscapes, and better facilities. Meanwhile, the professional geotourist is thought to take a more challenging, off-the-beaten-track climbing route, accepting less developed facilities and basic-quality services, giving them a chance to connect with the local community.

In Batur UGGp, most trips are accompanied by a tour guide from a volcanology observation centre, appointed by the Geopark Batur Management Board. However, some geotrails are also managed and guided by the local community groups, whilst other geotrails are guided by the local community who live around the geosite, yet have been trained by the geopark manager, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism as well as the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (Rosyidie et al., 2018). Overall, geotourism in Bali is supported by 715 local guides who are required to explain geo-volcanology, landscape, and Balinese

culture to geopark visitors (Samodra et al., 2018). Interestingly, many young people in the Batur Geopark area who are currently studying, both in primary, secondary, and vocational schools, take time to work part-time as freelance guides or provide information services to tourists (Sagala et al., 2018).

3.2 Rinjani-Lombok UNESCO Global Geopark

Rinjani-Lombok UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGp) is located on Lombok Island, situated between Bali Island to the west and Sumbawa Island to the east. The geopark covers an area of approximately 2,800 km², spanning four regencies and one city (West Lombok, Central Lombok, East Lombok, North Lombok, and Mataram city) and encompassing nearly seven times the area of Batur UGGp. This highlights Rinjani-Lombok's much larger scale and wider regional integration compared to the more localised structure of Batur. The region is characterised by a highly diverse landscape, including savannahs, semi-deciduous forests, lower montane evergreen forests, and tropical montane evergreen forests (UNESCO, 2020).

Rinjani-Lombok UGGp was the first geopark proposed by the Indonesian government for designation as a UNESCO Global Geopark in 2008. However, despite its significant geological value, both the government and the site management initially failed to meet UNESCO requirements. The geopark was eventually designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark in 2018, albeit with several recommendations from the Council. One of the most prominent concern related to the perceived similarities in geological heritage between Rinjani-Lombok UGGp and the nearby Batur UGGp in Bali, as both are volcano-based geoparks. Consequently, UNESCO emphasised the need for a comparative study to determine whether Rinjani-Lombok and Batur UGGps share comparable geological characteristic (Development Planning Agency of West Nusa Tenggara Province, 2017).

According to the official Rinjani-Lombok UGGp website (rinjanigeopark.com), 22 geological sites have been identified within the geopark area. These sites represent the region's remarkable geological diversity and collectively preserve the physical evidence of one of the most significant volcanic events in human history—the 1257 eruption of Mount Samalas. This catastrophic explosive eruption is considered one of the largest volcanic eruptions since the end of the last Ice Age, it devastated much of Lombok and caused widespread environmental and climatic impacts, rendering parts of Bali and Sumbawa Islands temporary uninhabitable (Ingimarsson, 2025). Traces of the 1257 Samalas eruption remain clearly visible today, both within and beyond geopark boundaries. Pyroclastic

deposits, volcanic ash layers, and the vast caldera structure itself stand as enduring geological records of this powerful event.

Among the 22 geological sites identified within the geopark, the most iconic landmark is Mount Rinjani, an active stratovolcano that dominates the landscape of Lombok Island. Rising to 3,726 m above sea level, it is the second-highest volcano in Indonesia and serves as the central feature of the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. Its prominent elevation and symmetrical cone shape make it a striking visual landmark, while its ongoing volcanic activity highlights the dynamic geological processes that continue to shape the region. Closely associated with Mount Rinjani is the Samalas caldera, which was formed as a result of the 1257 eruption. Within this caldera lies Segara Anak Lake approximately 200 m deep. The lake, surrounded by steep caldera walls that expose layers of volcanic deposits, provide valuable geological records of past eruptive phases. Rising from within the lake is the cone of Barujari volcano, an active post-caldera cone that continues to experience periodic eruptions. This combination forms a dramatic and scientifically significant landscape that reflects the region's dynamic volcanic history (Figure 3.5), making the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp a site of outstanding geological and educational value.

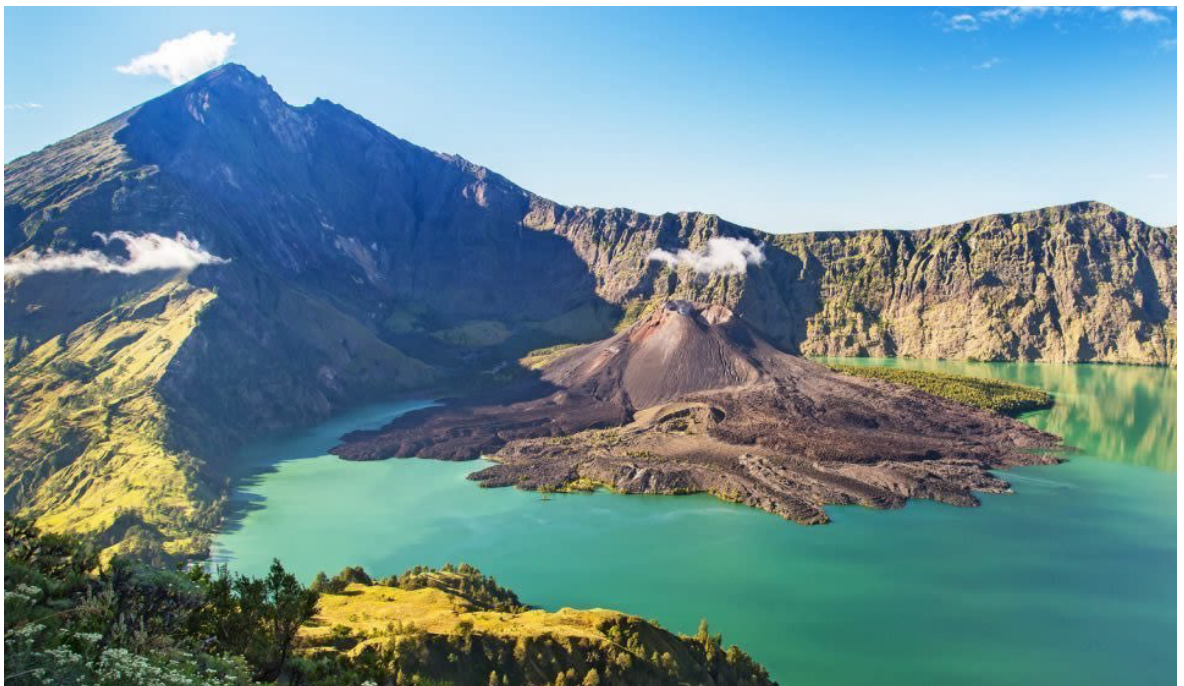


Figure 3.5 Lake Segara Anak and Barujari Volcano
(source: *pagitrans.com*, 2026)

At the same time, beyond the mountainous geopark area, the Gili Islands—comprising Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, and Gili Air (Figure 3.6)—stand out as both popular tourism destinations and officially recognised geosites within the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. Their geological and ecological significance complements the volcanic landscape of Mount Rinjani, representing the coastal and marine dimension of the geopark. Characterised by white sandy beaches, clear turquoise waters, coral reef systems, and rich marine biodiversity make them particularly attractive for snorkeling and diving activities, drawing a substantial number of tourists each year. The Gili Islands have not only have become one of Lombok’s primary tourism hub, but the area also has been declared to become a site of national water conservation (Taman Wisata Perairan Gili Matra).



Figure 3.6 Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, and Gili Air
(source: *digitaltravelcouple.com*, 2026)

In general, tourism growth accelerated significantly after President Joko Widodo designated Lombok Island as a priority tourism destination in 2017 under Indonesia’s national tourism development program. This status brought major government investment in infrastructure, stronger international promotion, and increased private investment. As a result, Lombok became easier to access, more widely recognised, and more developed for visitors, leading to faster tourism growth. This designation, combined with the recognition as a UNESCO Global Geopark, strengthened the island’s international visibility and branding. As shown in Figure 3.7, international tourist arrivals continued to rise even after a destructive 7.0 Mw earthquake struck the island in July 2018 (as recorded by the Meteorological, Climatological, and Geophysical Agency, 2018). Although the disaster temporarily disrupted tourism

activities, visitor numbers gradually recovered and continued to rise in the subsequent period, demonstrating the resilience of Lombok's tourism sector.

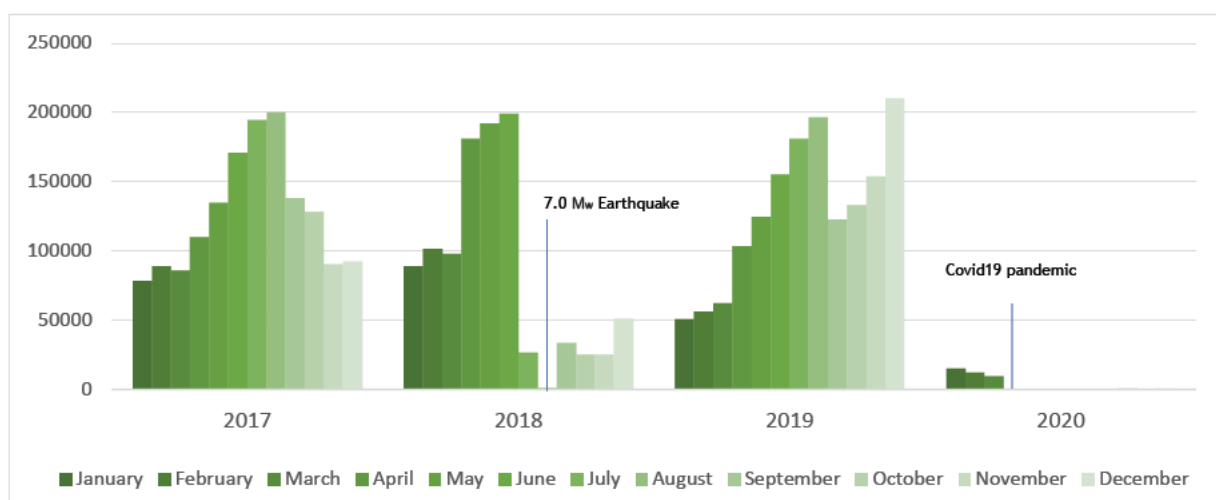


Figure 3.7 International Tourists Arrival in Lombok Island
(source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021)

In addition to its geological sites, the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp also encompasses 17 cultural sites that reflect the island's rich cultural landscape. With a population of nearly four million people in 2024, Lombok is characterised by a distinctive ethnic and religious composition that shapes its social harmony and identity (Budiwanti & Eidhamar, 2024). The cultural sites are closely intertwined with the island's historical and religious traditions, represented by prominent places of worship such as the Gumantar Ancient Mosque, Bayan Beleq Mosque, Kotaraja Mosque, Meru Temple, and Suranadi Temple. These landmarks symbolise the long-standing presence of both Islamic and Hindu traditions on the island. Beyond formal religious landmarks, other cultural sites reflect the everyday way of life of local communities. Traditional villages in Senaru and Sembalun, for example, represent living cultural landscapes where vernacular architecture, customary law, agricultural practices, and communal values are still maintained. Together, these religious and community-based cultural sites highlight Lombok's pluralistic social fabric, where different belief systems and cultural expressions coexist and collectively shape the island's heritage and identity.

Approximately 90% of its inhabitants belong to the Sasak ethnic group, who are predominantly Sunni Muslims and form the overwhelming majority on the island, while Balinese Hindus constitute around 3% of the population and are primarily concentrated in West Lombok (Budiwanti & Eidhamar, 2024). Despite religious differences, relations between the Muslim Sasak majority and the Hindu Balinese minority are generally marked

by tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This intercommunal harmony is deeply rooted in shared historical experiences, including a period when Lombok was ruled by a Balinese king from South Bali, as well as enduring cultural and spatial connections that continue to influence daily life (Budiwanti & Eidhamar, 2024).

Comparable to the Muslim majority—whose strong religious presence is reflected in the approximately 1,000 mosques spread across the island, with the Grand Islamic Center Mosque serving as its most prominent landmark (Figure 3.8)—Lombok is widely known as the ‘Island of a Thousand Mosques’. This title underscores the central role of Islam in shaping the island’s cultural identity and spatial landscape, where Mosques can be easily found in nearly every village and neighbourhood. They function not only as places of worship but also as centres of community life, education, and social interaction.

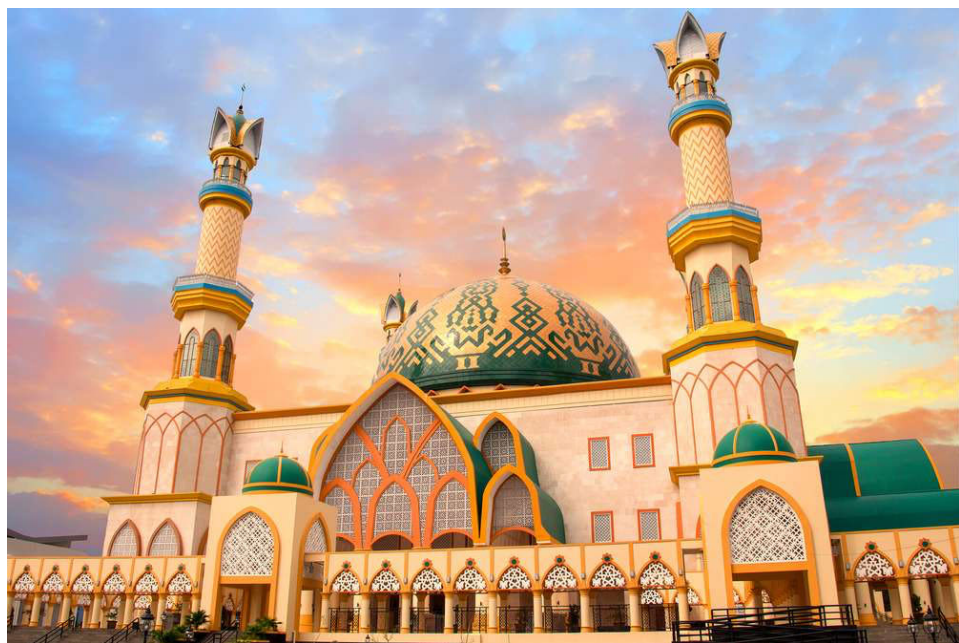


Figure 3.8 The Grand Islamic Center Mosque
(source: *autorin.com*, 2026)

In parallel, the Balinese Hindu community is equally afforded the space and freedom to sustain its religious and cultural traditions. Although they constitute a minority on the island, their presence remains highly visible through a number of large temples inherited from the period of Balinese rule over Lombok. These temples are not only preserved as active places of worship but are also carefully managed as important cultural heritage sites. Many of them, such as Suranadi Temple, have evolved into major tourist attractions (Figure 3.9).



Figure 3.9 Suranadi Temple as cultural site within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp
(source: *airial.travel*, 2026)

In contrast to the geological sites and cultural sites identified within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, the number of formally designated biodiversity sites is relatively small. Nevertheless, the biodiversity value of the geopark remains significant, particularly given its diverse ecosystems ranging from savannah landscapes and lowland forests to montane and sub-alpine environments around Mount Rinjani. Importantly, several biodiversity sites fall under different administrative and territorial authorities that overlap within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp boundary. At least eight of these sites are managed by separate institutions, including Mount Rinjani National Park, and the West and East Rinjani Forest Management Units. Each of these entities operates under its own regulatory framework, management priorities, and institutional mandates that creates both challenges and opportunities.

3.3 Summary

In sum, this chapter has established the contextual foundation for the comparative analysis undertaken in this study by situating Batur UGGp and Rinjani-Lombok UGGp within their specific geographical, and socio-cultural environments. While both geopark operate within the same UNESCO Global Geopark framework and share broadly similar volcanic foundations, they differ markedly in the ways in which geological, ecological, and cultural elements are organised and integrated into destination development. Their shared similarities allow for meaningful comparison, while their differences provide analytical leverage for understanding variation in management approaches and experiential configurations that ultimately shape how authenticity becomes articulated through tourism, as discussed in the subsequent finding chapters.

Chapter 4 Research Design and Methods

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed to address the aim of this study. It begins by establishing the philosophical foundations underpinning the inquiry, including the adopted research paradigm and its associated ontological and epistemological assumptions. The study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which understands reality as socially constructed and context dependent. By privileging participant's subjective meanings, lived experiences, and everyday practices, this perspective enables a deeper exploration of how individuals interpret, negotiate, and make sense of authenticity within specific cultural and situational contexts.

These philosophical foundations inform the selection of a qualitative multiple-case and multi-source research design supported by ethnographic fieldwork, emphasising immersion in the field, sustained engagement with participants, and attentiveness to the sensory, embodied, and relational dimensions of the setting. Ethnographic engagement enables the researcher to move beyond formal representations and policy narratives by observing how geopark principles are enacted, negotiated, and sometimes contested through everyday interactions, practices, and lived experiences (Rasquinha & Sissons, 2026; Atkinson, 2017). Sustained presence in the field further allows attention to the atmospheres, material settings, embodied encounters, and affective dimensions through which authenticity is experienced and interpreted by different actors (Thanem & Knights, 2019; Turner, 2007). In this way, the study captures not only institutional processes of governance but also the situated, lived, and relational dimensions of visitor experience (Hulst, 2008; Molin, 2025).

Data collection integrates multiple qualitative methods to reflect the interpretive, ethnographic, and multi-actor orientation of the research. Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders examine institutional constructions of authenticity and governance processes, while in-depth interviews and photo-elicitation with visitors explore how experiences are perceived, embodied, and interpreted. These methods were complemented by sustained participant observation and ethnographic immersion across the study sites, enabling the researcher to situate participants' accounts within the everyday practices, social interactions, sensory encounters, and atmospheres through which authenticity was experienced and negotiated. Document analysis further contextualised these experiences within broader

organisational and policy frameworks, while also enabling comparison between institutional narratives and lived experiences observed in the field.

Importantly, the methods were not treated as separate forms of data collection, but as interconnected and mutually informing components of the research process. Insights emerging from interviews informed subsequent observations and field engagement, while ethnographic observations and visual materials deepened the interpretation of participants' narratives and revealed embodied and affective dimensions of experience that were not always articulated verbally. The integration of interviews, observations, fieldnotes, photographs, and documentary sources enabled triangulation across multiple datasets and perspectives, strengthening the interpretive depth and contextual richness of the analysis, enhancing rigour (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Data were analysed through an iterative thematic approach that moved recursively between these sources, allowing patterns, relationship, and tensions to emerge progressively across cases and contexts (Rothbauer, Moran-Ellis, Alexander, Cronin, Dickinson, Fielding, & Slaney, 2012; Morgan & Nica, 2020; Udayanga, 2025). This process enabled a nuanced understanding of how authenticity is co-constructed and negotiated between governance actors and visitors. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and reflexive engagement with the researcher's positionality, informed all stages of the research process to ensure responsible and context-sensitive inquiry.

4.1 Research Paradigm

This study is situated within an interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivism seeks to understand social reality through the meanings individuals and communities construct within their specific cultural, environmental, and institutional contexts (Elster, 2007). Rather than assuming that social phenomena exist independently of human interpretation, interpretivism recognises that reality is socially produced and continuously negotiated. As Goodson and Philimore (2004, p. 36) argue, *'the complex social world can be understood only from the point of view of those who operate within it'*. In this sense, interpretivism prioritises the perspectives and lived experiences of participants, acknowledging that social phenomena can only be meaningfully understood by engaging with how they are interpreted and enacted in everyday life (Kieźel, Piotrowski, & Wiechoczek, 2019). Adopting this paradigm therefore enables the researcher to explore the meanings individuals attach to the phenomenon under study and to develop a nuanced understanding grounded in participants' own social realities.

The interpretivist paradigm is particularly well suited to this study, as it provides the conceptual and methodological tools to examine the complex, socially constructed, and context-dependent nature of authenticity within geopark governance and geotourism experiences in Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps. This paradigm recognises that decision-making processes do not merely implement policies in a mechanical way; rather, the governance structure and its associated actors mediate which interpretations of authenticity are legitimised, prioritised, and contested, reflecting the influence of institutional frameworks and embedded power dynamics (Bock, Costa, Rodrigues, & Macke, 2021). Governance, tourism practices, and authenticity are therefore produced through ongoing interactions among multiple actors.

Contemporary scholarship recognises that authenticity in tourism is not treated as a fixed or objectively measurable but socially negotiated and interpreted in relation to these governance processes (Canavan & McCamley, 2021; Gardiner, Vada, Yang, Khoo, & Le, 2022; He & Timothy, 2024). Stakeholders often hold competing perspectives on what constitutes authentic geological heritage, cultural expression, or community participation. An interpretivist approach enables the study to capture these constructions as relational and dynamic, tracing how they are co-constructed in practice and how power relations embedded within governance influence which definitions prevail. This focus allows the research to move beyond surface-level descriptions, providing a nuanced understanding of authenticity as an outcome of the governance structure, where it is socially embedded, negotiated, and contested.

This paradigm aligns directly with the study's overall aim of examining how stakeholders perceive and construct authenticity in geotourism experiences and how governance structures shape the prioritisation and enactment of these interpretations in practice. By foregrounding multiple perspectives, interpretivism enables the research to address the three objectives of the study. Through this lens, interpretivism is not only philosophically appropriate but methodologically necessary, as it allows the research to capture the complex interplay between governance, authenticity, and experiential outcomes within Indonesian UGGps.

4.2 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design informed by ethnographic fieldwork to investigate how authenticity is constructed and negotiated within geopark governance and geotourism development in Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps. A defining characteristic of qualitative research is its capacity to generate in-depth, interpretive insights into complex social phenomena (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This orientation aligns with the study's interpretivist positioning, which foregrounds contextual depth, lived experience, and the exploration of multiple perspectives situated within specific empirical contexts.

A case study approach is particularly appropriate because geoparks are place-based and context-specific formations shaped by intersecting socio-cultural, environmental, and institutional dynamics. Rather than existing as fixed or universally bounded entities, their spatial meanings and boundaries are often relational and subject to interpretation by different actors. Examining Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps as two distinct yet comparable cases, notable for their identified similarities, enables a nuanced exploration of governance processes, allowing for the identification of both convergences and divergences in how geopark principles are interpreted and enacted across different contexts. As outlined in Chapter 3, these cases were purposively selected based on their contrasting governance configurations and shared designation as UNESCO Global Geoparks, providing a robust comparative foundation for analysing how authenticity is constructed and negotiated in practice.

Within this case study framework, ethnographic fieldwork provides the primary methodological orientation. Ethnography is widely understood as an immersive and interpretive approach that seeks to understand social life through sustained engagement with people, practices, and meanings in their everyday contexts (Adams, 2025). Rather than observing social phenomena from a distance, ethnography prioritises situated knowledge and the co-presence of researcher and participants, enabling insight into how realities are experienced, interpreted, and negotiated. Through prolonged engagement in the field and the integration of methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and informal conversations, ethnography generates richly contextualised accounts of social processes and lived experiences (Christou & Saveriades, 2010).

Ethnographic engagement included participant observation, informal conversations, attendance at community and tourism-related activities, and repeated visits to key sites and attractions. The researcher engaged with the geoparks in ways similar to visitors by walking

geotrails, visiting geological and cultural heritage sites and participating in tourism activities. Particular attention was paid to how visitors and local stakeholders interacted with landscapes, heritage resources, and one another, as well as to the sensory, embodied, and affective dimensions of these experiences. This included observing how people moved through and responded to different environments, the emotions and meanings they associated with particular places, and the atmospheres created through everyday social interactions and tourism practices. These observations were systematically documented through reflexive fieldnotes captured through journal photographs and documentary materials such as the collection of tourists brochures, providing contextual insights that complemented and enriched interview data while supporting a deeper understanding of how authenticity was experienced, interpreted, and negotiated with geopark settings.

Owing to its emphasis on depth, context, and lived experience, ethnography has been widely employed to explore questions of meaning-making (Edensor, 1998), identity (Malam, 2004), and power relations (Adams, 2006). Such an orientation is particularly relevant to the present study, which investigates how meanings within geotourism experiences are socially produced and how power relations shape whose interpretations of authenticity are recognised and legitimised within geopark governance.

Importantly, ethnography was selected as the primary methodological orientation because it provides a particularly valuable entry point for examining how authenticity and governance are enacted in practice. Within tourism studies, ethnography has been especially influential in challenging essentialised understanding of authenticity. Ethnographic work has demonstrated that authenticity is not an inherent property but a socially negotiated construct shaped by representation, power, and practice (Tucker, 2003). While the case study design offers a comparative analytical framework, ethnography enables close engagement with the lived dimensions of geopark development that are often obscured in policy-driven analyses. By reducing distance between researcher and participant, ethnographic methods facilitate access to tacit knowledge, informal interactions, and everyday negotiations through which meanings are produced and circulated (Bowie & Chang, 2005). This is especially crucial in context where institutional narratives risk simplifying the complexity of local experience. Beyond what participants explicitly articulated during interviews, ethnographic engagement enabled observation of how authenticity was experienced and negotiated through everyday practices, social interactions, and embodied encounters with geopark landscapes. For example, during visits to several geosites, visitors frequently spent more time engaging with local guides and residents than with formal interpretive signage. Conversations about

agricultural practices, local histories, and everyday life often prompted visitors to ask questions, share personal reflections, and compare local experiences with their own backgrounds. These interactions suggested that perceptions of authenticity emerged through interpersonal encounters as much as through official heritage narratives. Observing such moments provided insights that were not always articulated during interviews, revealing how authenticity was co-produced through social engagement rather than simply consumed as information.

Ethnographic observation also captured sensory and affective dimensions of experience, including how visitors and local stakeholders responded to particular landscapes, heritage sites, interpretive materials, and community interactions. Attention to these often unspoken aspects of tourism revealed how meanings of authenticity were enacted through movement, emotional attachment, social relationships, and engagement with place. Documented in the field journal, these observations complemented interview and documentary data by providing a richer understanding of how authenticity was experienced, interpreted, and sometimes contested within everyday geopark settings.

A critical dimension of this ethnographic approach concerns the researcher's positionality and prior entanglement with the field. Before undertaking this doctoral research, the researcher worked within the national geopark in West Nusa Tenggara Province and frequently collaborated with practitioners connected to both case study sites. Through this professional engagement, the researcher developed sustained relationships with the stakeholders and became familiar with the operational realities, governance tensions, and everyday practices shaping geopark development. As a result, the researcher's entry into the field was not that of a detached outsider but of a returning researcher embedded within existing relational networks. Ethnography was therefore particularly valuable, as it allowed the researcher to work through these layered relationships while remaining attentive to how knowledge is produced through situated encounters.

This prior involvement meant the research was not extractive in nature but emerged from ongoing dialogue and shared concerns within the geopark community. I entered the field with pre-existing perspectives shaped by my professional experience and previous engagement with geopark initiatives, some of which were affirmed through fieldwork, while others were challenged and reconfigured through renewed engagement. Returning in the capacity of a PhD researcher introduced a shifting and sometimes ambiguous positionality. I was simultaneously familiar and re-situated: known to many participants through past

collaborations yet newly positioned as an academic whose work would circulate beyond local institutional contexts. This repositioning influenced how I was perceived and, in turn, what was shared, how it was narrated, and where access was either facilitated or quietly limited.

These shifting relationships and encounters prompted ongoing reflection on the assumptions I brought into the field. Having previously worked with geopark initiatives, I initially assumed that stakeholders broadly shared common understandings of sustainability, heritage conservation, and geopark development goals. While fieldwork confirmed the importance of these aspirations across stakeholder groups, it also revealed significant differences in how these concepts were understood, prioritised, and enacted in practice. For example, during discussions surrounding tourism development at several geosites, government representatives frequently emphasised visitor growth, infrastructure improvements and the economic benefits associated with UNESCO recognition. In contrast, some community members expressed concerns that increasing tourism activity risked disrupting local practices and reducing community control over cultural and natural resources. Although both groups described their positions as contributing to sustainability, they attached different meanings to what sustainable development should involve. Encounters such as these challenged my initial assumption of a broadly shared vision among stakeholders and highlighted how competing interests and priorities were negotiated within geopark governance. Through interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations, I became increasingly aware that certain narratives were more visible and institutionally supported than others, while alternative perspectives were sometimes marginalised or overlooked. These experiences encouraged a more critical examination of how power relations shape whose interpretations of authenticity become recognised and legitimised within geopark governance.

My prior involvement also shaped the kinds of knowledge that became available through the research process. Existing relationships often enabled conversations that moved beyond formal institutional narratives, creating opportunities for participants to discuss governance tensions, competing priorities, and everyday challenges that might not have emerged in more formal interview settings. For example, during one interview, a stakeholder who had spoken positively about collaborative governance in the recorded conversation later reflected more candidly in an informal discussion about frustrations surrounding decision-making processes within the geopark. They described how certain initiatives were presented as collaborative while, in practice, key decisions were often made before broader consultations took place.

Similar reflections emerged in subsequent informal interactions with other stakeholders, who distinguished between the official discourse of participation and their everyday experiences of governance. These conversations provided insights into perspectives that were less visible in formal accounts and highlighted the importance of examining not only what governance structures were intended to achieve, but also how they were experienced by those involved. Access to these more candid discussions helped reveal the contested nature of authenticity within the geopark and illustrated how power relations shaped whose voices were heard, recognised, and acted upon.

However, the same familiarity that facilitated access to these perspectives also introduced methodological challenges. Participants occasionally referred to events, relationships, or local dynamics without elaboration, assuming a shared understanding based on my previous involvement with geopark initiatives. As a result, certain assumptions risked remaining unexamined because they appeared self-evident to both participants and myself. Recognising this possibility required ongoing reflexive effort to question what seemed familiar and to attend to issues that might otherwise have been taken for granted. Reflexive fieldnotes, repeated site visits, and continual comparison between interviews, observations, and documentary materials therefore became important strategies for examining how my positionality shaped both what was revealed and what remained obscured. Navigating these tensions required continual movement between participation and analytical distance, recognising that familiarity could simultaneously facilitate deeper understanding while limiting opportunities for critical scrutiny.

These dynamics shaped the ethnographic process in subtle but significant ways. The researcher therefore was required to navigate a constantly shifting field of familiarity and distance, negotiating when to lean into insider knowledge and when to step back to sustain analytical reflexivity. This included recognising how shared histories could both deepen understanding and obscure taken-for-granted assumptions. Engaging ethnographically from this positionality required sustained reflexive attention to how relationships, expectations, and power dynamics shaped the research encounter. Rather than treating positionality as a methodological limitation, this study approaches it as a generative condition of knowledge production. The researcher's situated familiarity with the geopark landscape enabled deeper access to the relational and informal dimensions of governance, while reflexive distance allowed critical interrogation of the narratives the researcher had previously been part of. By making these dynamics explicit, the researcher seeks to foreground the co-constructed nature of ethnographic knowledge and to acknowledge how authenticity and governance are

interpreted not only by participants, but also through the researcher's evolving position within the field.

Finally, this reflexive ethnographic orientation informed the study's methodological design and its approach to rigour. In qualitative research, rigour is not achieved through methodological plurality alone but through transparency in how methods are enacted and interpreted (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). While the integration of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and document analysis enabled methodological triangulation, the study recognises that using multiple methods does not automatically ensure credibility. Instead, rigour was pursued through sustained methodological elaboration, including prolonged immersion in the field, detailed documentation of fieldwork processes, and iterative engagement with participants over time (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). These strategies supported the in-depth, contextually grounded knowledge while reducing analytic distance between researcher and field.

4.3 Methods for Data Collection

Data collection was organised into two broad stages, each employing complementary methods align with the research objectives (Figure 4.1). Although the researcher was already familiar with the physical environment of both geoparks through previous visits and preliminary research, the initial fieldwork was important for moving beyond familiarity with the physical landscape to develop a deeper understanding of the social relationships, cultural practices, and institutional arrangements that shaped each geopark. Sustained engagement in the field enabled the researcher to establish rapport with participants, identify key actors and sites, gain insight into community dynamics and governance processes, and refine areas of inquiry that informed subsequent stages of the research. The second fieldwork period focused more directly on data collection while maintaining ongoing participant observation and engagement with local stakeholders. Lasting approximately 1.5 to 2 months each, these periods of fieldwork provided opportunities for sustained observation, repeated interactions with participants, and deeper engagement with the contexts through which tourism practices, heritage narratives, and experiences of authenticity were produced, negotiated, and understood.

While this staged structure is presented for analytical clarity, the fieldwork itself unfolded in a dynamic and iterative manner. Rather than following a rigid sequence, data collection evolved responsively, with emerging insights shaping subsequent lines of inquiry and

methodological focus. This flexibility reflects the study's ethnographic orientation, in which field engagement developed through ongoing interactions, evolving relationships, and context-specific opportunities for access. Conversations, observations, and unanticipated encounters frequently redirected the research trajectory, requiring the researcher to move iteratively across actors, sites, and emerging themes. Consequently, these stages functioned less as fixed phases than as provisional analytical anchors that helped organise the research process without constraining its development. Such an approach allowed the study to remain responsive to the relational and multi-layered nature of geopark contexts, where meanings of authenticity emerged through unfolding engagements rather than predetermined analytical categories.

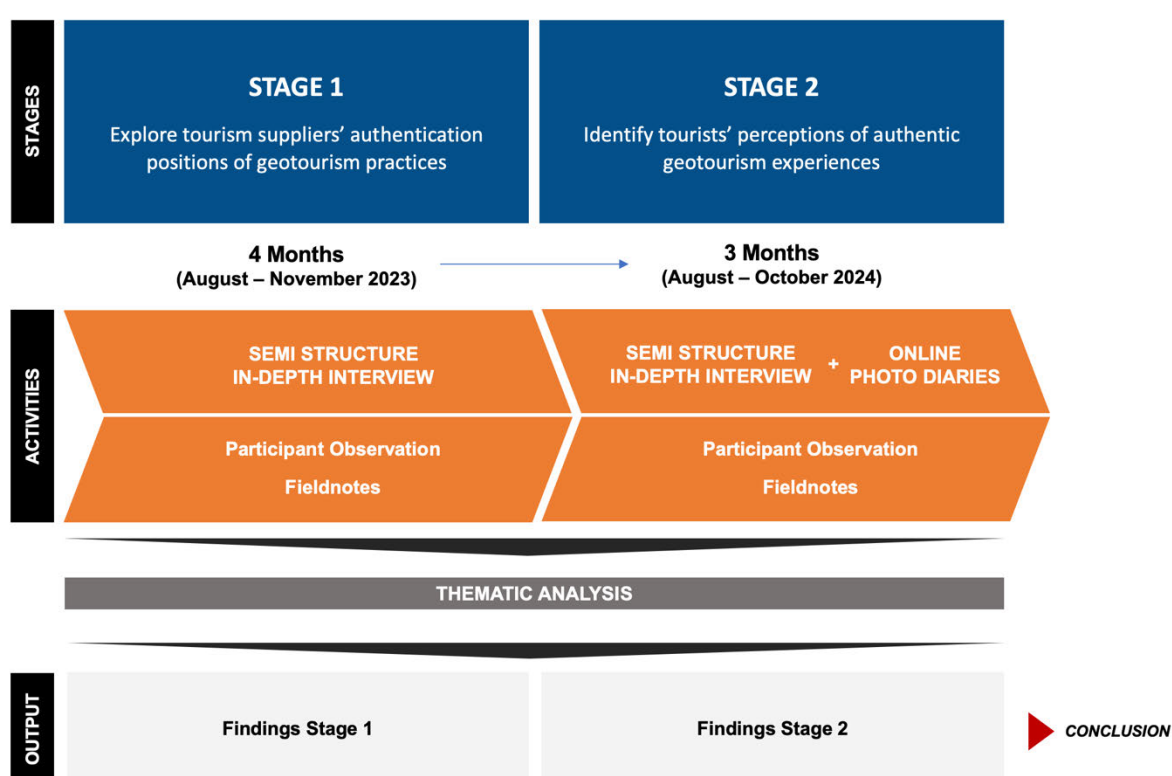


Figure 4.1 Stages of data collection
(source: Author, 2023)

Participant observation and broader field immersion provided contextual understanding of everyday practices, interactions, and governance dynamics within the geoparks, while semi-structured interviews enabled more focused engagement with participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations. Informal conversations often complemented formal interviews by revealing insights that emerged more spontaneously through ongoing field relationships and routine encounters. Photographs and fieldnotes further supported the interpretive process by documenting spatial arrangements, material practices, visual

representations, and situational details that might not have been fully captured through interviews alone. Through this ongoing movement between methods, sites, and participants, the study employed methodological triangulation as a means of developing richer and more nuanced interpretations of how authenticity was understood, negotiated, and performed across different contexts and actors within the geoparks.

The different methods employed in this study were not treated as discrete forms of data collection but as interconnected and mutually informing components of the ethnographic process. In this research, the ethnographic approach was operationalised through prolonged engagement across both geopark study sites over multiple periods of fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted through two extended visits to each geopark between August 2023 and October 2024. The first phase involved approximately 2 months of fieldwork in Batur UGGp and 2 months in Rinjani UGGp, while the second phase involved return visits of 1,5 months to each site. These repeated periods of engagement enabled the development of relationships with participants, observation of ongoing practices and interactions, and opportunities to revisit emerging themes and interpretations over time.

Conducting ethnographic research across two case study sites, however, also introduced methodological and interpretive challenges. While the researcher engaged with both geoparks through participant observation, repeated site visits, tourism activities, and interactions with local stakeholders, the social and cultural contexts of each site differed considerably. Experiences that appeared similar on the surface often carried different meanings depending on local histories, governance arrangements, community relationship, and tourism practices. For example, in both geoparks, visitors frequently described interactions with local guides as among the most memorable aspects of their visit. However, ethnographic observation revealed important differences in how these encounters were experienced and interpreted. In Batur UGGp, guides often emphasised narratives of cultural heritage, local traditions, and community resilience following volcanic eruptions, with visitors frequently describing these interactions as providing a deeper understanding of local life. In Rinjani, conversations between visitors and guides were more commonly centred on trekking experiences, environmental stewardship, and the cultural significance of the mountain landscape. Although both sets of encounters were described by visitors as authentic, the meanings attached to authenticity emerged through different social and cultural contexts.

Interpreting these sensory, embodied, and affective dimensions of participants' experiences therefore required continual reflexive attention to how authenticity was understood and enacted within each setting. Rather than treating observations as directly comparable across cases, ethnographic analysis involved situating experiences within their specific social and cultural contexts while identifying broader themes and patterns that connected the two geoparks. This reflexive and contextual approach was particularly important given the study's interest in understanding how meanings of authenticity are produced, negotiated, and contested within geopark settings.

4.3.1 Data Collection: Stage 1

Stage 1 focused on governance actors and tourism suppliers, establishing an institutional and production-side understanding of authenticity. This stage comprised an exploratory phase centred on geopark stakeholders operating across multiple governance scales.

- Recruitment Procedures for Tourism-Supplier

In total, 38 participants were interviewed (see Table 4.1), comprising actors connected to UNESCO, national government institutions, and local stakeholders from both Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps. In qualitative research, sample size is guided by the principle of data saturation rather than statistical representativeness. While saturation ultimately determined recruitment, an initial benchmark of approximately 10-12 participants per stakeholder category or governance level was used as a flexible guide. This target remained adaptive and responsive to thematic saturation as it emerged during fieldwork.

Table 4.1 Research Participants in Stage 1

No	Level	Geopark Stakeholders	Age	Gender	Qualification	Media
1	International	UNESCO Geopark Office Representative	51	M	Bachelor	Online
2		UNESCO Assessors	56	M	Doctorate	Online
3		UNESCO Jakarta Representative	40	F	Master	Online
4	National	Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs	40	F	Master	Online
5		Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy	66	M	Bachelor	Online
6		Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources	44	M	Doctorate	Online
7		The National Development Planning Agency	52	M	Master	Online
8		National Committee for Indonesia Geoparks	57	F	Doctorate	Online
9		Indonesian Geotourism Guide Association	51	M	Bachelor	Online
10		Professional Geotourism Certification Agency	60	F	Bachelor	Online
11	Provincial (Batur UGGp)	Regional Tourism Department	50	F	Master	Online
12		Regional Energy and Mineral Resources Dep.	54	M	Doctorate	Online
13		Regional Nature Conservation Agency	49	M	Bachelor	In-Person
14		Museum Batur UGGp	46	M	Master	In-Person
15	Local (Batur UGGp)	Local Tourism Office	40	M	Master	Online
16		Geopark Management Board	52	M	Master	In-Person
17		Geopark Management Board	57	M	Master	Online

18		Geopark Management Board	57	M	Master	Online
19		Geologist/Tour Guide	30	M	Master	In-Person
20		Business Association	69	M	High School	In-Person
21		Resident	53	M	Diploma	Online
22	Provincial (Rinjani- Lombok UGGp)	Regional Energy and Mineral Resources Dep.	38	M	Master	In-Person
23		Regional Environment and Forestry Dep.	43	M	Master	In-Person
24		Regional Nature Conservation Agency	41	F	Master	Online
25		Mount Rinjani National Park	43	M	Bachelor	In-Person
26		Museum West Nusa Tenggara/Culture Expert	68	M	Bachelor	In-Person
27	Local (Rinjani- Lombok UGGp)	Geopark Management Board	42	M	Master	In-Person
28		Geopark Management Board	36	F	Bachelor	In-Person
29		Local Tourism Office	32	M	Master	Online
30		Travel Agency	50	M	Bachelor	Online
31		Academia	37	F	Master	Online
32		Tourism Association	35	M	Bachelor	In-Perspn
33		Business Association	45	M	Master	In-Person
34		Site Manager	40	F	Master	Online
35		Tour Guide	42	M	Master	In-Person
36		NGO	35	M	Bachelor	Online
37		Local Champion/Tour Guide	32	M	Bachelor	Online
38		Resident	44	M	Bachelor	Online

Participant recruitment combined purposive and snowball sampling strategies. Purposive sampling was employed because it enables the deliberate selection of individuals with relevant knowledge, experience, and involvement in geotourism development. Consistent with qualitative research principles, participants were recruited based on their capacity to provide rich, contextual grounded insights aligned with the research objectives. Therefore, those included in the semi-structured interviews comprised individuals who contribute directly or indirectly to the provision, regulation, management, or interpretation of geotourism experiences within the geopark, ensuring a comprehensive and layered understanding of authenticity across governance levels.

Initial recruitment relied primarily on purposive sampling, particularly for government and institutional actors. Drawing on prior professional networks in geopark-related work, the researcher directly invited key stakeholders at international, national, and regional levels who were known to be actively involved in geopark governance. In total 14 participants from both case studies were recruited through purposive sampling. These participants were approached through personalised WhatsApp messages and email outlining the study's aims, ethical considerations, and participation details. Where individuals expressed interest, a *Participation Information Sheet* and *Consent Form* were subsequently provided for review and confirmation prior to scheduling the interview.

Snowball sampling was subsequently used to expand the participant pool, especially among local actors and practitioners. From the initial institutional participants, the researcher was introduced to additional officials and local stakeholders who were involved in geopark initiatives but were not easily identifiable through formal channels. A further 24 participants were recruited through this snowballing process. Among local actors in particular, referrals often reflected existing collaborative networks within geopark activities. Participants frequently recommended individuals recognised locally as active contributors of geopark initiatives, including community organisers, site managers, and tourism practitioners. This combined approach enabled the study to access both formal governance actors and embedded local participants. While purposive sampling ensured representation across governance levels, snowball sampling facilitated entry into relational networks that might otherwise have remained inaccessible, particularly in community and practice-based contexts.

As a result, the final sample spanned international, national, provincial, and local level, allowing the study to trace how authenticity was framed within global geopark principles and subsequently translated into national policy, regional management strategies, and site-level implementation. This vertical sampling strategy was deliberately designed to examine governance as a multi-layered, dynamic process, showing how top-down frameworks interact with regional and local practices.

Governance actors are understood here as individuals or bodies responsible for the formulation, oversight, and operationalisation of policies and frameworks that shaped geopark management. At the international level, interviews with UNESCO-related actors provided insight into how authenticity was positioned within global geopark standards and evaluation frameworks. At the national level, discussions with ministerial representatives and members of the national geopark committee illuminated how international principles were interpreted within Indonesia's regulatory and development agendas. Provincial and district-level actors, including geopark management boards, tourism associations, and academic representatives, revealed how these frameworks were operationalised in regional planning and destination development initiatives.

In contrast, tourism suppliers are conceptualised as actors who mediate, interpret, and deliver geotourism experiences on the ground. This group includes local guides, tour operators, community-based tourism facilitators, and other service providers who directly shape how visitors engage with geosites. Their practice translate governance frameworks and authenticity narratives into tangible experiences, while also reflecting local

knowledge, commercial priorities, and place-based interpretations. Local-level participants thus offer critical insight into how governance narratives are enacted, negotiated, or occasionally contested in everyday practice, and how these processes influence the visitor's perception of authenticity and destination distinctiveness.

Despite this multi-scalar coverage, some variation emerged between the two case studies. Although the overall distribution across the two case studies remained broadly comparable, the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp sample was slightly better represented (17 participants) than Batur UGGp (11 participants). This unevenness is acknowledged as a product of field dynamics rather than intentional sampling bias. In particular, the researcher's prior professional engagement with Rinjani-Lombok UGGp appeared to facilitate access, as pre-existing relationships fostered trust and greater willingness among participants to engage in study. Such familiarity eased recruitment processes and enabled more fluid communication during fieldwork.

By contrast, recruitment in Batur UGGp proved more challenging. Several potential participants expressed hesitation about participating, frequently framing themselves as having limited involvement in geopark initiatives or insufficient knowledge of geopark governance. This reluctance suggests that perceptions of relevance and self-positioning within governance structures may influence participation in research, especially where individuals do not identify as central actors. It also reflects broader dynamics of visibility and ownership within geopark governance, where some local stakeholders may feel peripheral to dominant institutional narratives.

- Interview Format for Tourism Suppliers

Semi-structured interviews require a defined yet adaptable set of questions that guide social interaction between the researcher and participant, enabling the co-construction of contextual and situational knowledge (Mason, 2018). In this study, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were employed to examine how authenticity was conceptualised, operationalised, and embedded within geotourism practices. The semi-structured format provided a balance between consistency and flexibility. An interview guide ensured systematic coverage of key themes while allowing space for probing, follow-up questions, and context-specific elaboration across governance levels (Bryman, 2016). This structure enabled the study to capture both institutional perspectives and situated interpretations shaped by participants' roles and experiences.

The interview guide was organised around six thematic domains derived from the study's conceptual framework: authenticity, authentication, commodification, experiential outcomes, destination distinctiveness, and sustainable development. These themes collectively addressed how authenticity is defined, produced, communicated, and experienced across geotourism systems. While these domains provided an analytical scaffold, interviews remained adaptive and dialogic. Participants were encouraged to foreground issues most relevant to their expertise and institutional role, allowing the research to capture variation across governance levels and professional contexts. This flexibility was particularly important in a multi-scalar geopark setting, where interpretations of authenticity may differ between global policy actors and local practitioners. A detailed version of the interview guide, including example questions under each thematic domain, is provided in Appendix 4. Referencing the full guides ensuring transparency while preserving the readability of the main methodology.

Interviews were conducted as one-on-one semi-structured conversations focusing on participants' perceptions and lived experiences of authenticity within geopark context. This format allowed for consistency across interviews while preserving flexibility to probe emergent themes. Each interview lasted on average around 60-90 minutes, with the shortest being 55 minutes, and the longest being 125 minutes. The interview was conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on logistical considerations and participant preference. Online interviews were facilitated through secure platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams, WhatsApp audio, or phone calls, ensuring accessibility without compromising rapport. With informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to support rigorous qualitative analysis and preserve the nuance of participants' narratives.

Regarding interview mode, the distribution between in-person and online interviews was broadly balanced, and this variation did not significantly affect the depth or quality of the discussions. Both formats proved equally effective in eliciting detailed reflections on authenticity and geopark governance. The researcher was able to observe key communicative cues, including gestures, tone, confidence, and moments of hesitation across both settings. In particular, the majority of online interviews were conducted via Zoom, which provided sufficient visual and auditory access to capture non-verbal dynamics and maintain interpretive depth. Both online and in-person formats were equally capable of generating rich qualitative insights. While face-to-face interviews facilitated immediate rapport and allowed attention to spatial context, online interactions

often enabled participants to speak from familiar environments, which sometimes supported more relaxed and reflective engagement. Across both modes, interviews remained conversational and responsive, consistent with the study's ethnographic orientation.

Overall, the flexibility to employ both approaches enabled the research to remain adaptive to logistical constraints while preserving the relational and interpretive depth necessary for examining how authenticity is understood and negotiated within geopark contexts.

4.3.2 Data Collection: Stage 2

While Stage 1 examined authenticity from the perspective of governance actors and tourism suppliers, Stage 2 shifted the analytical lens to visitors, acknowledging that authenticity is not only produced institutionally but also interpreted experientially. This stage centred on tourists as meaning-makers, exploring how authenticity is perceived, negotiated, and evaluated through lived encounters within geopark settings. By focusing on lived experience, it sought to capture how meanings of authenticity emerge through encounters with landscapes, narratives, and mediated interpretations rather than being solely defined by policy or management frameworks.

Methodologically, Stage 2 employed semi-structured interviews alongside online photo diaries to access both reflective and in-situ dimensions of experience. This mixed qualitative approach enabled study to document how authenticity is constructed at the point of consumption and complements the supply-side insight from Stage 1.

- Recruitment Procedures for Tourists

Participant recruitment for Stage 2 was designed to include both domestic and international tourists to reflect the heterogeneous visitor composition of UNESCO Global Geoparks (see Table 4.2). This distinction was analytically important because domestic and international visitors may engage with geopark through different cultural frames, travel motivations, and interpretive lenses. Domestic tourists may possess greater familiarity with national heritage narratives, language, and cultural context, potentially shaping more relational or place-based understandings of authenticity. In contrast, international visitors may approach the geoparks through global tourism imaginaries, UNESCO branding, or expectation shaped by prior travel experiences. Including both

groups therefore enabled the study to examine how authenticity is interpreted across culturally situated perspectives rather than assuming a singular tourist gaze.

Table 4.2 Research Participants in Stage 2

No	Geopark	Type of Visit	Origin	Age	Gender	Background
1	Batur UGGp	Join Geotour	Indonesia	26	F	School Teacher
2		Join Geotour	Indonesia	24	F	Freelancer
3		Join Geotour	Indonesia	38	F	Bureau of Statistic Officer
4		Join Geotour	Indonesia	51	M	Senior Tour Guide
5		Join Geotour	Indonesia	27	F	Unemployed
6		Join Geotour	Indonesia	36	F	Geopark Management Board
7		Join Geotour	Indonesia	28	F	Geopark Management Board
8		Join Geotour	Indonesia	19	F	Student
9		FITs (Trekking Mount Batur)	Netherland	27	F	On Career Break
10		FITs (Trunyan Village)	Indonesia	26	M	Student, Photographer, Guide
11		FITs (Trekking Mount Batur)	Netherland	23	M	Data Analyst
12		FITs (Lake Batur)	Germany	49	F	Yoga Instructor
13		FITs (Trekking Mount Batur)	Indonesia	25	M	Vila Manager
14	Rinjani- Lombok UGGp	Join Geotour	Indonesia	25	M	Credit Officer
15		Join Geotour	Indonesia	30	M	Business Manager
16		Join Geofestival Tour	Indonesia	32	F	Geopark Management Board
17		FITs (Trekking Mount Rinjani)	Indonesia	26	M	Shrimps Farmer
18		FITs (Trekking Mount Rinjani)	Indonesia	26	M	Sales
19		FITs (Batu Bolong Beach)	UK	30	F	Business Analyst
20		FITs (Bird Watching)	Indonesia	28	M	Environmental Consultant
21		FITs (Sendang Gile Waterfall)	Germany	26	F	Student
22		FITs (Geopark Rinjani-Lombok)	Singapore	42	F	Researcher
23		FITs (Geopark Rinjani-Lombok)	France	22	F	Student
24		Join Geofestival Tour	Japan	43	M	Geopark Management Board
25		Join Geofestival Tour	Indonesia	45	F	Geopark Management Board
26		Join Geofestival Tour	Indonesia	65	M	Geopark Management Board
27		Join Geofestival Tour	Indonesia	44	M	Geopark Management Board

Creswell (2007) suggests that qualitative saturation is often achieved within a sample of up to thirty interviews, depending on the depth and scope of inquiry. Similarly, Goulding (2000), in her exploration of authenticity in contemporary heritage attractions, worked with a sample of 33 tourists. In the present study, a total of 27 participants were recruited, comprising 8 international and 19 domestic visitors. While the research initially aimed for a more balanced distribution, the final composition reflects the practical realities of field access and recruitment across the two case study sites, as discussed in this section. Geographically, the sample was relatively evenly distributed, with 13 participants from Batur UGGp and 14 from Rinjani-Lombok UGGp.

To capture a diverse range of geotourism experiences, recruitment followed three complementary pathways. First, participants were recruited through organised geotours,

enabling both embedded observation and post-experience interviews. Second, Free Independent Travellers were approached through on-site, informal encounters across selected geosites. Third, existing professional networks were mobilised to facilitate access, particularly where direct recruitment proved challenging. The following sections outline each pathway in detail, highlighting how site-specific conditions shaped recruitment outcomes.

The first recruitment pathway involved collaboration with tour operators and geopark networks. The researcher initially contacted professional networks to identify scheduled geotourism activities and, where feasible, sought permission to join tours. This approach enabled both participant observation and post-experience interviews. However, recruitment dynamics differed across the two case studies due to contrasting field conditions.

In Batur UGGp, no geotours were operating during the fieldwork period. To address this limitation, a retrospective recruitment strategy was adopted. A geoscientist affiliated with Batur UGGp, who had previously been involved in organising a geotour, shared a participant contact list from a recent programme. The tour was a joint initiative between Batur UGGp and Rinjani-Lombok UGGp management boards titled '*Geotrip Expedition: Rinjani Batur Volcanic Geopark Tour Series*', held in April 2023 over four days three nights. The programme aimed to provide participants with an immersive experience of multiple volcanic calderas through a combined Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps itinerary.

Former participants were contacted via WhatsApp and email, which invited to participate in the study by reflecting retrospectively on their experiences. Eight individuals agreed to participate, all of whom were based in Lombok. Notably, although the itinerary was originally designed to begin in Batur UGGp and continue to Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, all eight participants only completed the Batur segment and did not proceed to Rinjani UGGp. Participants reported several reasons for this decision. Some had previously visited Rinjani UGGp and therefore expressed limited curiosity about revisiting the destination, opting instead to extend their stay elsewhere in Bali. Others cited scheduling conflicts and competing commitments that prevented them from continuing the second leg of the tour. While temporally distanced, these accounts offered valuable insights into how authenticity was constructed and remembered within the Batur context.

By contrast, fieldwork in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp coincided with an active geotour programme, enabling prospective recruitment and embedded engagement. The tour was commissioned by a private company as part of an employee outing and organised in collaboration with the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp management board. Conducted in August 2024, the three-day, two-night itinerary consisted of a guided programme visiting a range of geological and cultural sites across the geopark.

To ensure transparency while preserving the integrity of the tourism experience, the researcher prioritised clear role disclosure from the outset. With permission from the organising tour agency, the researcher was formally introduced by the tour leader at the beginning of the tour. This introduction clarified the purpose of the study, the researcher's role, and the voluntary nature of participation, ensuring that all participants were informed without creating pressure to engage.

At the same time, careful attention was given to the potential influence of the researcher's presence on participants' leisure experiences. Recognising that participants had joined the tour primarily for recreation, the researcher adopted a low-profile, participant-observer role. By engaging in activities as an ordinary tourist—walking the same routes, listening to guides, and taking photographs—the researcher blended naturally into the group. This approach aligns with established practices in tourism ethnography, where observational activities closely mirror everyday tourist performances, enabling immersion without undue visibility. To further minimise disruption, interactions were kept unobtrusive and context sensitive. The researcher avoided interrupting key moments of enjoyment or engaging participants in ways that might feel evaluative. Overt note-taking and formal data collection during the tour were intentionally avoided; instead, observation was documented retrospectively. This helped preserve the spontaneity of group dynamics and reduced the likelihood that participants would feel observed or studied in real time.

Importantly, recruitment was sequenced to respect the recreational nature of setting. While participants were informed about the study at the beginning of the tour, invitations to participate in interviews were extended only after the tour had concluded. This approach balanced ethical transparency with experiential sensitivity, allowing the researcher to conduct real-time participant observation while ensuring that participants' leisure experiences remained undisturbed. Following the tour, several individuals expressed initial interest and agreed to follow-up contacted for follow-up interviews.

However, while five participants initially consented, only two interviews were ultimately completed due to scheduling conflicts and limited availability among the remaining participants.

This recruitment trajectory highlights a recurring tension in tourism fieldwork. Group travel settings are typically temporally compressed and socially orchestrated, with participants moving through tightly scheduled itineraries that prioritise shared experiences over individual reflection. Within such contexts, research participation can be perceived as an additional demand layered onto already intensive travel rhythms. Once the tour concluded, participants dispersed rapidly across different geographical and professional contexts, and competing commitments appeared to diminish follow-through. This dispersal underscores how tourism mobilities disrupt conventional assumptions about participant availability. Unlike stationary field sites, mobile tourism environments produce fleeting relational windows in which rapport must be established quickly yet sustained across distance. The gap between initial consent and completed interviews therefore reflects not only logistical constraints but also the structurally transient nature of organised tourism encounters. In this sense, attrition is not merely a recruitment shortfall but a methodological effect of studying highly mobile populations.

At the same time, real-time participant observation enabled the capture of embodied practices, spontaneous reactions, and peer-to-peer meaning-making that would have been difficult to reconstruct through retrospectively alone. Fieldnotes were written during and immediately after site visits, recording not only verbal exchanges but also gestures, movement, spatial dynamics, and shifting group attention. These notes were later expanded to include contextual detail and early analytical reflections, allowing experiential fragments to be preserved before memory consolidation.

For instance, during a visit to Geosite Sendang Gile Waterfall in Rinjani UGGp, the guide introducing and explaining the elements of biodiversity within the site. While the information was positioned as foundational context, fieldnotes recorded a visible mismatch between interpretive intent and participant engagement. Several participants continued walking while the guide spoke, some pausing only briefly before moving toward scenic viewpoints, and the others busy in taking photographs (Figure 4.2). Rather than forming a listening cluster, the group remained spatially dispersed, suggesting limited willingness to suspend mobility for the guide storytelling.



Figure 4.2 The guide (with a green backpack) explained the biodiversity within the site
(source: Author, 2024)

This moment revealed how attention during mobile tourism is often uneven and selectively allocated. Although the guide attempted to foreground the significance interconnection of geological heritage and biodiversity, participants appeared more responsive to visually immediate stimuli. Fieldnotes documented how interest shifted rapidly when the group encountered cattle grazing along the hillside trail. Participants who have shown minimal engagement during the interpretive segment became visibly animated—pointing, laughing, taking photos, and calling others over. The sudden change in energy illustrated how affective engagement was triggered less by formal interpretation and more by spontaneous, sensory encounters embedded in the landscape.



Figure 4.3 Participant busy to get their phone to capture the cattle grazing
(source: Author, 2024)

Without fieldnotes, this divergence between interpretive design and experiential uptake might have remained invisible. Fieldnotes also captured micro-social dynamics that shaped meaning-making. Moments like shared laughter over the cows or informal photo exchanges revealed how authenticity may co-produced relationally—through collective recognition and peer affirmation. These fleeting interactions, often too mundane for participants to recall explicitly in interviews, provided insight into how group atmospheres shape experiential valuation.

The second recruitment strategy sought to include Free Independent Travellers (FITs). This approach was intended to ensure that interpretations of authenticity were not limited to curated tour experiences but also reflected self-directed encounters with the geoparks. Participants were approached through informal, on-site conversations across multiple geosites, with a focus on more popular locations where visitor turnover was higher. However, the realities of fieldwork introduced additional recruitment challenges, particularly in relation to international participants.

In Batur UGGp, international visitors were relatively easier to encounter across multiple geosites. At the primary trekking starting point for Mount Batur, for example, twelve visitors agreed to share contact details to arrange follow-up online interviews. Many indicated that their travel schedules were tightly structured and preferred to participate later, during their free time. At the moment of interaction, this appeared to be an effective strategy, combining opportunistic face-to-face engagement with flexible online follow-up to highly mobile travellers. In practice, however, the transition from initial agreement to completed interview proved fragile. Only two interviews were ultimately completed. Most individuals did not respond to follow-up communication, and one attempted interview was interrupted by technical difficulties on the participant's side.

In contrast, international visitor encounters in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp were comparatively rare. Only two international participant were encountered during an independent site visit, highlighting a marked imbalance in visitor composition between the two geoparks. This uneven distribution complicates direct methodological comparisons and suggests that recruitment outcomes cannot be interpreted solely as a function of research design or fieldwork execution. Rather, they are shaped by broader spatial and structural dynamics that condition who travels where, and under what circumstances.

One critical factor lies in differing tourism circuits and destination positioning. While some geoparks are embedded within well-established international travel routes, others are more strongly oriented toward domestic tourism flows or niche adventure segments. In such contexts, international visitors may be present but temporally dispersed, concentrated in specific seasons, or clustered within particular activity niches (e.g., trekking), making opportunistic recruitment more difficult. This highlights how researcher access is mediated not only by field presence but by the temporal rhythms and segmentation of tourism itself. Infrastructure and accessibility further complicate the picture. Sites with centralised visitor hubs, guided programming, or curated interpretation tend to create interaction nodes that facilitate recruitment. Conversely, more decentralised or independently navigated landscapes reduce incidental contact, placing greater reliance on pre-arranged access strategies. From a methodological standpoint, this suggests that recruitment feasibility is partially infrastructural—structured by the built and organisational environments that choreograph tourist movement.

Lastly, existing professional networks were mobilised to facilitate access, particularly in contexts where direct recruitment proved challenging. In one instance, an additional four international participants were successfully recruited through referral from networking with tourism stakeholder, and the interview proceeded smoothly. This experience contrasted sharply with the relatively low conversion rate from spontaneous, on-site encounters, where initial expression of interest often did not translate into sustained engagement.

- Interview Format for Tourists

Similar to the tourism supplier component, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with visitors to examine how authenticity was perceived, negotiated, and embodied within geotourism experiences. This method was selected to balance structural coherence with interpretive openness: while a common thematic framework ensured comparability across interviews, the semi-structure format enabled participants to narrate their experiences in their own terms and introduce dimensions that may not have been anticipated in advance. Such flexibility was particularly important given the subjective, affective, and relational nature of authenticity.

The interview guide evolved iteratively throughout fieldwork. Early interviews revealed subtle tensions between abstract conceptual language and lived experiential accounts, prompting ongoing refinement of prompts and sequencing. Rather than operating as a

fixed questionnaire, the guide functioned as a responsive instrument shaped by field encounters, preliminary analysis, and reflexive evaluation. A particularly significant methodological development involved the deliberate decision to avoid explicitly using the term ‘authenticity’ in framing questions. During Stage 1 interviews with tourism stakeholders, direct reference to authenticity often produced hesitation, definitional uncertainty, or strategic responses aligned with institutional discourse. Recognising the risk of imposing a conceptual frame onto participants’ narratives, the researcher shifted towards experience-centred questioning in Stage 2. Instead of asking whether something felt ‘authentic’, participants were invited to describe moments that felt meaningful, real, distinctive, unique, or memorable. This strategy allowed authenticity to emerge inductively from participants’ language and storytelling practices rather than being prescriptively defined by the researcher.

The final interview structure was organised into four interrelated domains: 1) Initial motivations and impressions, 2) lived geotourism experiences, 3) reflections and longer-term impacts, and 4) perceptions of destination distinctiveness. This sequencing was intentional. Beginning with motivations and first impressions grounded the discussion in anticipatory imaginaries and pre-visit expectations, which often shape how experiences are interpreted. The second domain shifted toward embodied and situated encounters, encouraging participants to recount specific interactions, sensory impressions, and emotionally salient moments. The third domain extended the temporal horizon by inviting reflection on longer-term meanings, personal growth, and shifts in perspective. Finally, the comparative domain encouraged participants to situate the geopark experience within their broader travel histories, revealing how distinctiveness and value are constructed relationally. Structuring the interviews in this layered manner facilitated a temporal movement from anticipation to immersion and subsequently to reflection and comparison. This progression enabled authenticity to be examined as a process that unfolds across different stages of travel rather than as a singular, static evaluative judgement made at one moment in time.

Interview timing was intentionally positioned as post-experiential. Conducting interviews after participants had completed their visits enabled more holistic and reflective accounts of their geotourism journeys, allowing meanings to consolidate beyond immediate, sensory impressions. This timing was also guided by practical and ethical considerations. Both Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps are characterised by steep terrain, dispersed geosites, and physically demanding, highly mobile itineraries. Interrupting participants

during these activities risked disrupting immersion, introducing fatigue-related discomfort, and potentially producing fragmented responses. Post-trip interviews therefore offered a more appropriate setting for in-depth reflection, aligning with tourism research that emphasises the value of retrospective sense-making once travellers have had time to process their experiences (Akama & Kieti, 2003).

Notably, all participants at this stage preferred an online interview format. In practical terms, this mode accommodated geographical distance and post-trip schedules while maintaining a comfortable environment for reflection. More importantly, however, the post-experiential timing shaped not only how the interviews after the journey, but the study also enabled a shift from immediate, descriptive recall to more interpretive narration. At the level of experiential reconstruction, participants were able to connect discrete moments into broader experiential trajectories, weaving together fragmented encounters into coherent narratives of the trip. Reflective distance allowed participants to contextualise their experiences within wider travel biographies. Many may draw comparisons with prior destinations, revisited expectations formed before the trip, and reassessed moments that had initially appeared mundane. This comparative framing deepened interpretive depth, transforming the interviews from simple recollections into sites of meaning negotiation. Conducting interviews after the trip therefore enabled access to these layered meaning-making processes, revealing authenticity not as an immediate judgement but as an evolving interpretive outcome shaped by time, recollection, and narrative reconstruction.

- Online Photo Diaries

To deepen the reflective dimension of the interview, participants were invited to share photographs that represented moments they perceived as meaningful, distinctive, or real during their geotourism experiences. In total, 15 participants contributed photographs to the study, including ten participants from the Batur UGGp and five participants from Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. Participants were generally asked to select between two to five photographs that they felt most strongly represented experiences, encounters, or moments that remained meaningful within their memories of the geopark.

The uneven distribution of photographs across the two case study sites reflects both the practical challenges associated with soliciting participant-generated visual materials and potential differences between the visitor contexts of the two geoparks. Participation in

this aspect of the research was entirely voluntary and depended on participants' willingness and ability to locate, select, and share personal photographs after the interview had taken place. While many participants expressed interest in contributing images, follow-up communication was not always successful, and some participants indicated that they no longer had access to photographs from their visits. These factors contributed to the overall number of photographs received but do not fully explain why substantially more images were submitted by participants associated with Batur UGGp than Rinjani-Lombok UGGp.

The reasons for this imbalance cannot be established with certainty. However, several contextual factors may have influenced participation. Batur UGGp attracted a larger proportion of international visitors, many of whom appeared to engage extensively in photographing and documenting their travel experiences. Interviews and observations also suggested that visitors to Batur UGGp frequently emphasised visually distinctive features of the landscape, including volcanic scenery, lakeside vistas, and cultural sites, which may have encouraged photographic documentation. In contrast, experiences in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp were often described in terms of physical challenge, personal achievement, environmental immersion, and extended trekking journeys. While these experiences were no less meaningful, they may not have translated into the same patterns of photographic sharing after the visit. Practical considerations may also have played a role, as some Rinjani-Lombok UGGp participants had visited the geopark years earlier and reported difficulty locating photographs from their trips.

Rather than viewing this uneven distribution as a methodological weakness to be corrected, it was treated as a characteristic of the dataset itself. The photographs were not intended to provide a balanced or representative visual record of each geopark but to offer additional insight into how participants chose to document and represent their experiences. The imbalance therefore highlights the selective and participant-led nature of visual data generation and serves as a reminder that photographs reflect not only what participants experienced, but also what they considered memorable, shareable, and worthy of preservation.

This approach was informed by the understanding that tourism experiences are often layered, affective, and sometimes contradictory, making them difficult to access through verbal questioning alone (Willson & McIntosh, 2010; Harper, 2002). While interviews captured participants' retrospective reflections on their experiences, participant-

generated photographs provided an additional perspective on how those experiences were perceived, remembered, and represented. As photographs were typically shared after the interview, they functioned as a complementary source of data rather than an elicitation technique.

The act of selecting and sharing photographs also afforded participants greater agency in shaping how their experiences were represented within the research. For instance, some participants described authenticity during interviews in relatively general terms, referring to local culture, nature, or community life. However, the photographs they subsequently selected often highlighted specific moments and places, such as religious sites or everyday scenes away from the main tourists routes. These visual selections helped illuminate what authenticity looked like in practice from participants' perspectives and revealed aspects of their experiences that were less fully articulated during interviews. Analysing photographs alongside interview narratives therefore provided a richer understanding of how authenticity was experienced, interpreted, and represented across the two geoparks. By choosing particular images, participants implicitly defined which moments mattered and how those moment should be framed.

In the initial research design, participants who joined the geotour were encouraged to take photographs during their trips that captured moments they perceived as authentic, with visual prompts (Appendix 8) provided prior to travel. However, this approach proved difficult to implement consistently in practice. Many participants had already completed their trips by the time they were recruited. As a result, the method was adapted to better align with field realities. Rather than collecting images in real time, participants were invited to share existing photographs after the interview had been completed.

This adaptation shifted the analytical role of the photographs from immediate documentation toward retrospective interpretation. Revisiting personal image archives after the interview introduced a reflective interval through which participants reconsidered their journeys and often articulated more layered meanings than those expressed during the initial conversation. The process of selecting photographs encouraged participants to reflect on why particular moments had remained memorable. In many cases, the selected images reflected themes that had already emerged during interviews, including participants' connection to place, encounters with local communities, sensory impressions of the landscape, and moments they perceived as genuine or unscripted. Examining these images alongside interview accounts provided an

additional perspective on how participants represented and documented aspects of their geopark experiences that they considered meaningful and authentic. In this sense, the adapted approach preserved the interpretive strengths of online photo diaries while demonstrating responsiveness to the practical and temporal constraints of tourism fieldwork.

4.4 Analysis

Qualitative data analysis in this study was conceptualised as an iterative and ongoing process rather than a discrete phase following data collection. As emphasised by Gibbs (2007), analysis develops alongside data generation, allowing emerging insights to inform subsequent engagement with dataset. Guided by this principle, the researcher adopted thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning embedded within interviews, field notes, and participant-generated materials.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic nuance, tone, and contextual meaning. Interviews conducted with local participants were first transcribed in Bahasa Indonesia and subsequently translated into English by the researcher. Although this process was time-intensive, it served as an important stage of immersion. Translating the data personally enabled the researcher to remain closely connected to the interactional subtleties of the interviews, including shifts in tone, implicit meanings, and culturally embedded expressions that might otherwise be diluted through outsourced translation. This process also allowed the researcher to reflect on the embodied and relational aspects of the encounters, from subtle gestures to explicit articulations expressed during the discussions.

Beyond interview transcript, the analysis incorporated contextual narratives generated through participant photographs. These visual materials were analysed alongside interview data, fieldnotes, and observational records using the same thematic framework to maintain analytical consistency across different forms of data. Treating visual-textual data alongside interview narratives enabled an integrated interpretation of both discursive constructions (what participants articulated verbally) and visual-symbolic constructions (what participants chose to capture and highlight). This multi-modal approach strengthened the analytical depth of the study by allowing authenticity to be examined not only through spoken accounts but also through participants' curated representations of meaningful experiences.

Drawing on the visual analytic approach outlined by Pilcher, Martin, and Williams (2014), photographs were analysed as both visual representations and social constructions of experience. Analysis focused primarily on the content of the images and their relationship to themes emerging across interviews, fieldnotes, and observational data. Images were coded alongside other forms of data in relation to recurring dimensions of authenticity, including environmental immersion, local cultural interaction, spirituality, everyday practices, remoteness, and emotional connection to place. Particular attention was given to recurring visual patterns across the two case studies, as well as notable absences, recognising that what participants chose not to photograph could be as revealing as what they elected to capture (Pilcher et al, 2014). Rather than being treated as objective records of experience, photographs were interpreted as selective representations that reflected how participants engaged with and documented aspects of the geopark they considered significant.

To ensure analytical rigour and transparency, the study employed thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach was selected for its methodological flexibility and compatibility with interpretivist inquiry. Thematic analysis facilitates the identification and interpretation of patterns across qualitative datasets while remaining sensitive to context and participant subjectivity. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, the method is particularly useful for examining lived experiences and socially constructed meanings. Later, Braun and Clarke (2019) conceptualise themes as patterns of shared meaning organised around a central organising concept, underscoring their interpretive rather than purely descriptive nature. In line with this framework, the analytical process followed six recursive phases:

- **Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data**

Familiarisation began during transcription and continued through repeated reading of interview transcripts, field diary, and participant-generated photographs. In this study, immersion involved not only reviewing verbal accounts but also revisiting contextual notes taken during participant observation and examining the narratives accompanying selected photographs.

- **Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes**

The second phase involved systematically coding meaningful segments of data across the entire dataset. Coding was conducted manually to support close and sustained engagement with the data. Rather than relying on automated or software-driven coding, the researcher worked directly with transcripts and field materials. This approach aligns with study's constructivist epistemology, which understand meaning as contextually

situated and co-constructed through interaction. Manual coding allowed for greater sensitivity to linguistic subtleties, narrative tone, and implicit meanings that might be overlooked through more mechanistic coding approaches

- **Phase 3: Searching for Themes**

In this third phase, codes were examined for patterns of shared meaning and clustered into potential themes. At this stages, provisional thematic maps were developed to explore relationships between stakeholder discourses and visitor interpretations, as well as similarities and divergences across the two case study sites

- **Phase 4: Reviewing Themes**

Themes were then reviewed against the dataset to ensure coherence and distinctiveness. This involved returning to transcripts and visual materials to assess whether candidate themes accurately captured participant's meanings. Some themes were collapsed, refined, or reconfigured. This phase strengthened analytical rigour by ensuring that themes were grounded in the data rather than driven by theoretical expectations.

- **Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

Once refined, themes were clearly defined and named to reflect their central organising concepts. Definitions articulated what each theme captured, how it related to authenticity, and how it differed from other themes. This phase required careful attention to conceptual clarity, ensuring that each theme conveyed analytical depth and explanatory power

- **Phase 6: Producing the Analytical Narratives**

The final phase involved integrating themes into a coherent analytical narrative that addressed the research questions. This stage moved beyond description toward interpretation, situating findings within broader theoretical debates on authenticity and geotourism. The narrative traced how authenticity was produced at governance levels, enacted within tourism practices, experienced by visitors, and reinterpreted through reflection and visual representation.

Applying thematic analysis across verbal, written, and visual materials supported a coherent and comprehensive interpretation of dataset. The integration of multiple data forms enabled triangulation, enhancing analytical credibility by revealing convergences across stakeholder groups and case study sites. This integrative strategy allowed authenticity to be examined as multi-layered construct emerging across discourse, lived experience, and reflective narration.

4.5 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were central to the design and implementation of this study, guiding all stages of data collection and analysis. Key principles—including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and participation autonomy—were rigorously applied to ensure responsible and respectful engagement with participants.

Prior to participation, all interviewees received a detailed Participation Information Sheet outlining the study's purpose, data management procedures, and their rights as participants. Written informed consent was obtained before each interview, and participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence, review transcripts, remove sensitive statements, or request pseudonymisation. These measures were designed to protect participants, foster transparency, and maintain ethical integrity throughout the research process.

Particular attention was given to the ethical complexities of the researching geotourism, where social interaction between visitors, local residents, and guides are central to the creation and perception of authentic experiences. These interactions are not merely background context; they constitute a core dimension of what makes geotourism meaningful, influencing how visitors interpret landscapes, engage with local knowledge, and experience place-based distinctiveness. Excluding visual representations of these interactions entirely would risk erasing this relational and performative aspect of authenticity, potentially producing an incomplete or decontextualised account of the geotourism experience.

To address this, participants were invited to share images that captured these interactions or the experiences themselves. When images included identifiable individuals, privacy and confidentiality were carefully preserved through blurring or anonymisation of faces, ensuring that the visual data could be ethically incorporated without compromising participants' autonomy or safety. This approach reflects a deliberate ethical trade-off: it allows the researcher to document and analyse the social and affective dimensions of geotourism, while simultaneously upholding participants' right and consent.

Overall, ethical practice was approached reflexively, recognising the power imbalance, cultural sensitivities, and potential vulnerabilities of participants. By foregrounding participant rights and maintaining a balance between ethical protection and the integrity of the research, this study ensures that the representation of geotourism experiences is both methodologically robust and socially responsible.

4.6 Summary

The chapter details the methodological frameworks and research design underpinning the study, situated within an interpretivist paradigm that emphasises the socially constructed and context-dependent nature of reality. By prioritising participants' subjective meanings and lived experiences, the research adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design, focusing on Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps as bounded, context-specific systems. Ethnography fieldwork complements this design, enabling the researcher to capture everyday practices, interactions, and situated meanings that shape geotourism and governance processes. The study integrates multiple qualitative methods—including semi-structure interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and online photo diaries—allowing authenticity to be examined as a co-constructed phenomenon across governance actors, tourism suppliers, and visitors. Reflexivity and positionality are explicitly acknowledged, with the researcher's prior professional engagement informing both access to field sites and interpretation of data while maintaining analytical distance.

Data collection was organised in two stages, reflecting both supply- and demand-side perspectives on authenticity. Stage 1 engaged governance actors and tourism suppliers across international, national, and local levels through purposive and snowball sampling, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, capturing how authenticity is operationalised within institutional and practice-based contexts. Stage 2 focused on visitors, employing post experiential interviews and online photo diaries to explore how authenticity is perceived, negotiated, and remembered during geotourism experiences. The chapter highlights the adaptive, field-responsive nature of recruitment, where relational trust, prior networks, and site-specific circumstances shaped who was accessible and willing to participate. Temporal, logistical and mobility-related constraints inherent in tourism contexts influenced attrition, reflecting broader patterns of tourist distribution, destination accessibility, and leisure-oriented priorities rather than methodological shortcomings.

Taken together, the chapter underscores the reflexive, adaptive, and ethically grounded approach of the study, demonstrating how methodological rigor, positional awareness, and ethical vigilance collectively enable a rich, contextually informed understanding of geopark governance and geotourism.

Chapter 5 Contesting Frameworks: UNESCO Guidelines and Indonesian Geopark Governance

This chapter examines how authenticity is implicitly articulated through UNESCO's framework for Global Geoparks and how these principles subsequently shape national and local geopark practices. It further explores how UNESCO constructs and promotes particular understandings of authenticity, and how these interpretations are negotiated, adapted, and sometimes contested across different scales of governance.

UNESCO (2015) formalised the Operational Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks through document 38C/14, which sets out the criteria, objectives, and evaluation mechanisms governing geopark designation and management. In Indonesia, these guidelines function as the principal reference for the national government in shaping policy direction, assessment standards, and action plans for the national geopark programme (Jakaria, 2020).

Within these Operational Guidelines, UNESCO attempts to articulate three interrelated foundational principles through which geoparks are framed and rendered legible as sites of global significance. These include: 1. Asserting geological heritage as “international significance” through expert-led assessment, 2. Promoting a “bottom-up” or community-led development model, and 3. Privileging storytelling and interpretation as mechanisms for linking geological heritage to its natural and cultural dimensions.

The following sections examine these three constructed dimensions in turn, exploring how they contribute to UNESCO's institutional articulation of authenticity and how they are negotiated and enacted within geopark settings. The analysis draws on a small number of strategically selected participants whose roles place them at key points within the geopark governance framework, enabling close examination of how UNESCO's principles are translated into practice. By unpacking the conceptual foundations of UNESCO Global Geopark guidelines, this chapter establishes the institutional context necessary for understanding how authenticity is subsequently interpreted and experienced by tourism suppliers and tourists.

5.1 Operational Guidelines and Scientific Assessment

The incorporation of authenticity as an indicator of heritage value within UNESCO is not a new conceptual development. Rather, it is institutionally embedded in UNESCO's earlier heritage frameworks, particularly the World Heritage Convention. Authenticity, as defined in UNESCO World Heritage glossary (UNESCO, 2026), refers to the relationship between a property's attributes and its Outstanding Universal Value, expressed through a wide range of tangible and intangible dimensions, including form and design; materials and substance; use and function; traditions, techniques and management systems; location and setting; language and other forms of intangible heritage; spirit and feeling; and other internal/external factors. Over time, this understanding has evolved from a predominantly material-based notion toward a pluralistic, culturally relative, and value-based concept, reflecting the diversity of human societies and the multiple ways in which heritage is created, practiced, and remembered.

Within this institutional context, geoheritage has historically occupied a marginal position within UNESCO's heritage frameworks. Scholars within the geoscientific community have long observed an imbalance in the international recognition of heritage values under the implementation of both the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) and the World Heritage Convention, which have tended to privilege ecological and cultural attributes over geological ones (Jones, 2008; Brilha, 2018). This imbalance has resulted in the persistent under-representation of geoheritage within UNESCO's heritage agenda. Consequently, geological heritage has often been subsumed within broader ecological or cultural narratives, rather than recognised for its intrinsic scientific, educational, and societal significance. This institutional marginalisation has limited the visibility of geoheritage and constrained its recognition as a distinct—yet integral—component of global heritage conservation.

The establishment of UNESCO Global Geoparks can therefore be seen as an institutional response to this imbalance. UNESCO Global Geoparks explicitly aim to “use geological heritage, in connection with all other aspects of that area's natural and cultural heritage, to enhance awareness and understanding of key issues facing society in the context of the dynamic planet we all live on” (UNESCO, 2015). While the Operational Guidelines for Global Geoparks do not foreground authenticity as explicitly as the World Heritage framework, the concept remains implicitly embedded. Given that geoheritage was historically encompassed within MAB sites and World Heritage properties, the application of authenticity as an indicator of heritage value is inherently transferred into the Global

Geopark settings. In this context, authenticity within UNESCO Global Geoparks should be understood as a concept that is institutionally inherited and recontextualised.

The UNESCO Global Geopark Operational Guidelines clearly stipulate that international geological significance must be demonstrated through a rigorous, globally comparative assessment carried out by scientific professionals serving on a UNESCO Global Evaluation Team. This evaluation is grounded in peer-reviewed, published scientific research on the geological sites within the proposed geopark area. By grounding evaluation in established scientific literature, UNESCO positions scientific expertise as the primary arbiter of value and credibility, attempting to ensure that Global Geopark designation is based on robust, internationally validated geological evidence rather than on claims of local, regional, or national importance alone.

This reliance on scientific validation plays a central role in shaping how authenticity is understood within the Global Geoparks framework. Authenticity is implicitly equated with geological accuracy, material integrity, and alignment with disciplinary standards in Earth sciences. Geological features—such as rock formations, stratigraphic sequences, and landforms—are treated as objective records of Earth’s history whose authenticity can be verified through expert knowledge. As a result, authenticity is framed as something that can be proven, measured, and certified through scientific assessment.

This emphasis on the inherent authenticity of geological features was reflected in Nita's account, a 40-year-old environmental specialist at the UNESCO Jakarta office, who highlighted how distinct geological histories across the Indonesian UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGp) align to authenticity:

In fact, the uniqueness or the authenticity is already self-evident and does not really need to be questioned. Take Rinjani, for example: there is no other place quite like it, or Belitung, which was once part of the seabed and later uplifted, or Karangsambung in Kebumen, which has long been used as a research site. In terms of geological features, these sites are inherently authentic because each site possesses its own distinct form of geological heritage.

By characterising sites such as Rinjani-Lombok, Belitung, and Karangsambung UGGps as self-evidently authentic, Nita’s account advances an understanding of authenticity as an inherent and largely incontestable property of geological formations. In this framing, geological distinctiveness operates as the primary basis for authenticity: each site is considered authentic because it embodies a particular geological narrative—whether volcanism, tectonic uplift, or stratigraphic complexity—that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Authenticity is thus derived, at least in part, from a site's capacity to materially demonstrate specific Earth processes and to contribute uniquely to scientific interpretations of Earth history.

This conception of authenticity as grounded in geological singularity has important implications for how geoparks are institutionally framed and governed. Notably, UNESCO deliberately refrains from imposing a rigid, prescriptive model for geoparks governance, management, or presentation. Instead, the Global Geopark framework seeks to balance scientific rigor with institutional flexibility, allowing each geopark to reflect its distinctive geological characteristics, cultural and socio-economic context. As Anden, a 51-year-old member of the UNESCO Earth Sciences and Geopark Section, explained:

We do not prescribe how it should be run. I mean, there are guidelines, right? If you go to our website, you get a brief overview of what a Global Geopark should be, and, of course, geotourism and sustainable development are mentioned there. It is not going to hold your hand, and it is not going to describe what it should look like. However, to give this more concrete sense, we have developed it together with the Global Geoparks Network. A checklist: it is 101 questions that a Global Geopark gets to read, and then there is an explanatory note that comes with it, which explains a little bit about what they could be doing and what an evaluator will look at when he or she visits the site.

Anden's reflections illustrate the juxtaposition of legally mandated protection with a non-prescriptive governance framework, revealing a defining tension at the heart of the UNESCO Global Geopark programme. While UNESCO insists on a firm scientific and legal foundation as a non-negotiable prerequisite for recognition, it simultaneously distances itself from direct intervention in governance practices. This rhetorical framing positions UNESCO less as an implementing authority and more as a normative reference point, establishing broad expectations while delegating responsibility for interpretation and execution to local actors.

This approach is echoed by Nita, who emphasised that while certain requirements must be met, the manner in which they are implemented is left to national discretion:

With regard to management implementation at the site level—regardless of whether the site is a World Heritage property, a Biosphere Reserve, or a Global Geopark—responsibility rests entirely with the Member State, or the state party concerned. UNESCO does not intervene directly. Management is therefore delegated to the nominating state, as the designation process is based on a nomination dossier submitted by that state. Once a site has been granted status, certain requirements must be met; however, the manner in which these requirements are fulfilled is left to the state's discretion.

Taken together, Anden's and Nita's accounts point to a central dynamic within the geopark framework: while authenticity is defined and authorised at the international level through scientific criteria and expert evaluation, its practical realisation is largely delegated to national and local actors responsible for translating abstract, globally standardised principles into concrete-specific practices. Given the symbolic authority and strategic value attached to UNESCO Global Geopark status, these actors operate under considerable pressure to demonstrate alignment with UNESCO's principles, guidelines, and evaluative expectations, even as they retain a degree of discretion in how such standards are interpreted and enacted. In practice, this governance arrangement tends to privilege sites that can be clearly delineated, legally protected, and articulated through standardised scientific discourse, as these qualities render them more readily legible within UNESCO's institutional framework. As a consequence, while UNESCO's configuration of authenticity enhances scientific credibility and educational coherence, it may simultaneously privilege institutionally recognisable forms of authenticity over those grounded in locally embedded meanings and practices.

It is through evaluation practices that these constructions are actively produced and reinforced. UNESCO Global Geoparks are subject to periodic revalidation every 4 years (Figure 5.1), designed to ensure continued alignment with the programme's principles over time. These assessments are conducted by independent teams comprising desk-based advisors and field evaluators who undertake on-site missions. The UNESCO Secretariat, in collaboration with the Global Geopark Network, maintains a roster of evaluators with expertise across a range of relevant domains, including geological heritage, conservation, sustainable development, tourism development and promotion, and environmental management. The same evaluators also participate in revalidation missions, reinforcing continuity and consistency in the assessment process.

While this continuity promotes standardisation at one level, it simultaneously reproduces particular evaluative orientation over time. Rather than weighing all criteria evenly, evaluators tend to prioritise certain dimensions—often those aligned with their disciplinary expertise, professional background, or previous assessment experience—when judging geopark performance.

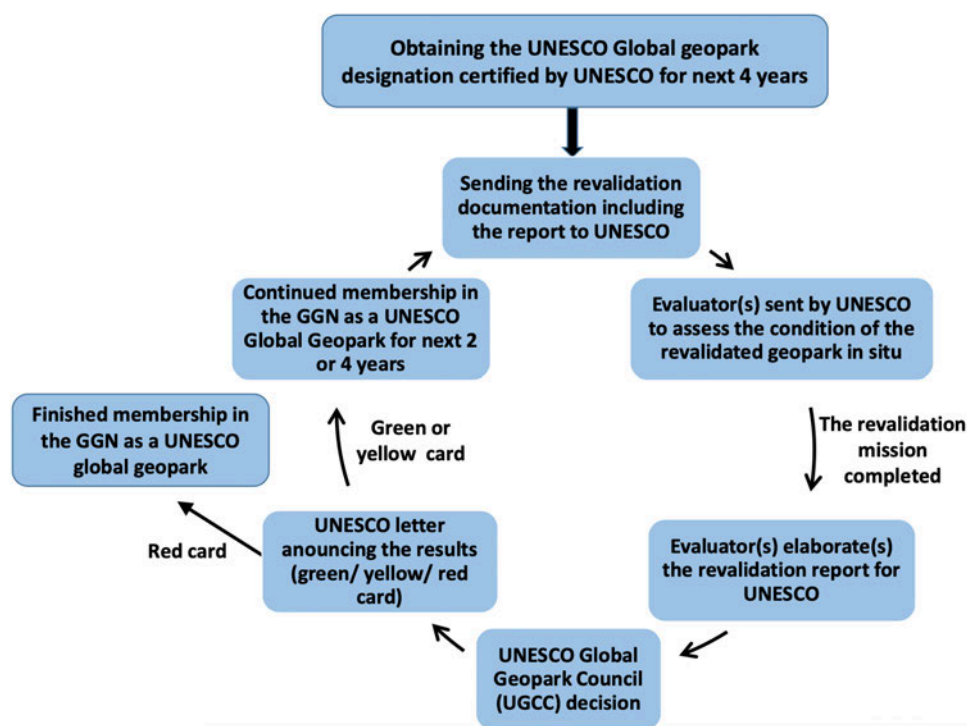


Figure 5.1 Revalidation process of the UNESCO Global Geopark
(source: Pásková & Zelenka, 2018)

Huel, an experienced UNESCO evaluator with a background in geography, described how such prioritisation is embedded within the structure of evaluation mission themselves. He explained that assessments are typically conducted by two experts, one of whom must have a geoscientific background, while the second may come from a complementary field such as tourism. The division of expertise, he noted, inevitably influences which criteria receive greater attention during the evaluation process:

So, two people are going on the mission: one evaluator has a geoscientific background, and the other could also have a tourism background. However, in the case of Batur UGGp this year, both have geoscientific backgrounds, but we do different work. She focuses more on management, marketing, and branding, and I am looking at regional development. At least one of the two evaluators should have a geoscientific background, and the second should cover the other professions. This is the same here on revalidation and evaluation.

Huel's account shows that evaluation within the UNESCO Global Geopark framework operates as a holistic exercise, extending beyond geological heritage to encompass management arrangements, marketing and branding strategies, and broader regional development objectives. At the same time, his reflection reveal that evaluation is not applied in a uniformly systematic manner. Rather, it is shaped by the disciplinary backgrounds,

professional orientations, and interpretive judgements of individual evaluators. Although geology remains a consistent priority—reinforced by the requirement that at least one evaluator possess geoscientific expertise—the emphasis placed on other criteria varies in practice.

These dynamics indicate that evaluative priorities arise not only from formal criteria but also from how evaluators interpret and enact them in practice. By anticipating the evaluator's gaze, aspiring and existing UNESCO Global Geoparks are encouraged to internalise evaluative expectations and proactively shape their practices, narratives, and spatial arrangements in ways that are legible to external experts. As Anden's earlier reference to what "an evaluator will look at" suggests, authority is exercised less through fixed templates than through situated judgements formed during site visits. Through repeated evaluations and revalidation missions, these prioritised dimensions are reinforced over time, subtly shaping the standards against which authenticity and quality are assessed.

The emphasis on geology within evaluative practice is reinforced by Asta from the Tourism Office of Bangli, Bali, drawing on his experience of revalidation mission at Batur UGGp. At the same time, Asta underscores the subjective and contextual nature of the evaluation process, noting that evaluators take the specificities of each geopark into account when conducting their assessment:

UNESCO assessors, for their part, tend to evaluate geoparks primarily on the basis of geodiversity and biodiversity. They do not focus on cultural aspects in Bali, as the island's cultural heritage is already widely recognized and assumed to be of high value. Their assessments, therefore, concentrate primarily on geological features.

Nita's account further illuminates how this hierarchy of values is enacted through the practical organisation of evaluation and revalidation missions. When evaluators visit a geopark, local actors typically curate a detailed itinerary designed to showcase the site's significance. This requires them to anticipate evaluative priorities that are not always clearly articulated. From Nita's perspective, such itineraries are frequently shaped by tourism-oriented logics, foregrounding established attractions and familiar visitor experiences. She contrasts this with what she understands to be evaluators' primary interest:

Revalidation missions are often organised like tourism itineraries, despite the fact that evaluators are geologists. Their primary interest lies in geosites, not general tourist attractions, and these need to be clearly distinguished. Cultural performances may be included as supplementary activities, but the focus of the visit should be on detailed presentations of geologically distinctive sites and features.

Nita's positionality as a national level UNESCO environmental specialist is central to this perspective. Occupying an intermediary role between UNESCO's international evaluative frameworks and locally grounded geopark practices, she articulates an understanding of an evaluation that privileges the presentation of geosites as objects of expert knowledge rather than as sites of entertainment or consumable experience. For Nita, evaluative legitimacy rests on the ability of local actors to foreground geological distinctiveness and scientific significance, whereas she perceives local stakeholders as often inclined to emphasise the touristic appeal and economic potential of their locations. Cultural expressions are tolerated—and at times encouraged—only insofar as they support geological interpretation and outreach without diluting or obscuring geological primacy.

Taken together, although UNESCO promotes flexibility and local autonomy in principle, evaluation and revalidation practices suggest that authenticity is ultimately determined by what is valued by 'expert' evaluators and by compliance with established scientific and legal frameworks. For local actors, this generates a degree of uncertainty: evaluative priorities are simultaneously standardised and situational, requiring them to anticipate the evaluator's gaze in order to secure and maintain UNESCO status. In doing so, local actors shape their narratives, spatial arrangements, and practices to align with perceived evaluative expectations. Evaluation thus operates as a negotiated and contingent process, in which geoparks must balance competing signals about authenticity, expertise, and value in order to remain legible within UNESCO's governance framework. Consequently, authenticity functions less as an acknowledgment of locally embedded meanings and more as a mechanism of governance that privileges scientific constructions of geological value.

These dynamics raise important questions about the place of local communities within geopark governance. If authenticity is primarily defined through expert evaluation and institutional legibility, the scope for bottom-up participation becomes both constrained and strategically negotiated. The following section examines how community involvement is articulated, enabled, and limited within this governance framework.

5.2 Bottom-Up Governance and Community Participation

Building on the earlier section, this departure can be understood as a structural consequence of how UNESCO simultaneously centralises epistemic authority while devolving responsibility for practice to local stakeholders. During the evaluative phase, UNESCO positions scientific expertise as the primary reference point for authenticity, relying on peer-

reviewed geological knowledge and expert missions to certify value. At the same time, UNESCO frames itself as a normative rather than an implementing authority, deliberately distancing itself from direct governance and day-to-day management. This configuration establishes a division of labour in which authenticity is authorised at the international level and is prioritised over and above other perspectives, while its enactment is expected to occur through national and local practices.

Interestingly, however, UNESCO explicitly commits to bottom-up governance as part of its guiding principles. Through claiming to promote community participation and recognising local and indigenous knowledge systems within its Operational Guidelines, UNESCO seeks to create discursive and institutional spaces in which alternative epistemologies may coexist alongside scientific expertise:

Geoparks adopted a “bottom-up” or community-led approach to ensure that an area’s geological significance could be conserved and promoted for science, education and culture, in addition to being used as a sustainable economic asset such as through the development of responsible tourism. ...UNESCO Global Geopark should actively involve local communities and indigenous peoples as key stakeholders in the Geopark.

The Global Geopark Operational Guidelines further emphasise the importance of partnerships with local populations by advocating co-management arrangements that address social and economic needs, protect the landscape, and conserve cultural identity. In parallel, the programme encourages institutional and policy support through mechanisms such as National Geopark Committees or similar coordinating bodies. These committees are framed as intermediaries, facilitating dialogue between local geoparks, national institutions, and UNESCO, while maintaining a formal commitment to decentralized, community-based governance.

However, this decentralisation is not absolute and should be understood as contingent and negotiated. Local actors continue to operate within evaluative criteria and policy frameworks defined elsewhere, and participatory practices tend to gain institutional recognition only to the extent that they can be rendered legible to external assessors and aligned with national development agendas. While evaluation mechanisms seek to stabilise and govern authenticity by making it measurable, comparable, and internationally credible, at the same time, the programme’s commitment to bottom-up governance introduces uncertainty and variability, as local practices do not always conform neatly to standardised assessment frameworks.

This tension becomes particularly visible at the national level, where actors hold divergent interpretations of what decentralised, community-based governance entails in practice. Rapu, a 52-year-old member of the national team at BAPPENAS, views this dynamic in largely positive light, emphasising the reversal of conventional development sequences within Indonesian UGGp:

This is precisely what I find compelling about the geopark approach: local action precedes state intervention. This stands in contrast to top-down models in which the government initiates projects but there are no local actors capable of implementing or sustaining them over time. In the geopark model the sequence is reversed. Such as what I found in Belitung UGGp, local communities are already at work, and central government bodies and line ministries step in later to complement, formalise, and strengthen what has already been built. As a result, geoparks tend to be more durable, because the people who animate them—the practitioners, organisers, and volunteers—are already in place.

From this perspective, decentralisation enhances institutional resilience by anchoring geoparks in pre-existing local capacities and social commitments, with the state acting as an enabling rather than initiating force.

By contrast, Andi, a 51-year-old member of the Indonesian Geotourism Guide Association who works closely with local stakeholders, offers a more critical assessment of how decentralisation operates on the ground:

To date, efforts remain concentrated upstream and are heavily dominated by scientific perspectives. While some progress may have been made in stakeholder education, conservation outcomes remain limited—for instance, although mining activities were meant to cease, this has not been fully realised in practice. Similarly, the goal of improving community welfare has yet to be achieved. In my view, these components are still fragmented rather than meaningfully connected.

Andi's account highlights the gaps between policy rhetoric and lived practice, pointing to the persistence of sectoral silos and uneven implementation. Together, these contrasting perspectives underscore that decentralised governance within the geopark framework is not a settled achievement but an ongoing process of negotiation. Within this governance framework, authenticity is not constructed solely through compliance with fixed standards or expert judgement; rather it is continuously produced through social processes, including negotiation among community members, collaboration with state institutions, and everyday engagement with the landscape.

Drawing on his professional experience, Anden, a member of the UNESCO Earth Science and Geopark Section, demonstrates a clear awareness of this tension between the discursive framing of Global Geoparks as community-driven initiatives and their practical dependence on municipal and provincial authorities for long-term sustainability. It is precisely this recognition that informs his caution against viewing geoparks as exclusively grassroots-driven projects. Instead, he frames them as operating within a multi-scalar governance framework—one that acknowledges the interdependence of local agency and higher-level state support, rather than treating decentralisation as a fully autonomous or self-sufficient condition:

I think it is important to recognize that Global Geoparks are not only grassroots-driven projects. Of course, they are grassroots-driven, and you cannot create a geopark by government decision alone. You need community support. You need university support, but they also need governmental support. Moreover, creating a geopark from scratch is challenging. You need governmental support, and I think that is why it is so important. That is why we see such a steep increase in Indonesia, for example, because the government also decided at the national level to support geopark development throughout the country. After all, they recognise their role in geopark, so we help with capacity building and the promotion of the concept.

Anden's account suggests that local commitment, while indispensable, is widely perceived as insufficient on its own to establish and sustain a geopark, particularly given the complexity of complying with UNESCO's scientific, managerial, and developmental expectations. His reference to Indonesia—where strong national-level political commitment has coincided with a rapid expansion of geopark initiatives—illustrates how state involvement is fundamental in the process, functioning as for a facilitator of community engagement. In this context, government support is understood to operate through economic and political investments in capacity building, the national promotion of the geopark concept, and the strategic positioning of geoparks within broader geotourism and sustainable development agendas.

From this perspective, multi-level governance emerges not as a contradiction to bottom-up participation but is perceived as a condition through which it is made operational. Local communities may articulate visions and enact daily practices, yet institutional frameworks are widely understood to provide the stability, coordination, and long-term capacity. Government involvement is therefore often interpreted as an enabling force—formalising partnerships, securing financial and technical resources, and embedding geoparks within broader policy discourses of tourism, conservation, and regional development.

A similar understanding of multi-scalar governance framework is echoed by Oniw, a 40-year-old staff member at the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs and Investment, who describes how such governance is operationalised within the Indonesian UGGp context:

The bottom-up orientation within a geopark implies that initiatives emerge from the community; however, it does not suggest that they are purely or exclusively community-driven. This is because geoparks operate within the framework of a nation-state—the Republic of Indonesia—where formal systems of governance, regulatory arrangements, and institutional structures are already in place. Accordingly, support is provided from higher levels, not in a top-down or directive manner, but through enabling interventions: offering institutional support, establishing legal and policy frameworks, and creating the conditions under which the geopark can contribute to local economic development while simultaneously attending to environmental conservation.

In this articulation, state involvement is not represented as a mode of hierarchical control but is instead understood and enacted as an enabling infrastructure that makes geoparks governable and sustainable over time. Read together, Anden's and Oniw's accounts suggest a hybrid governance arrangement in which bottom-up participation and top-down support are not articulated as opposing logics. Instead, they are constructed as interdependent processes that co-produce the geopark as a socio-institutional assemblage, sustained through ongoing coordination across scales—conflicting with UNESCO's somewhat utopian principle that geoparks are primarily bottom-up initiatives. As Zhuang, Stoffelen, Meijles, and Groote (2024) demonstrate in their study of Zhangjiajie UGGp in China, a highly convoluted, hierarchical governance framework can significantly constrain local agency. Rather than exercising the participatory role envisioned in UNESCO's bottom-up model, local actors often internalised and reproduced centralised management by downplaying their own potential role in geoh heritage governance. Crucially, the finding show that while bottom-up approaches are indispensable to UNESCO's vision of geoparks as vehicles for sustainable development, they do not automatically result in inclusive or holistic landscape management.

Field-based observations further illustrate how these multi-level governance arrangements are enacted in practice. Reflecting on his revalidation mission to Batur UGGp, Huel, a UNESCO evaluator, describes a landscape characterised by strong alignment between communities, the tourism sector, and administrative authorities. His account suggests that the geopark has achieved institutional legitimacy not only within the UNESCO framework but also within the broader regional development processes:

I observed a strong commitment from local communities, the tourism sector, and administrative authorities within Batur UGGp, where the geopark has clearly established itself as a respected partner within broader regional development processes. While multiple development initiatives are active in the area, the geopark functions as a key connective actor, linking diverse stakeholders and coordinating engagement across sectors. In Batur, the geopark operates as a central hub—bringing together decision-makers and facilitating collaboration—demonstrating a high level of institutional integration within the Kintamani district.

Anden's reflections further illuminate this mediating role by emphasising the geopark as a deliberative space in which different forms of expertise are brought into dialogue:

That is why it is important to be under a geopark: you bring together government officials, academics, university representatives, and community leaders. Moreover, I think that if everyone sits around the table, you can only learn from this. A government official will also see how important certain things are to local communities. Scientists can try to provide explanations that are understandable to everyone, and maybe solutions that people can think, "Wow, I can contribute something to this."

This observation is analytically revealing because it complicates the notion of geoparks as bottom-up initiatives. Rather than depicting a process in which ideas originate primarily from communities and move upward, Anden's account suggests that the geopark functions as a convening and mediating space in which knowledge and priorities are jointly produced by government officials, scientists, and community representatives. The emphasis on "everyone sitting around the table" points to a governance arrangement based on facilitated interaction rather than grassroots initiative alone.

In this configuration, higher-level institutions play a constitutive role by establishing the legal, administrative, and organisational conditions under which the geopark can exist. Once created, the geopark operates as a connective infrastructure—linking actors, translating between forms of expertise, and coordinating decision-making. Ideas and solutions therefore emerge through negotiation across institutional and epistemic boundaries, not solely from local communities. What is framed as bottom-up governance thus appears, in practice, as a mediated and multi-directional process in which authority circulates unevenly, shaped by differential access to resources, expertise, and legitimacy.

At the same time, this enabling role of the state appears to shape the conditions under which community participation is recognised, organised, and rendered legible. What counts as legitimate local knowledge, appropriate forms of engagement, or acceptable development outcomes is frequently filtered through national policy priorities, administrative

frameworks, and international evaluation regimes. Within this configuration, authenticity is not merely co-produced; it is also regulated. It must align with lived experience while remaining compatible with national development narratives and UNESCO's normative criteria.

Overall, this governance arrangement carries important implications for the constitution of authenticity. Where governance is not primarily bottom-up, authenticity cannot be reduced to the expression of locally rooted values or practices. Instead, what comes to be recognised as authentic within the geopark emerges through interactions among multiple actors operating with distinct mandates, evaluative criteria, and strategic interests. In this configuration, the geopark becomes a site where authenticity is produced through institutional filters that render certain representations of locality visible and legitimate, while others remain marginal or obscured.

Building on this understanding of governance and authenticity as co-produced through multi-scalar institutional arrangements, the following section examines how these dynamics materialise in practice through interpretive narratives and processes of heritage integration, focusing on the interpretive work through which the geopark is communicated to visitors and stakeholders.

5.3 Interpretive Narratives and Heritage Integration

Within the UNESCO Global Geopark framework, interpretation occupies a central and strategic position. According to the Operational Guidelines, geoparks are tasked not only with conserving geological heritage but also with mobilising it—*together with the area's natural and cultural dimensions*—to raise awareness of broader societal challenges within the context of a dynamic planet (UNESCO, 2015). Interpretation is therefore integral to how geoparks translate scientific value into social meaning, linking geological processes to cultural histories, livelihoods, belief systems, and contemporary development concerns.

As Anden emphasises, designation as a UNESCO Global Geopark entails a distinct narrative responsibility that extends well beyond the protection of geological features. Conservation alone is not sufficient; geoparks are expected to actively interpret and communicate the significance of their landscapes. This involves translating complex geological processes into accessible, compelling narratives that help visitors to understand how geology underpins biodiversity, shapes landscapes, and informs cultural traditions and everyday practices:

To become a UNESCO Global Geopark, you have to play a specific role: not only do you have to protect your geological heritage, but you also have to tell its story. The interconnection between the geological heritage and your landscapes, biodiversity, and traditions must be explained. So, you have to bring that story and that whole connection together, which actually requires several scientific disciplines, including anthropology. So, you need a science committee that supports the geopark's overall functioning.

Anden further shared the risks associated with failing to develop inclusive and intelligible interpretive narratives. Where interpretation remains narrowly framed within disciplinary scientific discourse—particularly geology or biodiversity—it risks becoming inaccessible to local communities and visitors alike:

If it [the interconnection between geodiversity, biodiversity, and cultural diversity] is missing, they cannot remain a geopark. For example, if your geopark is run exclusively by geoscientists or biologists, you will get a highly complex story of geology. Moreover, for many people in the Geopark, it will be at a level they do not understand; for many visitors, it will be beyond their understanding and maybe beyond their interest as well. However, if you manage to connect that geology to the traditional, maybe to the beliefs, to the religious views of people, to their understanding of geology, it is going to be very interesting addition and maybe an interesting perspective for somebody who visits the geopark.

This interpretive expectation is not merely aspirational but actively enforced through UNESCO's evaluation and revalidation processes. As Abo, a 52-year-old member of Batur UGGp management board, noted, multiple rounds of revalidation have produced recommendations explicitly targeting interpretive practice. In the Batur UGGp case, evaluators called for the revision of interpretive panels, specifying that they should be written in English and reframed around broader thematic narratives that integrate geology with culture and nature, rather than focusing narrowly on geological information:

We have already undergone three rounds of revalidation... one recommendation concerns the interpretive panels, which must be written in English and improved because the existing ones are outdated and disconnected from broader themes. Moreover, the content should not focus solely on geology; it must link geology with culture and with nature more broadly.

This example reveals that interpretation within UNESCO Global Geoparks is governed not only by standards of scientific accuracy but also by normative expectations regarding accessibility, narrative coherence, and thematic alignment with UNESCO's educational and sustainability agendas. Interpretation is evaluated as a performative practice—one that must demonstrate relevance to contemporary global concerns and communicate in forms that are

legible within international heritage frameworks, with the ultimate goal that international visitors will be able to effectively engage with and understand the geological significance of the sites. As a result, interpretive materials are subject to continual revision, not simply to reflect new knowledge, but to remain compatible with institutional perceptions of the expectations of international visitors. From this perspective, such interpretive choices are institutionally rational and aligned with UNESCO's mandate to promote global accessibility, education, and exchange through tourism.

However, this orientation towards global legibility has important implications for how local knowledge—and, by extension, authenticity—is articulated and recognised. While local meanings and lived experiences are not excluded, they are necessarily filtered through interpretive frameworks designed to travel across linguistic, cultural, and institutional boundaries. Consequently, local knowledge is rarely presented on its own terms; instead, it is translated into narratives that conform to externally defined criteria of relevance, coherence, and sustainability, largely shaped by the expectation of international visitors. As Pásková (2018) argues, the movement of local knowledge from everyday practice into geopark narratives involves its selective reinterpretation in order to conform to externally oriented modes of representation. From this perspective, interpretation functions as a mediating practice that reconciles local specificity with global intelligibility, simultaneously enabling recognition while reshaping how authenticity can be expressed. Authenticity, thus, becomes less about preserving geological heritage *in situ* than about curating a compelling sense of place that resonates with international audiences. Local culture, landscapes, and narrative are selectively mobilised to construct a distinctive identity that aligns with global expectations of what an authentic geopark should look like.

Anden reinforces this orientation by framing interpretation as a central instrument for awareness-raising and social engagement:

I think it is important that a UNESCO Global Geopark tells a story that is understandable to a broad audience and makes sense to them, in terms of what we are doing now to better protect our geodiversity. ... I think through a Geopark you can raise awareness of certain things and maybe move them to take action as well in certain aspects, and that is the whole purpose, and that requires indeed that holistic approach.

Anden's framing of interpretation must be read in light of his institutional position as a UNESCO-affiliated actor, which places emphasis on awareness-raising, broad audiences, and holistic storytelling, reflecting the organisation's longstanding mandate to advance

education, sustainability, and global responsibility through world heritage. The emphasis on encouraging people to “take action” points towards the cultivation of behaviour—such as environmental responsibility, risk awareness, and support for conservation and sustainability agendas. Interpretation, in this sense, is not conceived as an open-ended or locally situated practice, but as a pedagogical tool designed to align diverse publics with internationally endorsed norms of environmental stewardship.

To some extent, UNESCO encourages creativity in interpretive practice, provided that such creativity remains anchored in scientific credibility. As Anden explains, geoparks are invited to draw on local traditions, spiritual beliefs, and cultural imaginaries—such as viewing volcanoes as living beings—so long as these perspectives can be meaningfully interwoven with scientific explanations:

We invite people to be very creative about this. I mean, there is no limit to the creativity you can put into it as long as it makes scientific sense. We are cautious, for example, about claims that are not grounded in a scientific background. We invite people to go back to their traditions. Some people view a volcano as a living being, and some use it for spiritual and religious reasons. We want to interweave this with the more scientific approach to what a volcano is and to the disastrous production. How can we better prepare ourselves for the impact of another volcanic eruption, for example?

While this framing appears to promote openness and inclusivity, it also reveals an important asymmetry in the structure of interpretive authority. The emphasis on “inviting” creativity positions scientific institutions as gatekeepers, granting conditional space for cultural expression rather than recognising it as an autonomous source of meaning. Local beliefs and spiritual interpretations are welcome, but only to the extent they can be translated into narratives that make scientific sense. Interpretation, therefore, does not fully escape hierarchical ordering. Rather than local communities independently driving interpretive narratives, their knowledge is incorporated through a process of selection, translation, and validation overseen by expert institutions, whereby western constructions of scientific knowledge are prioritised. As Winter (2014) suggest, such discursive configurations arise from a persistent unease regarding the universal applicability of western-derived conservation policies and practices, coupled with a parallel pursuit of legitimacy and recognition within international heritage and conservation regimes. At the same time, scholarship on Asian heritage contexts has long called for greater attention to cultural specificity and to the intangible, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions of heritage—

dimensions that remain difficult to accommodate within scientifically oriented interpretive frameworks (Gao & Jones, 2021).

This integrative—yet highly structured—logic is further reflected in the spatial organisation of interpretation through geotrail development. Drawing on her experience as a geoscientist, geopark national team member, and UNESCO evaluator from Indonesia, Timah—a 57-year-old—explains that UNESCO guidance requires geoparks to develop geotrails as a core interpretive and organisational feature—now incorporated into most Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks Master Plans. Crucially, these routes are not intended to focus on geology alone, but to adopt a holistic and thematic approach; at a minimum, each geotrail is expected to combine geological, cultural, and biological dimensions:

An evaluator from UNESCO advised that when we develop a geotrail within a geopark, it should not focus on geology alone but should combine different elements. At a minimum, each route is expected to combine geological, cultural, and biological dimensions, with the cultural component further differentiated into tangible and intangible elements. Beyond this, he encouraged to include socio-economic sites and infrastructure sites within the geotrail. Infrastructure sites may include existing facilities such as museums, while socio-economic sites refer to places where local communities engage in activities such as handicraft production, cultural enterprises, or culinary practices. Geotrails are thus envisioned as curated itineraries that offer variation and thematic coherence, encouraging visitors to explore the geopark within interconnected narratives.

This approach reveals how interpretation within the UNESCO Global Geopark framework operates as a structured process of curation determined by UNESCO requirements, rather than a neutral reflection of place. The requirement to align geological, biological, cultural, and socio-economic elements within a coherent and legible narrative inevitably privileges those forms of local knowledge and practice that can be translated into UNESCO's interpretive and evaluative frameworks. Geotrails, therefore, function not only as interpretive tools but as spatial technologies of governance. By defining routes, sequencing sites, and assigning thematic coherence, they actively shape how landscapes are encountered and understood. Movement is channelled, attention is directed, and meanings are foregrounded in ways that discipline visitor experience. Authenticity is thus produced through managed encounters—made visible and intelligible through curated pathways that reconcile local specificity with the demands of global comparability and scientific authority.

Collectively, these accounts demonstrate that interpretation within geoparks operates as a governed practice through which authenticity is actively assembled rather than simply expressed. Integrative devices such as geotrails, interpretive narratives, and thematic

framing do not merely communicate pre-existing values; they organise how geological, cultural, and socio-economic elements are selected, ordered, and made meaningful. While these practices create important spaces for local culture and livelihoods to become visible, they also channel that visibility through institutional templates that are ultimately designed to ensure coherence, scientific credibility, and international legitimacy—with the ultimate aim to attract international visitors and assist in their interpretation of geological landscapes in a scientific sense. Local meanings are therefore not excluded but refracted through curated narratives that align with broader evaluative and developmental frameworks. Interpretation thus functions as a key mechanism through which geoparks reconcile local specificity with global expectations, producing forms of authenticity that are simultaneously situated and standardised rooted in place, yet ultimately shaped by the governance structures within which they are rendered recognisable and legitimate.

Chapter 6 Negotiating Authenticity and the Politics of Geotourism Experience

This chapter presents the findings from Study 1, focusing on the roles of key stakeholders in the authentication process within Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGs). While this chapter builds on the conceptual and institutional analysis developed in the previous chapter, it is presented separately in order to foreground the empirical dynamics of stakeholder interaction and meaning making in practice. By examining how different actors negotiate authenticity values in Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGs, the chapter shows how authentication is not only defined through formal frameworks but is actively produced through social, political, and institutional processes that shape geotourism experiences and visitor encounters with the landscape.

The chapter is structured into two main sections. The first section examines the governance frameworks and institutional arrangements underpinning geopark management in Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGs. This section maps the formal organisational structures, lines of authority, and stakeholder roles that shape everyday management practices. By outlining how responsibilities are distributed across different levels of government and management bodies, it establishes the individualised contexts within which geopark decisions are made. Importantly, this section highlights how differing governance configurations influence which values are prioritised, thereby setting the unique structural conditions under which particular interpretations of authenticity become legitimised.

Building on this institutional overview, the second section turns to the power dynamics embedded within these governance arrangements. It examines how they actively shape the authentication of the geotourism experience in practice, in different ways across the two sites. Focusing on the development of geotrails, this section explores how authority, expertise, and negotiation operate among stakeholders. The findings show that, in Batur UGGp, tourism-led, fragmented governance reinforces top-down decision-making, resulting in commodified, externally defined forms of authenticity that marginalise geological narratives and community agency. By contrast, Rinjani-Lombok UGGp demonstrates a more negotiated and relational construction of authenticity through collaborative governance. However, expert-led and hierarchical structures continue to delimit whose knowledge is

recognised as authoritative. Taken together, the chapter illustrates the crucial role of institutional arrangement in determining which authentic values are legitimised for visitor experiences.

6.1 Governance Structure and Institutional Arrangements

The establishment and governance of UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGs) in Indonesia are profoundly shaped by power dynamics among stakeholders. A geopark is never a neutral space; it is shaped by competing interests, institutional hierarchies, and negotiations over authority (Jung, 2025). These dynamics affect not only how a geopark is conceptualized, managed, and maintained, but also, as I hope to show, how its authenticity is constructed, negotiated, and communicated through geotourism experiences. The distribution of power, responsibility, and decision-making among national, regional, and local actors determines which values, narratives, and representations become central in presenting the geopark to visitors.

Within this broader governance landscape, Presidential Regulation No. 9 of 2019 on the Geoparks Development, issued by the Government of Indonesia, was introduced to provide a unified national policy framework for the coordination and management of geoparks. The regulation can be understood as the national institutional translation of the UNESCO Global Geopark Operational Guidelines discussed in Chapter 5. While UNESCO governs Global Geoparks through soft instruments—guidelines, evaluation, and expert authority— rather than direct regulation, the Indonesian state operationalises these expectations through formal legal mechanisms. In doing so, the regulation mirrors UNESCO’s emphasis on coordination, multi-actor engagement, and alignment across scales, while simultaneously recentralising authority by clarifying mandates and responsibilities within Indonesia’s bureaucratic and political context.

Importantly, the regulation addresses long-standing challenges in Indonesian geopark governance, particularly the fragmented and sectorally divided arrangements that have characterised geopark management, including a lack of coordination between central and regional governments and across ministerial mandates (Ristiawan, 2024). By formalising roles and responsibilities, the regulation seeks to strengthen inter-institutional collaboration and align geopark development with national priorities.

At its core, Article 5 of the regulation articulates a multi-level, multi-actor governance model. This model is operationalised through a structured process comprising several interrelated stages, from identifying geological heritage to long-term management. It outlines four main stages of geopark development as follows:

Table 6.1 Geopark Development in Indonesia

Stage	Responsible Actor(s)	Key Activities
1. Designation of geological heritage	Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Local Government	Designates official geological heritage sites as the basis for geopark development.
2. Geopark Planning	Local Government (with National and Stakeholder input)	Develops the Master Plan, which includes Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
3. Geopark Designation	- National Geopark: Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources (based on recommendations from the Governor and the Indonesian National Geopark Committee - KNGI) - UNESCO Global Geopark: UNESCO (based on recommendations from KNGI and the Indonesian National Geopark Committee for UNESCO – KNIU)	Grant national or international recognition based on recommendations.
4. Management and Monitoring	UNESCO, Geopark Management Body; National, Regional, and Local Governments	Implements programs, monitors conservation and education efforts, and reports performance results.

These stages attempt to ensure that geopark development in Indonesia is embedded within a structured governance framework that balances centralised coordination—aiming to ensure standardisation, accountability, and alignment with national policy goals—with localised implementation, which is perceived as enabling community participation and adaptive management. Each stage is intended to involve distinct institutional responsibilities and decision-making mechanisms that, together, shape how geoparks are conceived, recognized, and sustained in Indonesia. This multi-level institutional structure is supported by the Indonesian National Geopark Committee (KNGI), the central coordinating body. The KNGI comprises three main entities:

- *Steering Council*: Chaired by the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, and including ministers responsible for tourism, energy and mineral resources, environment and forestry, education, and culture.
- *Expert Council*: A group of academics, professionals, and researchers that provides scientific advice and ensures policy and management integrity.
- *Implementation Team*: Representatives from national and regional governments, along with stakeholder groups, who coordinate implementation and communication across levels.

Collectively, these institutions are responsible for coordinating geopark-related policies, providing guidance to regional governments and site-level management bodies, assessing applications for National Geopark and UNESCO Global Geopark designation, and aligning geopark initiatives with broader sustainable development agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their efforts are operationalized through the National Action Plan for Geopark Development, a five-year roadmap coordinated by the Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas). This plan provides strategic direction and policy coherence across ministries and local governments, supported by technical guidelines issued by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and related agencies.

At the regional level, geopark governance is primarily shaped by provincial and district governments, which align geopark initiatives with local development agendas and spatial planning frameworks. Depending on the geopark's territorial scope, the Governor or the Regent/Mayor formally establishes and appoints the Geopark Management Body, whose structure and composition are defined through local regulations to reflect local needs. These governance arrangements are implemented through a structured, multi-stage designation process involving several institutional actors. Figure 6.1 illustrates the formal procedure for National Geopark designation in Indonesia, from local initiation to final evaluation and approval by national authorities:

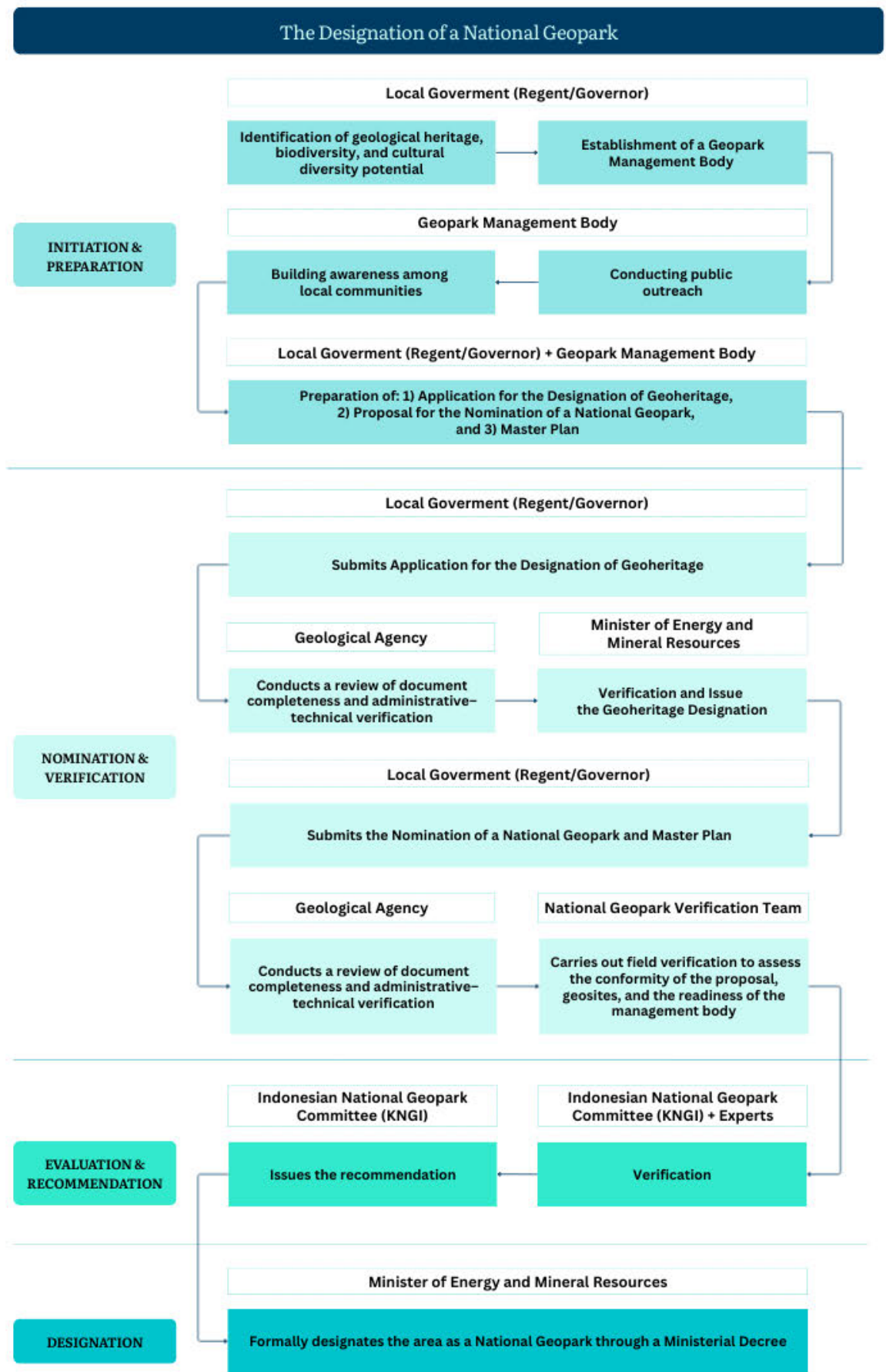


Figure 6.1 The designation process of a National Geopark
 (source: Author, 2025, adopted from the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources
 Regulation No. 31 of 2021)

As the figure indicates, the designation process not only formalises geopark status but also establishes the institutional foundation for local-level governance. Central to this framework is the Geopark Management Body, which typically comprises representatives from government institutions, universities, community leaders, NGOs, and the private sector. Beyond coordinating conservation, education, tourism development, and heritage promotion, the management body functions as a key intermediary, facilitating collaboration across local, national, and international geopark networks. Through this role, it seeks to balance the sustainable use of geological and cultural resources with community-oriented development goals.

The practical implications of this governance framework become evident when examining how it is operationalised in different territorial contexts. This contrast is illustrated by the management structures of Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps, which operate under the same national regulatory framework but exhibit fundamentally different governance logics shaped by administrative scale and territorial complexity. The Batur UGGp management structure (Figure 6.2) is embedded within a single-district governance, with the Advisory Board, chaired by the Regent of Bangli, supported by the Vice Regent, the Chairperson of the Regional Parliament (DPRD), and the Regional Secretary. This high-level political oversight ensures that geopark initiatives align closely with regional development priorities. Beneath this board, an Expert Council provides scientific and technical advice to inform strategic decisions and ensure that development remains consistent with the geopark's principles of conservation, education, and sustainable community empowerment.

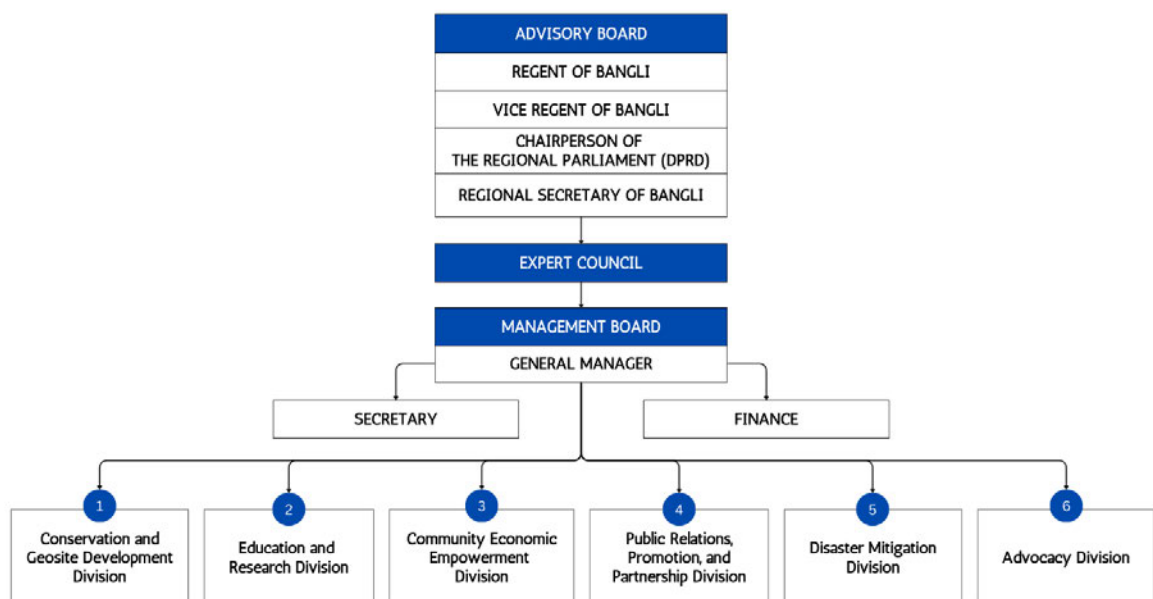


Figure 6.2 Geopark Management Structure within Batur UGGp
(source: Author, 2025, adopted from Regent of Bangli Decree No. 600/789/2024)

Within this governance structure, the General Manager serves as the central executive authority in the Batur UGGp, translating strategic direction from the Advisory Board and Expert Council into operational policies and programmes. Positioned at the core of the governance hierarchy, the role involves coordinating administrative functions (secretary and finance) alongside multiple functional divisions, attempting to ensure alignment across conservation objectives, educational initiatives, tourism development, and community empowerment. This management configuration facilitates relatively direct oversight and streamlined decision-making.

In contrast, Rinjani-Lombok UGGp’s management structure reflects its inter-district and provincial scale, with authority dispersed across multiple governance layers. As illustrated in Figure 6.3, the Advisory Board, chaired by the Governor of West Nusa Tenggara, provides strategic direction and political legitimacy. The Steering Committee, led by the Regional Secretary of West Nusa Tenggara, serves as the coordinating body that translates these strategic objectives into actionable policies and programs. It serves as an intermediary between the Advisory Board and the Management Board, facilitating interdepartmental coordination and ensuring that geopark programs align with provincial planning and budgetary frameworks.

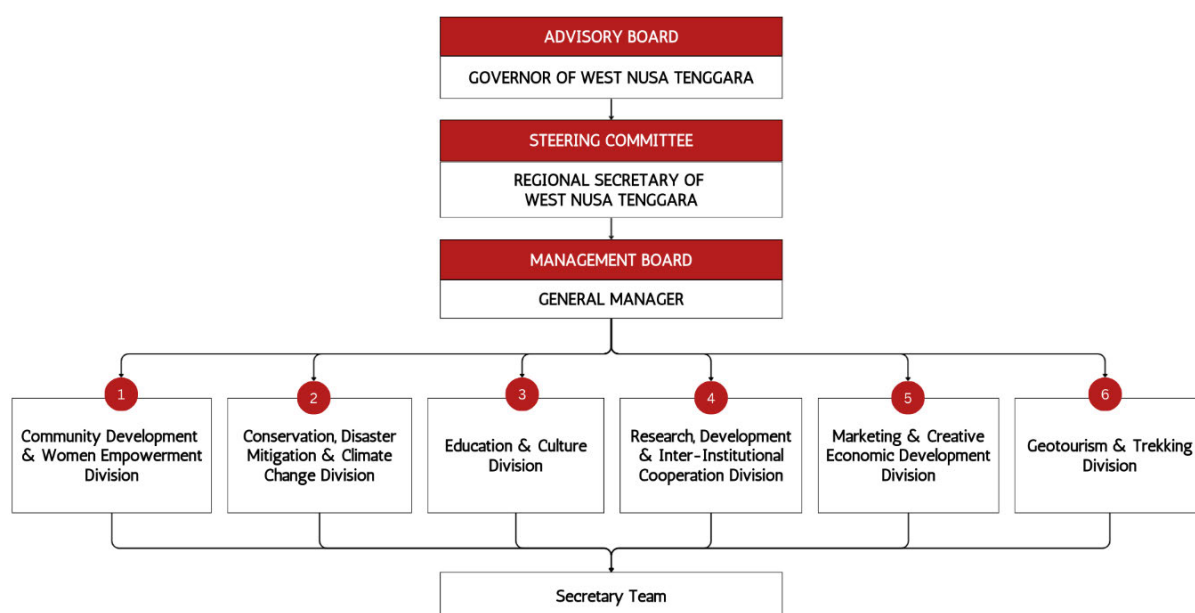


Figure 6.3 Geopark Management Structure within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp
(source: Author, 2025, adopted from the Governor of West Nusa Tenggara Decree.
No. 100.3.3.1-227/2024)

At the operational level, the Management Board of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp broadly corresponds to that of Batur UGGp. Both management bodies operate within, and are

constrained by the same governance framework established under the Presidential Regulation on Geopark Development. Although the internal divisions are organised and labelled differently, they address comparable functional domains, including conservation and risk management, education and research, community development, promotion and partnerships, and tourism-related activities. This institutional similarity reflects the strong standardising effect on the national regulatory framework. However, this regulatory standardisation is not universally accepted by stakeholders involved in geopark governance. As Suni, a 57-year-old member of the Batur UGGp Management Board, observed:

There should not be an effort to standardise everything. I may be one of the few members of the forum who consistently argue that the governance of geoparks in Indonesia cannot be made uniform, as each site differs in character and significance. ...However, with the introduction of the new presidential regulation, there is now an attempt to standardise all these rules.

Suni's statement reflects broader concerns among local actors that national regulatory intervention risks overlooking the place-based nature of geoparks. His critique foregrounds the idea that geoparks are not merely administrative units but socio-ecological assemblages shaped by distinct geological formations, cultural narratives, community relations, and historical trajectories of governance. From this perspective, governance effectiveness depends less on institutional uniformity than on the capacity to adapt management arrangements to local realities.

Debates surrounding regulatory standardisation become clearer when considered alongside UNESCO's approach to geopark governance. As discussed in Chapter 5, UNESCO Global Geoparks are built on a principle of contextual flexibility. While geoparks must demonstrate compliance with a shared set of core criteria, such as integrated conservation, education, sustainable development, and community involvement, their governance structures, management strategies, and operational practices are intentionally left open to adaptation. From a functional perspective, Indonesia's national framework reflects an effort to translate these international norms into domestic policy, establishing a baseline of compliance and strengthening national coordination, administrative clarity, and institutional legitimacy within a centralised governance system.

Tension arises, however, when standardisation extends beyond shared principles to the imposition of prescriptive organisational forms. As Tya, a 30-year-old geoscientist at Batur UGGp, explained, the 2019 Presidential Regulation directly reshaped an organisational structure that had previously operated effectively:

In 2020, the organisational structure of the Batur UGGp management body was reconfigured in response to the 2019 Presidential Regulation. The restructuring introduced a new governance model that positions the management body as a professional, non-profit organisation. Thereby prohibiting it from independently managing or generating financial resources. While intended to strengthen institutional accountability, the regulation has also presented challenges, not only for Batur UGGp but for several other geoparks across Indonesia.

This restructuring reveals how regulatory reforms framed around ‘professionalisation’ and ‘accountability’ can inadvertently undermine operational autonomy. By prohibiting geopark management bodies from independently generating or managing financial resources, the regulation reinforces dependency on government budgets and political approval. This creates a paradox in which geoparks are formally designated as non-governmental entities, yet remain structurally constrained by state-controlled financial and bureaucratic systems. Rather than empowering local management, standardisation in this form may re-centralise authority and limit the capacity of geoparks to respond flexibly to local needs and opportunities. This suggests that standardisation, when applied without sufficient sensitivity to local institutional maturity, may erode existing strengths in adaptive, locally embedded management practices.

These constraints are reflected in the everyday experiences of geopark practitioners. Tya further described the practical implications of this shift by the requirement to attach their activities institutionally to government agencies:

In particular, management bodies are required to be institutionally attached to government agencies. For instance, if a management body wishes to implement tourism-related activities, its budget must be channelled through the district tourism office. Rinjani-Lombok UGGp is often presented as a successful benchmark because its management structure is closely integrated with government offices (OPD). Yet, from my observations, this arrangement has in fact become a major constraint. Excessive institutional attachment to multiple government agencies and the need for constant bureaucratic synchronisation have emerged as the primary obstacles to effective action. This represents a clear departure from previous arrangements, under which management bodies operated independently. Under the earlier model, institutional independence provided far greater flexibility.

As someone who works within the system, Tya perceived that this institutional proximity has become a source of constraint rather than strength. By requiring management bodies to channel budgets and activities through sectoral offices, governance shifts from adaptive management toward bureaucratic compliance. The removal of this autonomy diminishes both fiscal resilience and the incentive structures that support proactive governance. This

undermines the ability of geoparks to respond to local opportunities, seasonal dynamics, or emerging community needs—capacities that are essential for effective conservation, education, and sustainable development.

At the same time, these constraints are inseparable from the broader governance environment in which geoparks operate. As Asta, a 40-year-old member of the Tourism Office in Bangli, observed:

Even though the Presidential Regulation states that geoparks are better managed as non-government entities, in Indonesia, it seems extremely difficult to operate without government intervention. The bureaucracy is highly complex, with numerous laws, regulations, and regional authorities determining what is allowed and what is not. As a result, management bodies have little flexibility. Government involvement is mainly needed to deal with these bureaucratic matters.

Taken together, these accounts reveal a structural ambivalence at the heart of Indonesian geopark governance. While the 2019 Presidential Regulations formally promote non-governmental management models, empirical experience indicates that geopark governance remains deeply embedded within state systems. Government intervention continues to play a central role not only in policy formulation but also in mediating regulatory complexity, providing political legitimacy, and mobilising financial and administrative resources necessary for implementation. However, this intervention simultaneously constrains managerial autonomy and reinforces bureaucratic dependence. In this sense, government intervention functions less as a transitional support mechanism and more as a structural necessity embedded within Indonesia's multi-layered governance system, determining geopark formation and management.

This ambivalence is further complicated by differing views on how authority and participation should be balanced across governance levels. Mala, a 66-year-old former staff member of the Ministry of Tourism, offered a more nuanced account, arguing that top-down and bottom-up approaches serve distinct yet complementary functions within geopark governance:

In terms of supporting infrastructure development, a top-down approach is essential, since such initiatives rely on government policy and resources. Infrastructures provision, by nature, is the responsibility of the state, and thus must be initiated from above. However, for community engagement and activities, a bottom-up approach is more effective. If communities are made overly dependent on financial assistance from above, the sustainability of initiatives becomes fragile, as they tend to collapse once external funding ceases. Conversely, when activities are nurtured from below, communities recognize their intrinsic benefits, become personally invested, and are more likely to sustain them in the long term.

At first glance, Indonesia's hybrid top-down/bottom-up model appears broadly compatible with the UNESCO frameworks. As Mala's account suggests, different governance scales serve distinct functions: state-led, top-down interventions are essential for infrastructure provision, regulatory coordination, and political legitimacy, while bottom-up processes are more effective for community engagement, programme sustainability, and local stewardship. However, closer examination reveals that top-down authority often extends beyond enabling functions and into domains of everyday decision-making, particularly through financial control and bureaucratic oversight. In this sense, the Indonesian model reflects a pragmatic interpretation of UNESCO's principles, recognising that local participation cannot operate independently of state capacity in highly regulated governance environments. Yet, this limits the space in which bottom-up governance can meaningfully operate. As a result, what emerges is not a balanced hybrid but a form of constrained participation favouring state power.

This tension reflects a broader geopark governance dilemma identified in the literature: the relationship between top-down and bottom-up management. Jung's (2025) study within Batur UGGp similarly demonstrates that sustainable development cannot be achieved through either top-down or bottom-up frameworks alone. Instead, it requires participatory governance arrangements that recognise and incorporate customary institutions, ritual obligations, and local livelihood concerns. These insights suggest that the central challenge for geopark governance lies not in minimising state involvement, but in recalibrating its role—shifting from a directive and controlling presence towards one that enables, supports, and legitimises locally adaptive and participatory forms of governance. Such a recalibration is essential for ensuring that conservation and tourism development initiatives remain socially embedded, culturally meaningful, and sustainable in the long term.

More importantly, moving beyond binary top-down/bottom-up thinking (as constructed through UNESCO's principles) constitutes a key contribution of this chapter. Rather than focusing on abstract governance ideals, analytical attention needs to shift towards specific conditions under which particular configurations of authority, participation, and coordination become enabling or constraining in practice. The discussion above highlights the limitations of treating top-down and bottom-up governance as opposing or mutually exclusive models. Despite policy narratives that promote particular approaches—most notably UNESCO's emphasis on bottom-up participation—geopark governance rarely conforms to these ideal types in practice. Instead, they are best understood as an evolving, often messy combination of the two approaches, continuously reconfigured in response to

shifting political, institutional, cultural, and environmental contexts. Platt and Medway's (2020) notion of an immersive institutional stance is better aligned with this governance reality. Rather than attempting to create a place through standardised interventions or relying on symbolic forms of participation, an immersive approach works with the existing social, cultural, and institutional landscape. It emphasise sustained engagement, learning, and responsiveness, enabling incremental adaptation to local feedback and changing conditions while remaining embedded within place-specific dynamics.

These governance dynamics provide a critical foundation for the following section, which examines how such power relations and institutional arrangements shape everyday practices, the construction of authenticity, and visitor experiences within Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps.

6.2 Power Dynamics and Authentication of Geotourism Experiences

While the previous section characterised Indonesian geoparks as operating through a combination of bottom-up aspirations and top-down governance structures, the following discussion deliberately foregrounds a tension within this framing. In practice, the balance between these two modes of governance is often uneven, with institutional actors frequently exercising disproportionate influence over how geotourism is conceptualised, structured, and implemented. This disjuncture between the rhetoric of participatory, community-based development and the realities of centralised decision-making is particularly evident in the organisation of geotourism initiatives.

This tension is particularly visible in the growing emphasis on geotrails as a central strategy for geotourism development within Indonesian UGGps. Geotrails do more than guide visitors through landscapes; they serve as curated interpretive pathways that materialize the narratives and priorities negotiated among stakeholders. Their design—what stories to foreground, which sites to include, whose perspectives to present—reflects decisions made through complex interactions between stakeholders.

The significance of geotrails in shaping geotourism experience was highlighted by Waid, a 37-year-old academic and one of the key architects behind the geotrail template adopted across Indonesian geoparks. Drawing on her experience in designing the geotrail, she explained:

We view the geopark as a vast, open landscape, unlike a national park or nature reserve, which has fixed boundaries. A thoughtful planning approach is necessary to strengthen the geopark's identity and help people recognize it as a conservation landscape with unique geological importance. This is where the geotrail concept becomes essential. It serves to connect key sites, geological, biological, cultural, around a unifying theme. The overarching theme helps communicate the geopark's story to both local communities and visitors through information and interpretation. By developing the geopark through this trail-based approach, we aim to foster a stronger sense of place, increase public awareness of its unique identity, and establish a more integrated and manageable framework for its conservation and promotion.

Waid's account reveals how geotrails operate as instruments through which geopark identity is curated, spatially organised, and made legible. By selecting a unifying theme and linking specific sites to that narrative, geotrails shape how the geopark is understood, what knowledge is prioritised, and how value is assigned across the landscape. In this process, natural formations are transformed into curated, consumable tourism products, with selected landscape elements packaged into narratives that appeal to visitors and often align with institutional priorities. In this sense, geotrails become a spatial manifestation of power relations, whereby certain stakeholders are in a position to determine how landscapes are represented and engaged with by visitors. What appears to be a neutral planning exercise becomes an arena where power is materially inscribed into the landscape.

To illustrate how these power dynamics are operationalised in practice, the following subsection examines the development of geotrails within Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps, focusing on the actors involved and the processes through which interpretive authority is established.

6.2.1 Geotrail Development within Batur UGGp

In Batur UGGp, geotrail development offers a concrete lens through which to examine how expert knowledge, institutional priorities, and interpretive authority converge in the production of geotourism experiences. These power relations are illuminated through Asta's reflection on the early development of Batur UGGp. With over fifteen years of experience at the Bali regional tourism office, Asta observed that once the regional tourism authority was assigned to lead the geopark's development during its formative years, decision-making became increasingly shaped by the logics of tourism promotion and market expansion, rather than by the bottom-up ethos advocated within UNESCO's geopark framework:

Since the initiation stage, the management body of Batur UGGp has been operated under the coordination of our Department of Tourism. Until 2019, our department was the one consistently responsible for managing geopark affairs. Currently, a dedicated geopark management body has been established; however, its authority remains limited, and coordination with our department continues.

According to Asta's account, this emphasis on tourism-centric goals can be traced back to the institutional landscape that emerged during Batur's proposed UNESCO Global Geopark designation. The Ministry of Tourism—holding the most substantial political backing, financial capacity, and bureaucratic leverage in the application process—played a decisive role in shaping how the geopark was interpreted and operationalised on the ground. By framing the geopark primarily as a tool for tourism development, this agenda filtered down to the operational institutions responsible for day-to-day management. As this vision shaped planning and implementation, the geotrail development came to mirror the priorities of those institutions that defined its purpose.

Within these institutional arrangements that positioned the Department of Tourism at the centre of decision-making, priorities such as visibility, visitor numbers, and revenue generation came to dominate. Alternative perspectives from other stakeholders, including the management body and local community, who envisioned the geopark as a space for knowledge exchange, community identity, and cultural recognition, had limited room to influence the direction or content of the geotrail. This concern of unequal power distribution was echoed by several participants, who highlighted longstanding issues in the Batur UGGP's conception and early development. They observed that the initial arrangements put in place during this period continue to structure power relations and influence how decisions are made today. Many described a governance structure in which authority remains concentrated among a small circle of institutional actors, limiting opportunities for broader participation and shaping whose perspectives are prioritised in ongoing initiatives.

While UNESCO frameworks and Indonesian national policies formally promote participatory governance and the inclusion of diverse stakeholders' voices, these structures operate largely as normative templates rather than as guarantees of practice. The translation of such principles into concrete decision-making is mediated through local institutional arrangements, where authority is unevenly distributed and shaped by existing bureaucratic hierarchies, mandates, and sectoral priorities. As a result, the realisation of inclusive governance depends less on formal design than on how power is exercised and negotiated at the local level. In this context, aspirations for community participation or multi-stakeholder

engagement were reconfigured, diluted, or overridden by dominant actors, effectively countering plans to include certain voices.

This institutional configuration illustrates how governance arrangements themselves can function as mechanisms of commodification. By subordinating geoheritage management to the priorities of tourism authorities, geological sites and narratives are reframed primarily as marketable assets rather than as educational or cultural resources. This dynamic resonates with Jung's (2025) observations, which highlight that existing scholarship often tends to treat geoparks primarily as a tourism-led development project, overlooking the degree to which geoparks also function as contested governance spaces, and I add, fundamentally spaces of culture and everyday lives for local actors.

Building on this, Asta pointed to the bureaucratic complexities underpinning geopark management. He noted that the difficulty is not only a matter of institutional preference but also of structural constraint:

This difficulty arises because the bureaucracy is highly complex, with extensive regulations and overlapping authorities at both the local and national levels that determine what is permissible. As a result, geopark managers are constrained and cannot operate independently because the geopark overlaps with multiple agencies.

Although the geopark management body is formally responsible for coordinating geopark initiatives so as to facilitate a bottom-up, community-led approach, in practice, it must navigate a dense web of approvals, regulations, and sectoral jurisdictions—from conservation offices and spatial planning authorities to national-level ministries. As Asta noted, this leaves managers unable to act independently, as any decision is subject to the requirement of the agencies that ‘own’ particular aspects of the landscape, heritage, or infrastructure. He perceived that the role of geopark managers or management bodies is more about mediating among multiple institutional mandates and acting as gatekeepers that translate bureaucratic expectations into operational practices.

Read alongside Mala's account in the previous section, this divergence in perspective reveals a key tension in how governance effectiveness is understood and experienced across scales. From within central government, Mala presents the hybrid top-down/bottom-up governance structure as functional and complementary, with clearly differentiated roles for state-led infrastructure provision and community-driven engagement. However, Asta's account from the ground level exposes how these formal distinctions blur in practice, as top-down authority frequently extends beyond enabling functions into the realm of everyday decision-

making. What appears coherent and well-balanced at the policy level thus becomes experienced locally as a constraint, with bureaucratic oversight and sectoral fragmentation narrowing the space for meaningful participation. The Indonesian geopark model may be institutionally hybrid in form, but in practice it produces uneven outcomes from the perspective of local actors, where participation is formally encouraged yet substantively limited by the persistence of hierarchical authority and regulatory control.

Asta further illustrated these overlapping authorities by showing how different agencies impose conflicting interpretations of their jurisdiction over the same lands and landscape:

Agreements made at higher administrative levels break down in practice, as each agency adheres to its own regulations. For example, forestry law prohibits any alteration of trees or geological features within conservation areas. At the same time, in tourism, conservation is understood as using tourism benefits to sustain and protect natural areas, which often require amenities and facilities that conflict with conservation principles. Reconciling these different interpretations of conservation has been difficult.

Asta's account strengthens the argument above that what appears to be an integrated governance system from above becomes, in practice, a collection of parallel authorities that rarely align. These contradictions are not simply bureaucratic inefficiencies. They reflect fundamentally different ways of perceiving the value of the governance structure, as well as understanding the landscape—what it is for, whose interests it should serve, and how its value should be protected or developed. Environmental institutions approach the landscape through a preservationist lens that demands strict limits on human intervention. At the same time, tourism authorities view it as an asset whose value is realised through visitor access, infrastructure, and economic circulation. Because these interpretations are rooted in distinct institutional cultures and mandates, they cannot be easily reconciled through technical fixes or administrative agreements.

Although some scholars argue that cross-sector collaboration is a central prerequisite for successful geopark development (Farsani, Coelho, Costa, and Amrikazemi, 2014; Fauzi & Misni, 2022), the political dynamics observed in Batur UGGp suggest a more complicated reality. It is within this institutional landscape that broader power imbalances become visible. This was further underscored by Gusa, a 54-year-old member of the Regional Energy and Mineral Resources Department in Bali, who reflected on this power play at ground level. He highlighted a structural gap in ownership, with local voices routinely being sidelined in favour of top-down priorities:

From the very beginning, I emphasized that local communities might not fully understand the concept of a geopark and, as a result, be unable to take ownership of its development. Although Batur was designated as the first UNESCO Global Geopark in Indonesia, in practice, community participation and inclusive management, which ideally should have been central, remained limited.

Gusa's reflection highlights a broader dilemma within the power dynamics of geopark governance. While the governance structure is designed to incorporate community perspectives because the identification of geoparks is led by the government, and because communities do not always possess understanding and experience regarding geoparks, it becomes challenging for communities to genuinely engage. What results is a form of management detached from the everyday realities of those who inhabit the landscape. In the case of Batur UGGp, this disconnection translated into widespread disengagement in the development of the geotrail, as many residents possessed only a limited understanding of the geopark's objectives and little motivation to view themselves as stakeholders in its future.

Gusa's account exposes an inherent inability for communities to take ownership of a framework that was perhaps never co-produced with them in the first place. The geopark model, rooted in European scientific traditions and heavily reliant on geological classifications, interpretive frameworks, and managerial logic unfamiliar to most Indonesian communities, was effectively given to them as a fully formed entity rather than emerging from their cultural epistemologies or everyday spatial practices. Expecting communities to 'take ownership' of the geopark as a pre-packaged, Eurocentric model of place management was structurally unrealistic. They were neither provided the epistemic tools nor the institutional space to shape the development meaningfully, nor could they be expected to mobilise Eurocentric geological narratives that were largely disconnected from their cultural understanding.

Recognizing these limitations, Asta noted that programs were actually introduced as early as 2011 to promote community involvement in planning and to encourage local input, with district-level authorities serving as facilitators. Meanwhile, funding mainly continued to come from national government sources. However, the influence of these top-down practices has stayed central. A decade later, this institutional dominance remained evident in the development of Batur UGGp's geotrail despite these initiatives.

This tension was felt within the community that lived around the Batur UGGp. Nemo, a 52-year-old resident of Batur who has observed the area's transformation since its designation, highlighted the fragmented and performative nature of outreach:

I must be honest: public outreach and education related to the geopark require further improvement. Outreach should not be viewed solely as a means to gain recognition as a global geopark. Ideally, it should be an ongoing effort. While some efforts have been made, these initiatives should not be limited to the assessment periods.

Nemo's insight illustrates how geopark development is often perceived locally as an intermittent project tied to external assessments rather than as a continuous, lived reality. Consequently, this orientation produced trails that were designed less as community-owned interpretive pathways and more as performative showcases intended to meet UNESCO criteria and international visitor expectations.

Abo, a 52-year-old member of the Batur UGGp management board, reflected on the implications of this dynamic. According to him, the geotrail had come to symbolize the widening gap between the geopark's formal recognition and the lived experiences of those residing within its boundaries—raising critical questions about who truly benefits from geotrail development and, more broadly, on whose terms the geopark's value is defined:

In its current state, the community has grown indifferent, seeing little value in the geopark's offerings. In my view, this is mainly due to the absence of funding and resources, leaving little scope for meaningful initiatives.

As a member of the management board who has experienced all these dynamics firsthand, Abo's frustration illustrates how power and resource imbalances simultaneously generate and reinforce a cycle of disengagement. When communities perceive the geopark as an externally imposed initiative that offers no opportunity for genuine co-production, tangible benefits, or sustained investment, their sense of ownership further diminishes, thereby fostering detachment from its objectives. Without sufficient financial support or consistent institutional follow-up, the geopark's designation risks being reduced to a largely symbolic status, a label that is ceremonially recognized but less embedded in the everyday practices of local people. In such circumstances, the geopark functions more as a performative achievement than as a meaningful instrument for local development or cultural recognition.

It is precisely this disjunction that Stoffelen (2019) warns against. He argues that geoheritage cannot be divorced from the activities, interpretations, and daily practices of the people who inhabit or interact with these landscapes. Scholars widely contend that without meaningful mechanisms to incorporate local perspectives and priorities, such governance arrangements risk generating conflict, undermining legitimacy, and failing to realise their transformative potential (Zhang, West, Thakholi, & Suryawanshi, 2023; Lassila, 2018). In the context of

geotourism, these governance limitations have direct implications for destination competitiveness in an increasingly globalised tourism market. As geoparks rely on place-based narratives to differentiate themselves, governance arrangements that marginalise local voices risk producing commodified and generic experiences. This not only weakens claims to authenticity but also undermines the competitive positioning of geoparks that seek to distinguish themselves from conventional tourism models.

This imbalance has become more pronounced as state funding, once substantial in the initial stages of Batur UGGp's designation, has diminished over time. For the geotrail, this meant that initial investments in infrastructure and promotion were not matched by sustained support for maintenance, interpretation, or community-led initiatives. The reduction in resources not only curtailed the scope and continuity of community-focused programs but also left communities reliant on sporadic, externally driven interventions. Rather than building capacity and autonomy, such conditions perpetuated a cycle of dependence, reinforcing the dominance of external actors in shaping the development of the geotrail.

Abo's account underscored that while the commodification of geological heritage through geotrail development may generate visibility and economic potential, the opportunities they create are often constrained by the persistence of a top-down approach. For residents, these dynamic carries significant implications for how the geopark's value is assessed. As Gusa noted, locals primarily evaluate the geopark's relevance in terms of tangible outcomes, particularly improvements to their livelihoods. When such benefits remain limited or unevenly distributed, the designation risks being seen as abstract and disconnected from everyday realities, as he explained:

Many community members have already established themselves in traditional livelihood patterns, particularly sand mining, which has long been a significant source of income. This sense of economic comfort poses a substantial challenge to fostering broader engagement with geopark objectives. ...Especially, the economic value of a geosite is not always immediately tangible. As a result, the community tends to prioritize tourism activities or attractions that promise quicker financial returns, rather than those that require sustained investment and long-term vision.

Gusa's perspective highlighted resident concerns that participation in geopark activities is often perceived as a less significant opportunity for livelihood enhancement and as a potential source of disruption to established income. For many households, sand mining remains a far more immediate and reliable source of revenue. In this sense, unless geopark initiatives can offer competitive benefits, or at least supplement the economic returns from

sand mining, they remain a secondary concern. This perspective reflects a pragmatic orientation toward livelihood security, in which the geopark is evaluated in direct comparison with more established and profitable activities, such as sand mining or mainstream tourism. Such pragmatism underscores how economic rationality and existing cultural practices shape local perceptions of global heritage designations. These attitudes are further reinforced by the broader community mindset informed by Bali's long-standing reputation as an established global tourism destination, where international recognition is neither novel nor necessarily perceived as adding tangible value. As Asta explained:

Bali's situation is unique among other regions. Balinese society has long been accustomed to international tourism, making the UNESCO designation did not result in significant increases in visitor numbers. Moreover, the designation brought less transformation in Bali than in places like Ciletuh-Pelabuhanratu or Gunung Sewu UGGps, where geopark recognition led to significant new development.

Asta's account highlights a critical paradox: while UNESCO status is often promoted as a catalyst for regional development, its transformative potential is highly uneven, depending on the maturity of existing tourism industries and local communities' economic expectations. In regions with emerging or underdeveloped tourism sectors, such as Ciletuh-Pelabuhanratu UGGp or Gunung Sewu UGGp, the designation can function as a catalyst for growth and legitimacy. In a saturated tourism landscape like Bali, where cultural performances and scenic panoramas already dominate market logics and where many international tourists have chosen to visit for their appeal, the geopark risks being absorbed into the pre-existing pattern of commodification. Instead of reshaping tourism practices or diversifying local development pathways, it may simply mirror and reproduce the dynamics already at play, limiting its potential to deliver the transformative change envisioned by UNESCO.

This raises broader questions about the rationale for implementing the geopark itself in such a setting and the purpose it is ultimately intended to serve. Where the designation is not widely perceived as responding to locally identified need, nor as offering benefits that extend beyond those already embedded within Bali's mature tourism economy, it risks being understood as externally driven rather than locally grounded. In these circumstances, the geopark framework may be experienced less as a transformative intervention and more as an additional governance layer, one that introduces new labels and regulatory expectations without fundamentally altering existing development trajectories. This perception complicates efforts to cultivate local ownership, engagement, and long-term legitimacy.

This broader context reinforces the tourism prioritisation in Batur UGGp, whereby, processes of valuation tend to align closely with pragmatic and market-oriented logics, privileging elements of culture and landscape that can be readily packaged, marketed, and consumed within established tourism circuits. Rather than reorienting attention towards geological heritage as a distinct source of meaning and value, the geopark designation is absorbed into existing modes of tourism production. As remarked by Adny, a 49-year-old member of the Bali environmental group:

In Bali, the aspects most valued are those that are immediately marketable and enjoyable, such as culture and scenic panoramas. These are widely visited, yet their significance is interpreted mainly in cultural or scenic terms rather than geological ones. Visitors generally engage only with the visible panoramas, while geological knowledge is less well understood.

Adny's insight reveals a hierarchy of value within Batur UGGp structured around visibility, commercial appeal, and compatibility with Bali's established tourism economy. Cultural expressions and scenic landscapes are readily mobilised as commodities, while geology—despite forming the epistemic and normative foundation of the geopark within the UNESCO framework—remains marginal, weakly articulated, and institutionally under-prioritised. It is consistently eclipsed by attractions that are easier to package, market, and monetise, revealing how value is not inherent but actively produced through market-oriented and institutional logics.

These valuation practices fundamentally reshape how authenticity is produced and encountered within the geopark. Rather than emerging from geological narratives that convey deep time, scientific significance, and place-based materiality, authenticity is increasingly constructed through culturally familiar and visually consumable representations that align with dominant tourist imaginaries of Bali. While such representations may be experienced by visitors as 'authentic', they simultaneously displace the geological meanings intended to legitimise the geopark designation. Authenticity thus becomes selective and performative—less an expression of geoheritage than an effect of market alignment and narrative simplification.

Mala, a former member of the Tourism Ministry, illustrates this tourism-oriented imbalance in his reflection on earlier collaboration with the Batur UGGp management body during the initiation of geotrail development:

In 2019, I was invited by Batur UGGp to contribute to developing a geotrail. However, the process was carried out hastily, and there appeared to be a limited understanding of what a geotrail should encompass. The outcome resembled an ordinary tour rather than a structured thematic journey, lacking a coherent narrative or interpretive framework. This posed significant challenges, as it was difficult to shift prevailing mindsets and foster a deeper appreciation of the geotrail concept.

Read together, Adny's and Mala's accounts illustrate how this reconfiguration of authenticity both reflects and reinforces existing power relations. Local communities, embedded within a highly competitive tourism economy, are incentivised to prioritise practices that generate immediate economic returns, leaving limited space to engage with geological heritage that lacks clear market value. Visitors, in turn, encounter the landscape primarily through familiar cultural and scenic frames, consuming a geopark experience that reproduces established tourism logics rather than challenging or diverting from them.

6.2.2 Geotrail Development within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp

In contrast to market-driven and institutionally constrained dynamics observed in Batur UGGp, geotrail development in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp reveals a different configuration of power relations, one in which community engagement plays a more substantive role in shaping governance processes and geotourism outcomes. Stakeholders widely noted that local communities in Lombok illustrated a relatively strong receptiveness to the geopark idea, which facilitated smoother program implementation and reduced the likelihood of open conflict among stakeholders. Communities demonstrated a willingness to align with the geopark's vision, lending legitimacy to management efforts and enabling greater cooperation across stakeholder groups. Several participants attributed this positive dynamic to meaningful engagement with communities at the grassroots level. They emphasised that open invitations to collaborate with the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp management body from the outset fostered a stronger sense of inclusion and encouraged community support.

This receptiveness was reflected clearly in community narratives. Yadi, a 44-year-old resident and head of the village tourism initiative, described how engagement with the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp managers shaped the development of a geosite in his village:

At the national level, there was a strong push to develop tourism villages because of their potential to improve local livelihoods. This encouraged us to begin exploring tourism opportunities in our own village. Although we initially felt we lacked any particularly distinctive features, our discussions with the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp

managers were constructive. Ultimately, those conversations played a key role in our village being recognised as a tourism village based on its geological characteristics.

Yadi's account highlights the community's openness to external ideas and their deliberate efforts to engage with geopark actors given the perceived economic benefits that geopark development was thought to initiate, following an inclusive approach taken by management from the outset. His narrative shows that the villagers actively sought opportunities to align with national tourism agendas and used guidance from the geopark management body. This reflects a strategic form of receptiveness, grounded in the expectation that cooperation with Rinjani-Lombok UGGp could bring economic and institutional benefits.

In Rinjani-Lombok UGGp more broadly, many communities had previously relied on agriculture and small-scale agritourism. The introduction of geopark initiatives was therefore perceived as a promising opportunity to diversify local livelihoods. The geopark designation provided access to new tourism-related income and institutional support, creating a strong incentive to embrace the geopark vision. This stands in contrast to Batur UGGp, where tourism had long been a central source of income. For those communities, the geopark label did not generate significant new economic opportunities but largely reinforced existing tourism structures. Because the designation did not fundamentally alter their development trajectory, the motivation to engage with geopark initiatives was comparatively more limited.

At the same time, Yadi's account also demonstrates how geopark discourses were translated into locally meaningful development pathways. The community's willingness to reinterpret those that they have considered ordinary landscape features as potential geosites reflects an adaptive process in which communities internalise geopark narratives and reframe their environment in ways compatible with the geopark's vision. In this sense, community receptiveness becomes a driver of institutional alignment—strengthening the legitimacy of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp's initiatives and smoothing the implementation of its programs across villages. This acceptance constitutes a crucial form of community ownership that underpins the geopark's development. Whereas many Indonesian UGGps struggle to establish trust and meaningful engagement with local communities—often requiring long-term negotiation, capacity building, and careful mediation—Rinjani-Lombok UGGp benefits from a relatively favorable social environment in which local aspirations and geopark objectives overlapped from the outset.

Beyond economic motivations, a key factor supporting this positive response from the grassroots level is the strong horizontal collaboration among stakeholders within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. Coordinated by the Regional Development Planning Agency (BAPPEDA), these collaborative networks foster trust, transparent communication, and shared decision-making between government agencies, local organisations, and community representatives. This environment of mutual trust and cooperation reassured communities that engaging with the geopark vision would be beneficial and respected, reinforcing their sense of ownership and willingness to participate. Usna, a 38-year-old geologist for Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, who works at the Regional Energy and Mineral Resources Department (ESDM) and was one of the central figures in its early development phase, reflected on how initial cross-sector collaboration gradually developed into stronger coordination and more structured coordination:

Back then, promotion and related activities were managed by the Department of Tourism before a dedicated management body was created. At that time, we were coordinated by BAPPEDA until the management body was established. Within its scope, BAPPEDA coordinated all institutions involved in developing the geopark. ESDM handled geological enrichment, while the Environmental Agency focused on biodiversity identification, and cultural experts primarily managed cultural aspects.

Usna's reflection highlights the transition from a fragmented, department-based arrangement toward a more integrated system. Rather than positioning the geopark under a single-sector authority, Rinjani-Lombok UGGp was developed through a cross-sectoral structure coordinated by BAPPEDA, the regional development planning agency. Crucially, BAPPEDA's authority extends beyond the geopark itself. As the institution responsible for aligning sectoral programmes with regional development plans, budget allocations, and long-term spatial strategies, BAPPEDA processes both the formal mandate and the political leverage to convene agencies that would otherwise operate in parallel or in competition.

This positioning enabled BAPPEDA to frame the geopark not as a stand-alone tourism initiative but as a shared development platform through which multiple institutional priorities—environmental protection, geological conservation, cultural heritage, and tourism development—could be negotiated and aligned. While the Department of Tourism retained primary responsibility for implementation, other technical agencies played substantive roles: ESDM contributed geological expertise, the Environmental Agency addressed biodiversity and conservation concerns, and cultural institutions ensured heritage values were incorporated into planning and interpretation. Rather than competing for jurisdiction, these

agencies were drawn into a planning process in which their respective mandates were recognised as complementary components of a broader regional development agenda.

Importantly, this arrangement did not eliminate institutional differences or potential tensions. However, by embedding the geopark within BAPPEDA's broader planning and coordination framework, conflicts were more likely to be managed upstream—through planning meetings, budget harmonisation, and shared performance indicators—rather than emerging as operational blockages on the ground. In this sense, BAPPEDA functioned less as a neutral coordinator and more as a governance broker, capable of translating sectoral priorities into a collectively endorsed development trajectory. This institutional architecture reduced overt conflicts over authority and facilitated a more coherent approach to geopark development, contributing to smoother implementation and greater stakeholder alignment in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp.

Interestingly, although Rinjani-Lombok and Batur UGGp share similar early institutional trajectories—both initially operating under tourism authorities during their formative years—the evolution of stakeholder collaboration and authority distribution appears to have unfolded more effectively in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. This divergence can partly be attributed to the temporal sequencing of designations. Unlike Batur, which moved directly toward UNESCO Global Geopark status as Indonesia's first UGGp without a prolonged national-level incubation period, Rinjani UGGp underwent an extended phase as a National Geopark before its UNESCO designation. This period provided valuable institutional “learning time” during which governance arrangements, stakeholder roles, and collaborative practices could be negotiated, tested, and adjusted incrementally.

During this national geopark phase, Rinjani-Lombok UGGp's governance relied heavily on interpersonal relationships and informal exchanges, with coordination driven more by individual initiatives than by formal institutional mandates that hold together an emerging institutional landscape, alongside the higher perceived value placed on geopark development by the Lombok community. As recalled by Suad, a 45-year-old member of the business association in Lombok:

Initially, when Rinjani-Lombok UGGp was still a National Geopark, our connection was primarily personal. It started from informal acquaintances rather than institutional cooperation. Over time, as the geopark developed and began organizing more events, those personal connections gradually evolved into formal collaboration between organizations. What started as individual relationships has now grown into strong institutional cooperation.

Suad's account illustrates how Rinjani-Lombok UGGp's collaborative foundation emerged organically over a long temporality, with informal connections playing a unifying role during its early development. In the absence of a formal coordination mechanism, stakeholders relied on interpersonal trust, familiarity, and shared commitment to advance initiatives. These informal ties made it easier for actors from different sectors to communicate openly, mobilise resources quickly, and resolve problems without bureaucratic obstacles. Because many stakeholders already knew each other or became connected through repeated interactions, they were able to build a sense of collective responsibility and shared purpose around the geopark idea. Over time, as the geopark recognition and responsibilities expanded, these informal networks gradually solidified into enduring institutional linkages that enabled more consistent cross-sector coordination.

This strong horizontal collaboration was not only the result of long-standing informal connections but also of the geopark management board's consistent efforts to bring stakeholders together. This was evident in the range of joint initiatives that developed over time. Many stakeholders described maintaining effective communication and positive working relationships with the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp management board. They highlighted the team's proactive involvement in activities that promoted knowledge exchange and stronger institutional collaboration, including community empowerment programmes, co-hosting events with partner agencies, and serving as keynote speakers to share their expertise with a broader audience. As recalled by Suad:

We used to get invited by the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp management board to provide support during their events. For example, during the APGN (Asia Pacific Geoparks Network) in 2019, we assisted with on-site management and guest guidance. It was a valuable opportunity for us to put into practice the knowledge we had gained from collaboration with the geopark team. Our involvement did not end there, we continued to participate in various activities and events organized by the geopark team afterward.

Suad's account illustrates how the management body has endeavored to maintain stakeholder engagement beyond one-off projects. By consistently involving partners in regional and international events, the geopark facilities not only provide skill transfer but also cultivate a shared sense of ownership and pride in representing Rinjani-Lombok UGGp on broader platforms. These experiences help participants to strengthen their professional networks and enhance their understanding of the geopark's broader vision.

This continuity of engagement stands in contrast to the experience in Batur UGGp, where collaborative activities tended to be more event-driven and episodic. Stakeholder

involvement often occurred in response to specific projects or UNESCO evaluation cycles, rather than being embedded in an ongoing institutional learning and relationship-building process. As a result, partnerships in Batur were more vulnerable to organisational changes, shifting political priorities, or turnover in key personnel. In Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, by comparison, the sustained involvement of stakeholders—through repeated training sessions, helped to stabilise collaboration over time and foster a collective investment in the geopark’s long-term development.

However, some participants from Rinjani-Lombok UGGp were also critical, pointing to uneven perceptions of the geopark’s relevance and value across government agencies. While strong enthusiasm is evident among community groups and the geopark management body, institutional engagement remains inconsistent. Several government departments regard geopark-related activities as peripheral to their primary responsibilities, leading to selective or minimal involvement. As Nias, a 41-year-old member of the environmental office in Lombok, explained, a sense of uncertainty and detachment persists among some officials who question the tangible institutional benefits of the geopark. These officials often express concern about what the UNESCO Global Geopark designation actually delivers beyond symbolic recognition:

I have heard it several times from government officials who ask, “*What exactly is the benefit of the geopark for us?*” They ask: once it has been designated a UNESCO Global Geopark and carries that branding, what happens next? Will it result in greater budget allocations, or will the associated activities become additional responsibilities for their institutions to fund and manage?

This observation reflects a broader challenge: when institutional actors perceive geopark designation primarily as a bureaucratic obligation or a source of uncertain returns, commitment to its objectives can be limited. Fragmented understanding across agencies undermines coordinated action, as each institution prioritizes its own mandates, funding cycles, and performance metrics. When agencies operate in isolation, each prioritizing different agendas or working under separate funding mechanisms, the geopark’s broader vision of holistic and sustainable development becomes difficult to sustain in practice.

The resulting uncertainty also affects long-term planning. Without clearly defined roles and secured commitments, initiatives such as community engagement programs, educational outreach, and integrated tourism packages are often reactive rather than proactive, dependent on the voluntary cooperation of overburdened staff. In this sense, the disconnect between formal designation and institutional buy-in illustrates that geopark success is not solely a

matter of branding or policy; it is contingent on sustained, coordinated, and well-resourced institutional commitment across multiple sectors.

Although geopark designation in Indonesia is typically initiated and promoted by government actors, the case of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp illustrates how support and engagement vary across government levels, shaped in significant ways by funding and budgeting arrangements. While some regional agencies and local communities in Lombok have expressed support, particularly where the geopark is perceived to align with existing development goals, other regional government actors have been more cautious, especially where the financial implications of geopark participation remain unclear. As Waid explained:

The geopark concept is generally well understood by the management body; however, communicating and extending it to relevant government agencies, especially those with the authority and budget to fund the programs, has been more challenging. Moreover, limited regional funding often becomes another major constraint in sustaining and realizing these initiatives.

While the management body may have a clear understanding of the geopark's mission and objectives, translating these ideas into practical collaboration among government departments and securing consistent budgetary commitments remains a significant challenge. Waid's account points to the central role of budgeting structures in shaping institutional engagement. In practice, while national ministries may endorse the geoparks conceptually, funding is typically channelled to regional governments through sectoral or general allocations rather than through dedicated geopark budgets. As a result, regional departments must decide whether, and to what extent, geopark-related activities justify already constrained resources. For some agencies, the geopark is perceived as an additional obligation that competes with core responsibilities, particularly when the outcome of such funding are perceived as unclear.

These budgeting dynamics have tangible effects on governance outcomes. For some authorities, the value of the geopark is not immediately evident because its benefits are often long-term, cross-sectoral, and difficult to measure within conventional bureaucratic performance frameworks, such as geological education, integrated interpretation, or sustained community engagement. As a result, geopark-related activities are sometimes perceived as additional responsibilities rather than as instruments that advance core institutional mandates. In consequence, engagement often depends on project-based funding

or temporary enthusiasm from individual leaders, which can quickly dissipate when administrative priorities shift or when funding cycles end.

In this way, funding mechanisms do not simply constrain implementation; they actively shape which actors participate, which activities are prioritised, and how the geopark is interpreted in practice. Uneven financial commitment across agencies reinforces fragmented governance, limits cross-sectoral coordination and weakens the geopark's capacity to deliver coherent and authentic geotourism experiences. Rather than reflecting a lack of interest alone, these dynamics reveal how budgeting structures mediate institutional power and influence the extent to which geopark principles can be meaningfully embedded across multiple layers of governance.

Viewed through this lens, Rinjani-Lombok UGGp's relatively strong horizontal collaboration across sectors does not necessarily translate into effective vertical alignment. While cooperation among technical agencies and community groups has improved, decision-making authority and financial control remain concentrated at higher administrative levels. This dependence on vertically coordinated budget allocations exposes persistent power asymmetries, particularly when support from senior political leaders is uneven or contingent. As Liam, a 50-year-old member of the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp management board, explained:

The challenge lies in ensuring that all levels of stakeholders are engaged, from community-based tourism groups [Pokdarwis] to decision-makers at the village, sub-district, and regional levels. This has been one of our main obstacles: while the management body and Pokdarwis may be highly enthusiastic and motivated, without the support of top leaders, these efforts often fail to produce meaningful outcomes.

Liam's reflection highlights that, while grassroots groups play a crucial role in mobilising local communities, their efforts remain constrained without sustained political will and institutional support from higher-level authorities. In practice, this support is often closely tied to political leadership and shifting administrative priorities. When regional leadership changes, development agendas and policy priorities may be reoriented, potentially reducing attention to or support for geopark initiatives. As a result, even well-intentioned programs struggle to achieve continuity, coherence, and measurable long-term impact. Without being firmly embedded within enduring policy frameworks and budgetary commitments, geopark programmes remain vulnerable to political turnover, making sustained implementation dependent on changing leadership preferences rather than institutional support.

6.2.3 Comparative Geotrails Governance Dynamics

A closer examination of governance practices reveals that the differences between Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps extend beyond organisational structures and reflect fundamentally different distributions of power and institutional legitimacy. These differences become particularly visible in decisions concerning geotrail planning, site selection, interpretive content, infrastructure development, and resource allocation. Such decisions are not merely technical or administrative processes but are inherently political, as they determine which stakeholders are able to influence geotrail development, whose knowledge is considered legitimate, and which aspects of heritage are ultimately presented as authentic.

In Batur UGGp, decision-making authority remains concentrated among government agencies and tourism institutions, reflecting a governance model characterised by strong institutional control and limited power-sharing. Although multiple stakeholders are formally involved in geopark management, authority is unevenly distributed, with tourism and governmental actors possessing greater influence over strategic planning and implementation than local communities. The historical dominance of tourism development agendas has further reinforced this imbalance, positioning geotrails primarily as tourism assets designed to enhance destination attractiveness and visitor consumption. As a result, decisions regarding route development, visitor facilities, and interpretive narratives tend to prioritise scenic viewpoints, marketable cultural performances, and tourism-oriented experiences that can be readily promoted to visitors.

This concentration of authority has also generated tensions among institutional actors. Overlapping mandates between government departments, ambiguities regarding responsibility, and competing organisational priorities often create uncertainty over who has the authority to make decisions and allocate resources. Conflicts frequently emerge around issues such as infrastructure provision, site management responsibilities, conservation priorities, and the balance between tourism development and geopark objectives. Rather than being resolved through formal participatory mechanisms, these disagreements are commonly managed through bureaucratic negotiations and administrative procedures, embedded with power relations among institutional actors. As decision-making processes become centred on negotiations between organisations with formal authority, opportunities for broader stakeholder participation may be reduced. These governance arrangements therefore privilege actors with institutional power and technical expertise, while community members typically participate through consultation rather than shared decision-making. As a result, local communities often have limited capacity to shape narratives, values, and

representations that are incorporated into geotrail development, despite being closely connected to the landscapes and cultural heritage being interpreted.

These governance dynamics have important implications for institutional legitimacy. In Batur UGGp, legitimacy is derived primarily from formal authority and administrative mandates, and control over geopark management processes rather than from broad stakeholder consensus. While such arrangements may facilitate the implementation of tourism development initiatives, they can also weaken local ownership of geopark programmes when communities perceive decisions as externally imposed. This contributes to a situation in which authenticity becomes increasingly institutionalised and commodified, reflecting the priorities of those actors who possess the authority to shape tourism planning, heritage interpretation, and geopark management. Consequently, locally grounded understandings of heritage and place may receive less attention than narratives aligned with broader tourism, conservation, or branding objectives. Geotrails therefore function not only as visitor experiences but also as instruments through which particular interpretations of authenticity are legitimised and privileged over others.

By contrast, Rinjani-Lombok UGGp demonstrates a more collaborative governance environment in which authority is distributed across a wider range of actors. The coordinating role played by BAPPEDA has been particularly significant in facilitating communication between government agencies, community organisations, tourism actors, and technical experts. Rather than exercising direct control, BAPPEDA often functions as a mediator that aligns diverse stakeholder interests and encourages collective participation in geopark initiatives. Its effectiveness in this role stems from its institutional authority over regional planning priorities, budgeting processes, and interdepartmental coordination, which provides leverage to align the activities of multiple government agencies towards shared geopark objectives. Through stakeholder consultations, coordination forums, and collaborative planning mechanisms, BAPPEDA facilitates dialogue between government departments, local communities, tourism actors, and civil society organisations. This governance arrangement creates greater opportunities for local communities to contribute to geotrail development and influence how heritage, culture, and place are represented within visitor experiences.

The governance configuration in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp has also shaped how conflicts are addressed. Although disagreements continue to emerge regarding development priorities, budget allocations, conservation measures, and programme implementation, these tensions are more frequently managed through consultation, negotiation, and ongoing stakeholder

engagement. This reflects the coordinating role of BAPPEDA, which possesses authority over regional planning and budget processes but relies on collaboration with government departments, community organisations, tourism actors, and local stakeholders to implement geopark initiatives. As no single actor holds complete control over geotrail development and management, decision-making often requires negotiation across multiple interests and priorities. For example, disagreements regarding infrastructure development at geosites or the allocation of resources for tourism programmes are commonly discussed through coordination meetings and stakeholder forums, where competing concerns can be debated and reconciled. Informal interpersonal relationships developed through repeated collaboration further support conflict resolution by fostering trust and mutual understanding among actors. While such mechanisms do not eliminate power inequalities, they create recurring formal and informal spaces in which stakeholders can engage with competing perspectives and negotiate mutually acceptable outcomes.

Nevertheless, the collaborative nature of governance in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp should not be interpreted as evidence of fully decentralised decision-making. Despite greater community involvement, significant authority remains concentrated within higher administrative and political structures, particularly regarding funding approvals, policy endorsement, and long-term programme support. Consequently, local stakeholders remain dependent on decisions made beyond the immediate geopark management structures. Delays in budget approval, changes in political priorities, and fluctuations in institutional commitment can therefore disrupt geotrail development and create uncertainty regarding the continuity of geopark initiatives. For example, participants noted that support for particular geopark programmes often depended on the priorities of government leaders and departmental officials, meaning that initiatives promoted under one administration were not always pursued with the same level of commitment following leadership changes. These constraints demonstrate that collaborative governance operates within broader hierarchical systems that continue to shape the distribution of power and resources.

The comparison between the two geoparks therefore illustrates that geotrail development is not simply a matter of designing visitor routes or interpretive materials but is fundamentally shaped by governance arrangements that determine how authority, legitimacy, and participation are organised, which heritage elements are prioritised, and how authenticity is communicated to visitors. While Rinjani-Lombok UGGp demonstrates greater stakeholder inclusion and more collaborative forms of governance than Batur UGGp, both geoparks

remain embedded within institutional structures that ultimately constraint the redistribution of decision-making power.

The following chapter, therefore, builds on these governance insights to examine how authenticity is constructed, negotiated, and institutionalised through the practices of planners, experts, and tourism actors, shedding light on the supply-side processes that translate governance structures into geotourism experiences.

Chapter 7 Interpreting Authenticity from the Perspectives of Tourism Suppliers and Key Governance Actors

This chapter presents findings from Study 1, extending the governance analysis introduced in Chapter 6 by moving from institutional arrangements to their effects on the construction of authenticity in geotourism. Rather than treating authenticity as an inherent quality of geological heritage or a matter of individual interpretation, the chapter shows how authenticity is produced through governance arrangements that distribute power, authority, and legitimacy among tourism actors in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGs).

Building on the comparison between Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGs, the chapter examines how key tourism suppliers and institutional stakeholders translate governance configurations into concrete geotourism practices. It reveals that governance structures determine whose knowledge counts as authoritative, which geological narratives are sanctioned, and how geotrails and geosites are framed for tourism consumption. Where governance is centralised and expert-driven, authenticity is constructed through standardised, scientifically framed interpretations aligned with UNESCO criteria and market-oriented branding, marginalising local experiential and cultural meanings. Conversely, in governance contexts where authority is more dispersed, authenticity emerges through negotiated practices that incorporate local understanding of place, everyday human-geology interactions, and informal tourism practices, even when these sit uneasily with formal institutional expectations.

The chapter's key contribution is to show that what becomes recognised as “authentic” geotourism is not simply the outcome of commodification or stakeholder negotiation at the destination level, but a structurally conditioned result of governance. By locating authenticity within the operation of governance power, the chapter demonstrates how governance arrangements institutionalise particular versions of authenticity while rendering other invisible. In doing so, it provides a governance-sensitive account of authenticity that explains variation in geotourism experiences across geoparks as a function of where decision-making power resides and how it is exercised.

The chapter is organised into two main sections. The first section explores how tourism suppliers and institutional stakeholders perceive and interpret authenticity within Indonesian

UGGps. The findings reveal considerable variation in how authenticity is understood, reflecting differences in professional roles, value orientations, and degrees of engagement with the geopark landscape. Two dominant perspectives emerge, each carrying distinct implications for how geotourism is governed and experienced.

First, authenticity is framed as the preservation of original essence and material integrity, emphasising geological formations, landscape features, and scientific accuracy. This perspective aligns with a preservation-oriented conception of authenticity, commonly rooted in western heritage discourse. While this perspective lends technical legitimacy to geopark initiatives and aligns closely with UNESCO conservation discourses, it also tends to privilege expert-led authority and institutional control, often marginalising locally embedded knowledge and everyday cultural meanings. As a result, authenticity becomes stabilised through standardised narratives and visual representation, reinforcing top-down approaches to interpretation and limiting opportunities for local actors to shape how geological heritage is communicated. Second, authenticity is understood as a lived and embodied experience, actively produced through storytelling, interaction, and guided interpretation. Within this perspective, local guides play a central role in mediating relationships between visitors and the landscape, enabling more relational and place-based forms of engagement. However, this form of authenticity, while experientially rich, often lacks formal institutional recognition and remains vulnerable to commodification pressures, simplification, or exclusion from official planning frameworks.

The second section examines how the abiotic, biotic, and cultural dimensions of the geoparks are brought together through the commodification of geotourism experiences, highlighting the tensions that emerge when integrative geopark ideals are translated into market-oriented tourism products. While UNESCO Global Geoparks are conceptually framed as holistic territories that interlink geology, biodiversity, and culture, the findings indicate that in practice this integration often remains partial and fragmented. Geological narratives—despite underpinning geopark designation—are frequently subordinated to scenic appeal or cultural performances that are more immediately legible and marketable to visitors. As a result, commodification processes tend to prioritise visually attractive and culturally familiar elements, while complex geological knowledge is simplified, selectively interpreted, or marginalised.

Interpretation plays a critical mediating role in this process, with the potential either to reconnect geological, ecological, and cultural dimensions or to reinforce their separation. However, its effectiveness is uneven, shaped by institutional priorities, resource constraints,

and perceptions of market expectations that influence what forms of heritage are emphasised, how they are communicated, and whose knowledge is authorised. Consequently, the commodification of geological heritage does not merely package pre-existing meanings for tourism consumption but actively reshapes how geopark resources are understood and experienced, with significant implications for the scientific integrity, local grounding, and educational value of geotourism within Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps.

Overall, this chapter demonstrates how governance structures are operationalised through supply-side practices, shaping the production and institutionalisation of authenticity within geotourism experiences. These practices directly influence how geological heritage is curated, interpreted, and presented to visitors, thereby conditioning what tourists are able to see, learn, and engage with in UNESCO Global Geoparks. The findings lay the groundwork for Chapter 8, which examines how these supply-side constructions of authenticity are ultimately experienced by tourists in practice, exploring how visitors interpret, negotiate, and, at times, contest official narratives within the broader geotourism experience.

7.1 Tourism Suppliers' and Key Governance Actors' Perceptions of Authenticity

As discussed in Chapter 5, although authenticity is not explicitly defined in official UNESCO Global Geopark documentation, it nevertheless plays a central and operative role in practice. This implicit emphasis reflects the historical positioning of geological values within the broader World Heritage Site framework from a conservation perspective (Brilha, 2018; Canet, Sánchez-Aguirre, García-Sánchez, & Castañeda-Bastida, 2024; Polman, Seijmonsbergen, Versteegh, & Kissling, 2024). Within this heritage framework, processes of designation, protection, and valorisation are fundamentally grounded in notions of authenticity (Labadi, 2010).

UNESCO's evaluation procedures further institutionalise this orientation by prioritising comparison, differentiation, and international legibility, particularly among geoparks located in close geographical proximity. As a result, authenticity operates as an implicit benchmark through which geoparks are expected to demonstrate that their geological, cultural, and socio-economic narratives are both distinctive and genuinely rooted in place, despite the absence of a formal or explicit definition. In the Indonesian context, UNESCO's recommendation that Rinjani-Lombok UGGp undertake a comparative study with the nearby Batur UGGp prior to its designation in 2016 illustrates how authenticity is operationalised as an evaluative tool: legitimacy depends on the ability to articulate a

credible and differentiated identity that justifies inclusion within the UNESCO network. It is within this institutional and competitive context that authenticity emerged as a critical focus for this research.

As earlier discussion has shown, geopark governance operates through layered regulatory arrangements and assessment mechanisms aligned with UNESCO Global Geopark standards. Across these mechanisms, authenticity functions as a normative expectation that shapes how geoparks are designed, narrated, and audited. However, despite its central role in designation, revalidation, and international recognition, authenticity remains loosely defined within policy and evaluative texts. This ambiguity shifts responsibility onto local actors, who must interpret and perform authenticity in ways that satisfy global evaluators while remaining intelligible and acceptable within local socio-cultural contexts.

To explore how these expectations are interpreted in practice, this study asked tourism suppliers and institutional stakeholders directly about authenticity and its relevance to their everyday geotourism activities. Participants' responses revealed a striking tension between the institutional importance of authenticity and its conceptual vagueness. Rather than offering clear or consistent definitions, many participants hesitated, paused, or sought clarification, indicating that authenticity was neither readily accessible nor uniformly understood across stakeholder groups.

This tension is evident in the response of Mala, a former Ministry of Tourism staff member, who openly expressed his uncertainty, asked, *"So that is why I am asking, what does 'authentic' really mean?"* Despite his extensive professional experience and direct involvement in geotourism development across multiple Indonesian UGGps, Mala was unable to draw on an established conceptual reference point. His hesitation highlights how authenticity operates as an assumed standard within the UGGp framework—one that exerts regulatory force not through clarity, but through its taken-for-granted status.

Similar patterns emerged across interviews with stakeholders at different institutional levels, from national policymakers to community representatives. Hesitation and requests for clarification were common initial responses as participants navigated the challenge of defining authenticity in relation to geotourism. Sometimes, this struggle showed in noticeable pauses and long silences—moments that revealed deep uncertainty about how to approach the question. At the national level, for example, when asked what authenticity meant to her, Urya, a 60-year-old representative from the Indonesian Tourism Profession Certificate Institute, responded with hesitation followed by a prolonged silence moment,

“Sorry, what? Authentic?... Oh okay... Authentic, huh? Hmm... (silent)...” This silence signaling a degree of uncertainty and the need to actively construct a response that could link the abstract notion of authenticity to the geoparks context.

At the provincial level, similar uncertainty was evident. Ansyah, a 43-year-old government official in the Forestry Department of West Nusa Tenggara Province (Rinjani-Lombok UGGp), conveyed both hesitation and self-doubt in his explanation:

Authentic... Hmm... maybe it is something special, I think... and also original. Something that only belongs to that place, like something endemic. Honestly, I am not entirely sure; I have never actually looked up what 'authentic' means. It is just what comes to mind.

Here, Ansyah's response illustrates the absence of a shared professional discourse on authenticity, prompting him to improvise using concepts familiar from his ecological training. Coming from a forestry background, he brings an interpretive framework shaped by ecological and environmental notions of originality and endemism, which are often framed in his field. His association of authenticity with something that belongs only to a specific place reveals a translation of the concept into terms that align with his ecological worldview, in which value is attached to what is natural, rare, and irreplaceable.

At the community level, this hesitation became even more pronounced. Kitna, a 69-year-old local businessman, did not attempt to define authenticity at all but instead sought clarification: *“What do you mean? Could you please explain?”* Despite decades of experience in tourism and deep familiarity with the local context, his response suggests that authenticity has rarely become everyday vocabulary or practice in a meaningful way.

Taken together, these hesitations, pauses, and attempts to reinterpret authenticity across multiple levels of governance, from national policymakers to site-level managers and community actors, reflect both its conceptual ambiguity and its limited practical resonance within Indonesian geopark governance frameworks. This ambiguity becomes particularly visible where UNESCO's evaluative and auditing mechanisms, mediated through national governance structures, require geopark actors to perform authenticity through conservation practices, cultural representations, and tourism narratives, while offering no shared or negotiated framework for how authenticity should be defined, enacted, or assessed across diverse institutional, socio-cultural, and territorial settings.

Within this context, hesitation should not be read as disengagement or limited capacity. Rather, it reflects an acute awareness that authenticity is a concept largely owned and

legitimised by external authorities and loosely connected to the everyday realities of geopark management and implementation in Indonesia. Authenticity thus functions less as a collectively negotiated value and more as a performative governance requirement—something to be demonstrated for evaluation purposes rather than meaningfully embedded in practice.

The tension is further compounded by the intellectual origins of authenticity. Rooted in western philosophical and tourism scholarship, the concept has often been associated with ideas of trueness (Wang, 1999), genuineness (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), realness (Rickly-Boyd, 2012), and nativeness (Salazar, 2010). When mobilised within Southeast Asian governance and community contexts, these framings do not always align with local epistemologies. As a result, the concept of authenticity can be challenging to translate into Indonesian community settings, where stakeholders use different, locally grounded ways to decide what feels genuine or meaningful to share with visitors.

In the Indonesian context, although the English term ‘authenticity’ has been officially adopted into Bahasa Indonesia as ‘*otentik*’, participants frequently used the term ‘original’ interchangeably when asked to reflect on authenticity in geotourism experiences. According to the *Great Indonesian Dictionary* (2024), *otentik* carries multiple meanings, including *dapat dipercaya* (reliable), suggesting that something is trustworthy and can be depended on; *asli* (original), indicating that something is true to its nature; *tulen* (genuine), emphasizing purity; and *sah* (legitimate), which signifies that something is valid or lawful. While this semantic range potentially enriches interpretations of authenticity, it also complicates its articulation in practice. This linguistic plurality helps explain why, earlier, some participants often struggled to define authenticity through a single definition, even as they demonstrated familiarity with the values and practices associated with it in their everyday engagement with the geopark.

These findings align with recent scholarship emphasising the culturally contingent nature of authenticity. Cheng, Fountain, Rosin, and Lucock (2024) show that cultural background plays a central role in shaping how authenticity is articulated and understood. Rather than relying on a direct linguistic translation of the term ‘authentic’, local stakeholders often draw on culturally embedded concepts, metaphors, and expressions to convey what authenticity means in their own contexts. This reinforces the view that authenticity is not a static or universally shared construct but a dynamic and culturally contingent notion, continually shaped by local histories, values, and everyday practices (Jamal & Hill, 2004; Cheng et al., 2024). Within the UNESCO Global Geopark framework, however, the scope for recognising

such variability is constrained by evaluative criteria that consistently privilege geological heritage as the primary anchor of authenticity. While UNESCO promotes cultural diversity and community participation in principle, designation and revalidation processes remain anchored in assessments of geological significant, scientific credibility, and the clarity with which geoheritage values can be documented and communicated internationally.

As a result, local expressions of authenticity that do not align easily with geology-centred narratives, or that foreground spiritual, historical, or lived relationships with the landscape, are at risk of being marginalised or strategically reformulated to foreground geology-centred narrative. In practice, geopark actors are encouraged to frame culture and community engagement in ways that reinforce geological storytelling, narrowing the space for authenticity to emerge from local priorities. The following subsections build on this conceptual framing by turning to tourism suppliers, exploring how they interpret, negotiate, and give meaning to authenticity in their everyday geotourism practices.

7.1.1 Originality, Materiality, and the Preservation of Place

While many tourism stakeholders initially struggled to articulate what they meant by authenticity, their reflections became increasingly structured and confident as the interviews unfolded. As noted, participants frequently used the terms ‘authentic’ and ‘original’ interchangeably, indicating an understanding of authenticity grounded in ideas of continuity, origin, and material preservation. Although stakeholders rarely drew on formal theoretical language, and despite subtle variations in the ways authenticity is constructed in the Indonesian context, their interpretations closely align with dominant western conceptions of authenticity that privilege stability and the safeguarding of original forms.

This understanding was articulated most explicitly at the national level by Mala, a key actor involved in Indonesia’s geopark designation process and geotourism development, who positioned authenticity as a foundational criterion for identifying geosites. Drawing on his professional experience and institutional authority, Mala described authenticity as inseparable from originality and the absence of external influence:

When we look for a geosite, we look for authenticity. When we search for a geosite, we are looking for something original, something not influenced by anything else. Original, just as it is. That is what makes it authentic. Natural as it is. Without any influence from outside.

Mala's articulation closely reflects the emphasis embedded within UNESCO's Operational Guidelines for Global Geoparks, which establish geological heritage of international significance as the primary foundation for geopark designation. Within these guidelines, authenticity is not articulated as a standalone or reflexive concept; rather it is operationalised through evaluative criteria that prioritise geological integrity, scientific value, rarity, and comparative distinctiveness, all assessed through expert-led processes. Geosites are therefore expected to demonstrate that their key geological features remain intact, minimally altered, and clearly legible as evidence of Earth history, effectively aligning authenticity with notions of originality and naturalness.

Mala's emphasis on the absence of external influence and landscapes that are natural 'as they are' also reflects UNESCO's prioritisation of material integrity and visual legibility as indicators of authenticity—an approach rooted in dominant western heritage paradigms that privilege expert authority and material preservation (Smith, 2006). This perspective closely aligns with what Cohen and Cohen (2012) describe as *cool authenticity*, in which authenticity is treated as an objective quality that can be verified by experts according to established standards. Geological features, therefore, are treated as self-evident carriers of authenticity, rather than as landscapes whose meanings are continually shaped through interpretation, narration, and encounter. This is particularly striking given that geotourism experiences are fundamentally mediated through viewpoints, interpretive signage, guiding practices, and visitors' cultural expectations, yet these mediations remain largely absent from UNESCO's construction of authenticity, which continues to prioritise material preservation over relational and experiential dimensions.

Crucially, by constructing authenticity as pre-social and inherently vulnerable to outside influence, Mala reproduces a framework in which geological features are privileged precisely because they can be presented as stable and temporally prior to cultural or human intervention. Within this framing, human presence is implicitly positioned as a risk to authenticity rather than as a constitutive dimension of how heritage meanings are formed. Authenticity is therefore protected *from* people, rather than understood as something that emerges *through* human engagement with place.

In this respect, Mala's account stands in tension with dominant perspectives in heritage studies that conceptualise authenticity as a socially constructed and culturally mediated process rather than an intrinsic property of heritage itself (Nakonieczna & Szczepański, 2024). The geology-led framing evident here thus exposes a fundamental contradiction within geopark governance: while geoparks are promoted by UNESCO as sites of

community engagement and sustainable development, their dominant constructions of authenticity—grounded in geological accuracy and integrity—continue to rely on ideals of non-intervention and the symbolic absence of human presence. This marginalisation points to a governance arrangement in which landscape management is dominated by geoscience experts embedded within formal state institutions (Stoffelen, 2019), a dynamic that is mirrored at the local level where community and tourism practitioners frequently do not perceive themselves as legitimate stakeholders in geoheritage valuation (Zhuang et al, 2024).

At the same time, this geology-centred construction of authenticity sits uneasily alongside UNESCO's promotion of the interconnectedness of geology, biodiversity, and culture as a foundational principle of the Global Geopark framework. When authenticity is anchored primarily in geological originality, material integrity, and the absence of external influence, the cultural dimension becomes constrained. Cultural expressions are consequently curated in ways that align conservation aesthetics: they are selectively framed as traditional or timeless, or spatially and narratively contained so as not to disrupt the dominant geological storyline. This raises a critical tension at the heart of geopark development: *to what extent can culture be genuinely embedded within geotourism products when authenticity is implicitly defined through the minimisation—or symbolic erasure—of human intervention?*

Taken together, Mala's account demonstrates how UNESCO-derived criteria are internalised and articulated by national-level actors as authoritative definitions of what constitutes the authentic. As will be shown later in this chapter, this framing has tangible consequences for how geotourism products are designed, narrated, and curated for tourist consumption. Importantly, this UNESCO-informed understanding of authenticity does not remain confined to the national level; rather, it travels downward through the multi-scalar governance structures that shape geopark development in Indonesia.

As discussed in Chapter 6, this downward movement is enabled by a governance architecture that formally endorses bottom-up participation while remaining operationally anchored in centralised evaluation, accreditation, and reporting processes. Within this structure, national actors such as Mala serve as critical intermediaries, translating global standards into national policies, planning documents, and operational guidelines. Through this process of translation, geological significance becomes stabilised as the epistemic core of the geopark—aligning local practices with international expectations while simultaneously narrowing the conceptual space in which authenticity can be recognised.

This dynamic is clearly reflected at the regional level in Batur UGGp. Across interviews, stakeholders consistently identified geological heritage as the primary marker of authenticity, often echoing the national emphasis on physical formations and material evidence. Alongside Asta, a member of the regional tourism office in Bali, both Gusa from the Regional Energy and Mineral Resources Department and Adny from a local environmental group foregrounded geological features as central to authentic geotourism in Batur UGGp. Although their responses were not always immediate, their reflections repeatedly returned to the landscape's geological formations as the most credible and authoritative indicators of authenticity. This material and evidentiary framing of authenticity was articulated most clearly by Adny, who pointed to the visible remnants of Batur's eruptive past:

The caldera is authentic (Figure 7.1), as evidenced by the visible traces of its past eruptions. The mountain still has what we call volcanic deposits from the eruptions, and these remain visible. ...the features are clearly visible.

Adny's emphasis on durability and visibility underscores how authenticity is recognised through material persistence. Volcanic deposits, eruption traces, and caldera formations function as tangible evidence of geological authenticity, offering observable confirmation that the landscape has not been fundamentally altered or obscured. Drawing on his experience in participating in, developing, and managing Batur UGGp, Adny frames authenticity as something that must not only be preserved but also made legible, aligning closely with management priorities centred on safeguarding and showcasing iconic physical features.



Figure 7.1 Mount Batur Caldera
(source: Author, 2023)

Within this regional framing, the Batur Caldera itself emerges as the defining symbol of authenticity. Widely constructed as one of the most significant geological heritage sites within Batur UGGp, the caldera—comprising two nested volcanic calderas and a complete volcanic landscape—is described by Mihardja, Alisjahbana, Agustini, Sari, and Pardede, (2023) as a ‘globally unique geological formation’. This claim is based on the site’s distinctive morphology, which enables multiple phases of volcanic activity to be observed within a single, coherent landscape. For participants such as Asta, Gusa, and Adny, the caldera of Mount Batur is more than a visually striking landform; it functions as a tangible marker of authenticity, precisely because it remains physically present, recognisable, and largely unaltered. In this framing, authenticity is grounded in the caldera’s capacity to demonstrate geological origin and continuity—what stakeholders repeatedly described as nature ‘as it is’. As Asta explained:

The authenticity lies in presenting Batur Caldera as one of the world's most stunning calderas. From the visitor's vantage point, they can observe the mountain below, the lake, and the surrounding peaks (Figure 7.2).

While Asta’s account initially appears to emphasise aesthetic appreciation, particularly references to panoramic views and visual grandeur, a closer reading suggests that these aesthetic qualities are inseparable from geological authenticity. The expansive visibility afforded by the caldera enables visitors to apprehend multiple geological elements within a single, coherent landscape. The ability to visually grasp the volcanic system as an integrated whole positions the site as unique and evidentiary, reinforcing perceptions of authenticity as something that can be directly seen and spatially comprehended.

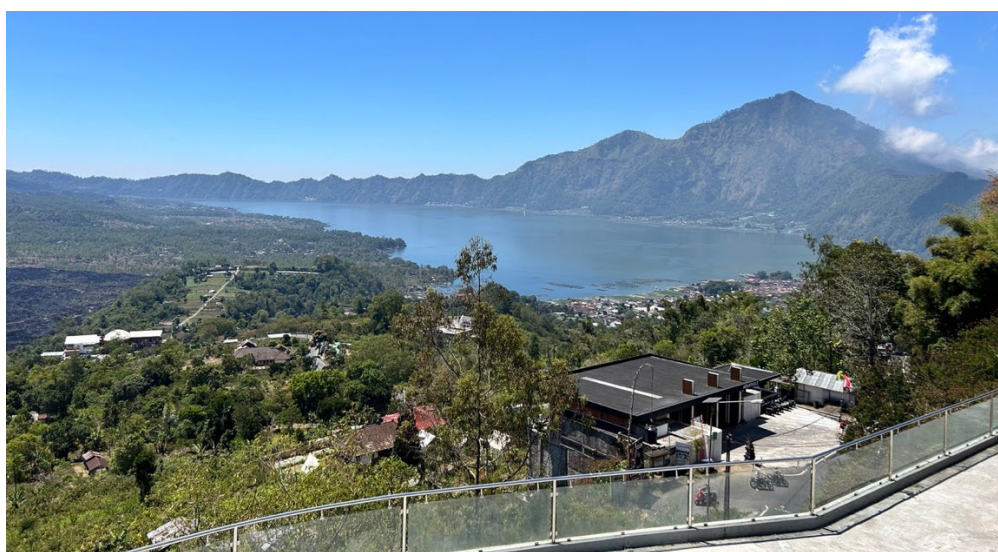


Figure 7.2 Viewpoint from Mount Batur Caldera walls
(source: Author, 2024)

Gusa further reinforces this emphasis on materiality by drawing attention to a spatial characteristic of the landscape that may not be immediately apparent to casual visitors but is geologically significant:

Unlike in most places where mountains are viewed from below, here (Mount Batur), one can look down upon the mountain itself. People may not realize that they are actually on the rim of the ancient Mount Batur (Figure 7.3).

Gusa's account highlights how the caldera's geological formation produces a rare spatial experience in which visitors stand on the rim of an ancient, collapsed volcano, looking down toward a younger volcanic cone below. This inverted perspective, viewing the mountain from above rather than below, derives directly from the caldera's volcanic geological history and morphology. Yet for Gusa, this distinctive vantage point functions less as evidence of authenticity in itself than as a means through which authenticity is made experientially available to visitors.



Figure 7.3 The inverted perspective from caldera walls
(source: Author, 2024 (top); Youtube Yohanes Putra Noari, 2025 (bottom))

The capacity to see, occupy, and physically engage with this elevated position allows deep geological time and volcanic processes to be rendered perceptible within the present day landscape. Authenticity, in this framing, does not reside solely in the material existence of the caldera but is produced through carefully orchestrated modes of encounter that privilege visibility, legibility, and embodied experience. In this way, geological authenticity becomes inseparable from its touristic framing: it is not simply preserved but actively curated and commodified through spatial positioning, visual access, and narrative emphasis.

Together, Asta's and Gusa's accounts illustrate how aesthetic appreciation in Batur UGGp is inseparable from geological legibility within the context of tourism. Panoramic views and distinctive vantage points are valued not only for their visual appeal, but because they translate complex geological processes into forms that are immediately visible, intelligible, and experientially accessible to visitors. In this way, geological authenticity is mobilised as a touristic resource—one that can be consumed through seeing, positioning, and narrating the landscape—linking authenticity directly to the design of geotourism experiences and the production of value for visitors.

When read in relation to the governance analysis in Chapter 6, this emphasis can be understood as an outcome of Batur UGGp's institutional arrangements. In a geopark where geotourism development is strongly tourism-oriented and decision-making remains largely top-down, authenticity is predominantly articulated through strategies of preservation and visual stability for tourist gaze. By foregrounding material integrity, iconic landforms, and an 'unchanging' landscape, Batur UGGp produces a stable and standardised tourism product that can be consistently communicated to visitors. This preservation-led construction of authenticity reduces uncertainty and mitigates reputational risk within competitive tourism markets.

While Rinjani-Lombok UGGp operates within a different regional and governance context, a comparable material understanding of authenticity also emerged there. Soes, a 43-year-old member of an environmental organisation in Lombok, similarly anchored authenticity in the tangible qualities of the natural landscape. For him, geotourism authenticity derives from the inherent characteristics of the land itself. Using Mount Rinjani as an example, he pointed to the existence of six trekking routes, each distinguished by its own landscape and geological features, as evidence that authenticity is physically embodied in place:

The authentic qualities of a geotourism site are primarily derived from its inherent natural attributes. Mount Rinjani, as an illustrative example, now boasts six trekking routes, each with its own unique identity, showcasing distinct landscapes and geological features.

In Soes's account, authenticity is firmly anchored in materiality and becomes legible through the organisation of the landscape for visitor use. Each trekking route is understood not only as manifestation of geological processes, but also as a curated pathway through which those processes are selectively revealed and experienced. At the same time, this material framing of authenticity is closely entwined with touristic consumption. The differentiation of trekking routes into distinct identities reflects an effort to package geological variation into recognisable and marketable experiences. Authenticity, in this sense, is not simply discovered by visitors but actively produced through the structuring of access, routes, and interpretive cues that guide how the landscape is encountered. Through trekking, geological authenticity is transformed into an embodied commodity, one that allows visitors to 'do' authenticity by walking through it, while reinforcing the primacy of material landscapes as the core source of value within geotourism experiences.

When considered together, these regional accounts indicate that the privileging of geology within Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps is neither accidental nor simply the result of individual interpretations. Instead, it reflects a structured institutional process through which UNESCO-defined notions of authenticity—centred on geological heritage of international significance, scientific credibility, integrity, and comparability—are translated into national policy and subsequently normalised across governance scales. Through formal mechanisms such as planning documents, geopark masterplans, and zoning regulations, alongside capacity-building initiatives, professional training programmes, and inter-agency coordination, geological features are repeatedly positioned as the primary reference point for defining and assessing authenticity. Similarly, research on a China UGGp also demonstrated that the assessment by UNESCO Global Geopark Council became a primary driver prompting local authorities to advance the geology conservation agenda (Zhuang et al, 2024). These mechanisms do not merely communicate priorities; they actively stabilise geology as the most legitimate and governable expression of authenticity, shaping how geoparks are narrated, managed, and promoted in practice.

Alongside this dominant geological framing, some participants also articulated a broader conception of authenticity that extends beyond natural formations to include the built environment. Sugan, a member from the local tourism office in Lombok, articulated this

perspective particularly clearly. Drawing on his experiences as both a tourism officer and an active tour guide, his understanding of authenticity has been shaped through sustained engagement with geopark activities, including geotour guide training, conservation workshops, and collaboration with geopark managers. Reflecting on these experiences, he explained:

The authenticity of the geotourism experience extends to environmentally conscious practices, ensuring the minimal exploitation of unaltered natural landscapes and the preservation of architectural features that remain true to their origins.

Although Sugan's account broadens the domain of what is considered authentic, it remains closely aligned with a western, preservation-oriented conception of authenticity, in which value is anchored in originality, minimal intervention, and fidelity to an assumed past. While this logic is most often associated with the protection of 'untouched' natural landscapes, his reflection demonstrates how it is equally extended to the built environment, where structures are valued insofar as they are perceived to retain their original form and meaning.

This emphasis on the built environment is echoed in the account of Suad, a 45-year-old member of a Lombok business association, who pointed to the traditional houses in Bayan village near Mount Rinjani (Figure 7.4) as a clear example of authenticity: *"...the word authentic implies experiencing things as they are, which can be reflected in the traditional houses in the Bayan area."* Suad's perspective foregrounds cultural expression, illustrating how authenticity is embodied in architectural heritage that conveys the continuity of local identity and tradition.



Figure 7.4 Traditional house in Bayan village, Lombok UGGp
(source: Author, 2023)

For Suad, these houses are framed as authentic not simply because of their age or appearance, but because they are understood as material continuities with past ways of life. Although no longer inhabited, they are carefully preserved by the community, which interprets this as evidence of cultural stewardship and an ongoing commitment to maintaining links with ancestral traditions. In geotourism encounters, these structures function as markers of authenticity precisely because they are perceived to stabilise and materialise cultural continuity, offering visitors tangible evidence of an enduring socio-cultural order rooted in place.

Consequently, authenticity comes to be defined through practices of preservation across both natural and cultural domains. Within this framework, what is valued as authentic is that which can be conserved, protected, and maintained in a form assumed to reflect an original or unaltered state (Stovel, 2004; Gullino & Larcher, 2013). Material integrity thus becomes the primary benchmark against which authenticity is assessed, positioning physical continuity as the foundation of authentic geotourism experiences.

More critically, these findings reveal a fundamental tension at the heart of geotourism practice. While preservation-oriented frameworks play an important role in protecting geosites and cultural assets from overt commodification, they simultaneously promote a largely static conception of authenticity. This conception not only limits opportunities for reinterpretation and transformation but also tends to fossilise culture by privileging selected moments, forms, or representations of the past while marginalising the ongoing evolution of everyday life. This tendency is especially problematic in contexts where heritage is deeply embedded in contemporary life, as it overlooks the ways in which communities actively negotiate and reinterpret in response to changing social, economic, and environmental conditions.

In doing so, such frameworks risk excluding human presence from authenticity narratives altogether, effectively silencing the voices of those who live in, work with, and care for these landscapes. By privileging fixed material qualities as the primary indicators of authenticity preservation-oriented approaches risk marginalising these dynamic, relational, and lived processes through which authenticity is contested and reworked over time. In this sense, authenticity becomes something to be protected from change, and something that excludes contemporary ways of life, rather than something that emerges through ongoing engagement. Consequently, the emphasis on preservation often conflicts with UNESCO's stated commitments to recognising social value and contemporary cultural significance.

Addressing this contradiction, Jones (2006) argues for a fundamental reorientation of heritage conservation away from the material fossilisation of heritage as a finished ‘product’ and towards an understanding of heritage as an ongoing ‘process’. This perspective foregrounds the continual remaking of meaning, tradition, and cultural practices, acknowledging that culture is not static but constantly evolving. By treating heritage as an active process, conservation can better reflect the lived experiences of communities and the fluidity of cultural expression.

This perspective resonates strongly with a substantial body of heritage scholarship that emphasises the inherently dynamic and polysemous nature of cultural heritage (Wen, 2022). Cultural heritage is not a static inheritance but a continually evolving assemblage of practices, values, and meanings shaped through social interaction and human experience (Cohen and Cohen 2012). At such, authenticity cannot be understood as a fixed property anchored solely in material preservation, but a relational process that is constantly redefined across context and encounters. Recognising this tension highlights the limitations of preservation-dominated frameworks in capturing the full complexity of geotourism authenticity and underscores the need to attend more closely to how authenticity is produced through lived, experiential, and socially embedded practice.

The following subsection explores how tourism suppliers at the local level navigate this tension in practice. Rather than simply adopting or rejecting preservation-led notions of authenticity, some suppliers actively rework them by foregrounding experience, participation, and mediation. Through these practices, authenticity shifts from being understood primarily as a quality embedded in preserved objects or landscapes to something that is actively produced through embodied encounters.

7.1.2 Lived, Embodied, and Guided Experience

While earlier discussions demonstrated that many participants tend to associate authenticity with tangible and physical markers this perspective alone offers only a partial account. As Kolar and Žabkar (2010) remind us, authenticity cannot be reduced to material attributes or visual cues. Instead, they conceptualise authenticity as an affective and experiential relationship between people and places, one shaped by emotions, perceptions, and lived experiences embedded in human history and cultural continuities. From this viewpoint, authenticity is less about what is seen and more about what is felt, enacted, and remembered through engagement with place.

This understanding resonates strongly with the accounts of tourism suppliers at the local level, many of whom work in sustained, everyday proximity to the places they represent. Their familiarity with local routines, practices, and social relations leads them to frame authenticity not as a fixed quality attached to objects or sites, but as something that unfolds through participation and embodied engagement. Ain, a 40-year-old member of the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp management board, articulates authenticity in precisely these terms. For him, simply viewing cultural artefacts or landscapes from a distance remains superficial; instead, authenticity emerges when visitors become actively involved in the practices and rhythms that structure everyday existence, allowing them to experience how cultural knowledge, skills, and values are enacted in practice:

Engaging in activities that mirror the local community's lifestyle provides an authentic tourism experience. Learning traditional weaving methods or discovering the art of crafting roofs from straw are genuine experiences rooted in the region.

By pointing to weaving and roof-making, Ain draws attention to practices in which material and meaning are inseparable. These activities rely on physical materials, tools, and techniques, yet they are sustained through embodied knowledge, inherited skills, and social meaning relations. When visitors take part in these practices, it is perceived that they encounter how physical craftsmanship operates as a channel for transmitting values of resilience, continuity, and identity. In this way, authenticity is understood to become becomes an experiential relationship that emerges in moments when visitors feel the texture of natural fibres, learn the rhythmic movements of weaving, listen to local explanations of meanings and traditions, or engage in forms of shared labour with community members. These embodied encounters are perceived by supply side actors to allow visitors to grasp the symbolic significance of everyday skills and practices, providing access to layers of cultural meaning that cannot be fully conveyed through visual displays or verbal descriptions alone.

Such participatory engagement, therefore, is understood by supply side actors to be a crucial mechanism through which authenticity is experienced and made meaningful. As Nguyen, Le, and Pham (2025) suggest, visitors' active involvement in tourism activities can foster deeper emotional connections, elicit a stronger sense of cultural immersion, and ultimately shape their perceptions of authenticity. This experiential depth is not only associated with more meaningful encounters but also with greater satisfaction and stronger loyalty and attachment to the destination.

Liam, another member of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp management board who also works as a tour guide, further illustrates how authenticity is attempted to be produced through lived and embodied engagement in practice. Through his demonstrations of preparing *ikan bendem*, Liam shows how he understands authenticity not simply as something inherited from the past as a static tradition but something that is continually enacted in the present through bodily practice, skilled performance, and shared experience. During his tours, geological explanations are interwoven with cooking practice and personal storytelling, in an attempt to allow visitors to learn through participation rather than passive consumption:

An example of this culinary uniqueness is the dish known as '*ikan bendem*'. This traditional dish involves placing spices inside a fish, steaming it with clay sourced from the Samalas [now known as Mount Rinjani] eruption, and then baking it. The use of volcanic clay in cooking is a longstanding tradition in the Lombok community. By reintroducing these practices to visitors, we aim to revive cultural heritage. This culinary experience, tied to the geological theme, becomes a distinctive and intriguing aspect that captures visitors' interest.

Liam's example demonstrates that, for him, authenticity is not a pre-given quality but is continually generated through embodied practices that attempt to connect people, place, and history. Cooking with volcanic clay, narrating its geological origins, and guiding visitors through the process is thought to allow visitors to feel authenticity through sensory engagement, bodily movement, and shared attention. In this sense, local actors are not merely custodians of heritage but become conceived as active and creative agents in the production of authenticity. They strive to selectively revive and recontextualise cultural practices in ways that are considered to respond to the expectations of contemporary visitors, who increasingly seek immersive, sensory, and educational encounters (Duda, 2023).

Following the recognition of authenticity as fluid and continually remade, storytelling and guided interpretation emerge as key sites where these dynamics are enacted in everyday geotourism practice. Some participants consistently perceived that engagement with local guides enriches visitors' appreciation of both cultural traditions and geological heritage. Through storytelling, embodied skills, and intimate knowledge of place, guides shift authenticity from something fixed and object-based to something lived, relational, and experienced through human connection and shared meaning. As Sukan, an official from the local tourism office in Lombok, observed, local guides play a central role in enabling these encounters, allowing visitors to engage with cultural expression in ways that are thought to feel grounded and connected to contemporary community life:

These guides promote noble values that are rooted in the local community's way of life. They embody a genuine hospitality that visitors can see, feel, and experience through local wisdom. Therefore, the direct interaction between visitors and guides offers authentic, valuable insights from the local community.

This experiential depth was illustrated by Tya, an academic and geologist in Batur UGGp, in his reflections on the Mount Batur eruption of 1926. Through these narratives, he noted, visitors are exposed not only to geological facts but also to layers of memory and emotion—fear, loss, resilience—that are inseparable from the geological landscape itself:

A guide, especially someone who lived in Batur after the 1926 eruption, can share factual information and personal experiences, including emotions, fears, and the rituals practiced there. This forms a heartfelt connection between the guide and the tourists. This emotional experience becomes crucial, as it is likely vastly different when someone merely conveys information than when a guide who directly experienced the dangers and tension of that time does. The expressions and emotions are authentic when shared by a local.

Tya's reflection highlights the central role of emotional storytelling in the production of authenticity. By sharing such stories, guides humanise the destination and make it more relatable to visitors. In this sense, authenticity creates a space where emotional truths are exchanged, and visitors can momentarily step into the lived realities of local communities, feeling the weight of local histories and the resilience of communities that have lived through them.

Notably, aligning with Tya's perspective, several participants emphasized that geological storytelling is equally central to authentic geotourism, particularly in its capacity to connect visitors to Earth's vast temporal and material scales. As Nias, a member of the environmental office in Lombok, pointed out, by integrating geological narratives into geotourism experiences, visitors could immerse themselves in the story of the land, understanding how geological forces have shaped its features, ecosystems, and cultural heritage over an extended period of time:

In my view, visitors can have a distinctive experience through the geological narrative. This narrative allows them to journey back into the genuine essence of nature, spanning tens of millions of years. Visualizing the intricate processes of formation adds depth to the experience.

Nias's account highlights that geological narratives do more than describe physical features; they situate those features within Earth's deep time, helping visitors grasp the enormity and complexity of the processes that shaped them. As Huijbens (2023) argues, the understanding of geological history adds layers of meaning and connection to the land, allowing visitors to organize seemingly unrelated events into a cohesive story—a structured framework for comprehending various geological phenomena. By engaging with this narrative, visitors can recognize and appreciate the intricate patterns and connections that define our planet's landscapes.

This emphasis closely aligns with UNESCO's geopark framework, which positions geology as the foundational element of geotourism and foregrounds geosites as tangible records of Earth's history. UNESCO's focus on geological narratives seeks to promote geoscientific understanding, raise awareness of deep-time processes, and foster respect for geological heritage as a basis for conservation and sustainable development. In this regard, Nias's account reflects UNESCO's core objective of using geology to deepen visitors' appreciation of landscape significance beyond surface aesthetics.

However, Nias's reflections also reveal a subtle but important departure from UNESCO's predominantly expert-led and conservation-oriented framing of geology. While UNESCO geoparks often emphasise geology as an experiential and imaginative medium through which visitors can “journey” into the essence of nature. This shifts the emphasis from geology as an authoritative, fixed narrative towards geology as a process of meaning-making that unfolds through engagement, visualisation, and emotional connection.

Thus, geological narratives in Nias's perspective both align with and extend UNESCO's geology-centred approach. They reinforce the centrality of geology in defining geotourism value, while simultaneously challenging static and preservation-focused interpretations by demonstrating how geological heritage can be dynamically experienced and reinterpreted. This suggests that geology within geotourism need not be confined to scientific explanation alone but can operate as a living narrative framework through which authenticity and heritage meaning are continuously produced.

Notably, several participants suggested that geological storytelling becomes more compelling when it is experienced through the body rather than conveyed solely through abstract facts. Moving beyond emotional narratives alone, geological storytelling often takes shape through multisensory practices that invite visitors to engage directly with Earth's materiality. Waid, a 37-year-old academic involved in developing geotourism activities in

Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, recalled working with a senior tour guide who encouraged visitors to lick a rock surface to feel its texture. This unexpectedly simple yet striking act left a lasting impression. For Waid, such moments illustrate how geological stories are not only narrated but also embodied, brought to life through the sensory engagement, creativity, and experiential expertise of local guides:

They may bring rock samples, allowing tourists not just to touch them but even to smell and, in some cases, taste them. I recall a senior tour guide permitting visitors to lick the rocks to discern their textures, a surprising yet captivating activity. Even in its simplicity, such engagements can, in my view, contribute to the authenticity of the experience.

This account demonstrates how guides attempted to leverage visitors' experience through a multi-sensory approach, encompassing touch, sight, and taste. When visitors touch volcanic rocks, feel the uneven textures of cooled lava, or listen to the subtle sounds of wind moving across a crater, they encounter the site through a form of sensory immediacy that cannot be replicated through images or verbal explanations alone. These multisensory practices were thought to actively generate a stronger sense of authenticity by anchoring visitors' understanding of the landscape in direct, bodily experience. Existing research on multisensory perception within business and management scholars demonstrates the significant impact of sensory stimulation on perceptions of service quality, visitor emotions, and purchase intention (Helmafalk & Hultén, 2017; Moreira, Fortes, and Santiago, 2017; Yoon & Park, 2012).

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate that authenticity in geotourism is produced differently across governance scales and institutional contexts. Within UNESCO and national-level frameworks, authenticity is largely articulated through geological integrity, material preservation, and international legibility—criteria designed to render geoparks comparable, evaluable, and credible within a global heritage regime. These understandings are reinforced at the regional level, where authenticity is frequently anchored in visible and enduring physical features that support preservation objectives and stabilise geotourism development.

At the local level, however, such framings coexist with more situated and practice-based interpretations. While many participants across all governance levels initially draw on conservation-oriented definitions—linking authenticity to calderas, volcanic deposits, trekking routes, or traditional architecture—these accounts only partially reflect how authenticity is perceived and constructed in everyday geotourism practice. Closer analysis

reveals authenticity to be a layered and relational concept, shaped by stakeholders' institutional positions, their proximity to governance structures, and their ongoing involvement in guiding, hosting, interpreting, and mediating visitor encounters.

This divergence exposes a central contradiction within geopark governance. Whereas UNESCO and regional frameworks prioritise forms of authenticity that are stable, measurable, and defensible within international evaluation systems, local actors often experience authenticity as fluid, negotiated, and relational. Authenticity thus operates simultaneously as a regulatory standard imposed from above and as a lived practice shaped from below. It is continually produced at the intersection of policy and practice, where global heritage ideals meet local realities.

These tensions have profound implications for how heritage is represented and enacted in practice. Governance frameworks tend to privilege forms of authenticity that are legible to institutional systems, foregrounding material integrity, visual coherence, and standardised narratives. In doing so, they often marginalise experiential, relational, and everyday dimensions of place, generating friction between conservation objectives and lived realities. Local knowledge and embodied relationships with landscape are frequently subordinated, positioning communities as implementers of authorised narratives rather than as co-producers of heritage meaning.

The manifestation of these tensions varies across the two case study, reflecting differences in governance arrangement and development priorities. In Batur UGGp, where geotourism development is more tourism-driven and decision-making remains largely top-down, authenticity is more frequently framed as preservation. In this context, preservation serves as a strategy for stabilising the tourism product. By prioritising physical integrity, visual continuity, and an 'original' or recognisable landscape, Batur UGGp presents a clear, standardised image that can be readily communicated to visitors, investors, and international bodies such as UNESCO. This preservation-centred framing reduces uncertainty and manages reputational risk in competitive tourism markets, positioning authenticity as an instrument of institutional control rather than lived practice.

By contrast, the more cooperative and socially embedded governance arrangements in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp do not simply enable experiential understandings of authenticity; they actively produce and normalise them through everyday interpretive practice. Because institutional representatives, local guides, community actors, and practitioners are closely involved in shaping interpretation on the ground, authenticity in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp is

generated through forms of relational labour, including storytelling, guided participation, and ongoing interaction between visitors and hosts. These practices foreground immersion, social connection, and embodied engagement, presenting authenticity as something that is performed and co-produced rather than passively observed. Yet, despite this emphasis on relationality and participation, such practices remain oriented toward tourist consumption, reconfiguring rather than escaping commodification by packaging social relations and lived experiences as part of the geotourism product.

This difference reflects how governance structures do not simply influence how authenticity is articulated; they actively condition which interpretations are legitimised and how authenticity itself is imagined, enacted, and valued within geopark contexts. Across both geoparks, differing interpretations nonetheless converge around geological heritage as the primary site through which authenticity is articulated. Whether framed in terms of preservation or experience, authenticity is most often anchored in geological features, reflecting the central role assigned to geology within the UNESCO Global Geopark framework. Within this framework, geological heritage is expected not only to be recognized for its scientific significance but also to support tourism, education, and local economic development. Meeting these expectations requires rendering geological knowledge accessible and meaningful to non-specialist audiences. It is through interpretation that geological heritage is transformed from a scientific object into a tourism resource—one capable of generating both economic value for destinations and experiential value for visitors.

This translation, however, can occur through different interpretive modes. In some contexts, geological heritage is encountered primarily as something to be gazed upon, where visual appreciation and expert explanation position geology as a spectacle to be observed rather than a landscape to be inhabited. In other contexts, it occurs through embodied and immersive experiences that encourage physical engagement, sensory involvement, and affective connection. From this perspective, interpretation emerges as the central practice through which geological heritage is commodified, transforming geological features into curated experiences that can be internationally branded, marketed, and consumed within geotourism systems. Building on this argument, the following section examines in more detail how interpretation operates as a mechanism of commodification, producing geological heritage as a marketable experience through specific narratives, practices, and institutional arrangements.

7.2 Commodification of Geological Heritage through Interpretation

Participants consistently describe interpretation as central to the shaping and communication of geological heritage within geotourism. In particular, geopark governance and planning actors frame interpretation as the process through which geological features are selected, contextualised, and made accessible to visitors. Through these practices, specific geological formations and processes are identified as significant, narrated as distinctive, and organised into visitable sites, trails, and exhibitions. This process is often characterised by abstraction and simplification, as complex geological knowledge is condensed into key stories, themes, or visual representations that can be communicated to broader audiences. As Waid, a former member of the ministerial team involved in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp's geotourism development, explained, interpretation was understood not merely as constructing physical routes or signposting sites, but as crafting stories that connect scientific explanations with local meanings:

The ministerial team adopted a primarily interpretive approach in developing geotourism within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. We aimed to encourage the development of interpretive elements across the geopark, which is why we began by identifying an overarching theme—since practical interpretation always needs a clear central idea. The theme had to capture the area's main features and distinctive character, serving as the connecting thread between the various sites. This 'red thread' is what we wanted to communicate to both visitors and local communities: *this is what makes your area special*. From that central theme, we then developed the interpretive trail, each designed to express and connect the unique stories and values found throughout the geopark.

Waid's account illustrates how interpretation functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a strategic mechanism for shaping meaning and identity. By articulating a clear thematic focus—the 'red thread'—interpretation enables geographically and thematically diverse sites to be experienced as parts of a coherent narrative. For Waid, through this narrative structuring, geological complexity is rendered intelligible to visitors, while simultaneously producing a sense of place that can be recognised, communicated, and promoted.

Extending this emphasis on integration, Mala, who worked alongside Waid on the same ministerial team, highlighted that interpretation within geoparks requires a deliberate effort to weave multiple layers of meaning across different sites into a coherent narrative structure. Rather than treating geosites as isolated points of interest, he explained that each site was interpreted through the combined lenses of geology, biodiversity, and cultural narratives, presenting them as unified and holistic entities:

In developing geosites, each site was interpreted not only in terms of geology but also by integrating biodiversity and cultural narratives, thereby presenting them as a unified whole. The aim was to transform geological knowledge into meaningful stories that could enlighten, educate, and offer visitors a distinctive experience.

Drawing on his extensive experience in developing geotourism across Indonesian geoparks, Mala's reflection points to a broader transformation in how geotourism interpretation is framed within Indonesian geopark governance. Rather than being treated as the discrete communication of geological facts to visitors, interpretation is increasingly conceptualised as an integrative and strategic practice through which geological heritage is connected to ecological systems, cultural meanings, and local livelihoods. This reframing reflects an institutional aspiration to move beyond geology-centred storytelling towards a more holistic representation of place.

This shift is formally reinforced by Presidential Regulation No. 09 of 2019, which mandates that geopark development and management articulate coherent relationships between geodiversity, biodiversity, and cultural diversity. In aligning national policy with UNESCO Global Geopark principles, the regulation positions integrative interpretation as a core governance responsibility, echoing UNESCO's emphasis on Earth heritage as a nexus of natural and cultural values (Pásková et al, 2021). However, as demonstrated in earlier chapters, the implementation of this integrative mandate is shaped by existing governance structures that continue to privilege geology as the primary source of institutional legitimacy. Consequently, while biodiversity and cultural elements are increasingly incorporated into interpretive narratives, they are often framed in ways that support or contextualise geological significance rather than standing as autonomous heritage dimensions. Interpretation thus becomes a key arena in which the tension between holistic policy ideals and geology-led governance practices is negotiated.

A related emphasis on narrative and affect was expressed by Hayu, a representative from the Bali regional tourism office, who highlighted how interpretation shapes how visitors feel, value, and connect with a place: *"Compelling narratives significantly enhance the attractiveness of geotourism sites, particularly when the stories resonate with real-life experiences."* Despite her relatively recent involvement in the development of Batur UGGp, Hayu's perspective offers valuable insight into how narratives grounded in lived interactions with the land, traditional beliefs, and embodied practices can enhance both the attractiveness and distinctiveness of geotourism sites, conveying forms of authenticity that cannot be achieved through purely scientific explanation.

For Hayu, such locally rooted narratives do not merely supplement scientific interpretation but situate it within a broader cultural and experiential context, rendering geological knowledge more relatable and emotionally resonant for visitors. This integrative approach reflects the core ethos of geoparks as spaces where natural and cultural heritage are understood not as separate domains but as interdependent layers of meaning that are continually negotiated through interpretation and experience. Especially in practice, processes of valuing and conserving natural and cultural heritage frequently overlap (Taylor & Lennon, 2011), as geological features become entangled with cultural identities, livelihoods, and historical narratives, thereby blurring categorical boundaries and reinforcing the relational character of heritage.

This integrative orientation is clearly illustrated by Tya's reflection on the 1929 Mount Batur eruption. He interpreted the eruption not merely as a discrete geological event but as a catalyst for ecological regeneration and cultural transformation. Fertile volcanic soils enabled new vegetation to flourish, reshaped agricultural practices and food traditions, and inspired enduring rituals of renewal. Through this interpretive lens, geoparks emerge as living landscapes shaped through a sequential yet interconnected process: abiotic foundations influence biotic system, which over time generate cultural meanings and social practices (Dowling & Newsome, 2018). Within this configuration, geology functions as the foundational layer of interpretation, providing the primary reference point through which ecological processes and cultural expressions are understood.

At the same time, Tya emphasises that interpretive entry points should remain deliberately flexible and be strategically selected in accordance with a geopark's thematic focus and intended visitor experience. His account complicates the widely held assumption that geopark interpretation must always begin with geological explanation, as he explained:

The interpretive framework depends on the geopark's theme. If geology is the aspect being foregrounded, then geology becomes the primary framework, with cultural and biological elements serving as complementary components. Conversely, if culture is the focus—such as in the case of the Trunyan Village geotrail—culture serves as the primary framework, while geological sites play a supporting role. This illustrates that we are not simply 'geology-centric' in our approach; instead, we aim to position tourism to enable visitors to understand the place beyond geology alone.

This emphasis on flexible interpretive entry points reflects a deliberate response to dominant governance and institutional discourses in which geology is often positioned as the primary—if not privileged—anchor of geopark value. Within UNESCO Global Geoparks

and Indonesian geopark governance alike, geological heritage functions as the formal basis for geopark designation, evaluation, and legitimacy. As a result, local guides frequently encounter expectations—whether from management authorities, training curricula, or visiting officials—that interpretation should foreground geological processes and scientific explanations. It is against this backdrop that Tya distinguishes his approach from a strictly geology-centric model. He does not reject the centrality of geology; rather, he resists the assumption that geological facts must always serve as the initial interpretive lens through which visitor encounter place.

This flexibility is significant because it reframes interpretation as a process of narrative configuration rather than linear explanation. Interpretation becomes less about transmitting geological facts in a predetermined sequence and more about assembling stories that connect abiotic processes, ecological dynamics, and cultural meanings in ways that are situationally relevant. When culture or biodiversity is foregrounded, geological significance does not disappear; instead, it is recontextualised within narratives that resonate more directly with visitors' interests, values, emotions, and lived experiences. This approach aligns with Larwood and Worton's (2018) argument that effective geotourism interpretation depends not only on geological expertise but on the guide's capacity to animate geological narratives by situating them within broader environmental and cultural contexts.

Importantly, Tya's insistence on moving beyond a geology-centric approach also reflects the practical realities of guiding work. Despite their central role in mediating geopark narratives, local guides frequently operate within practical and structural limitations that restrict both the depth and coherence of integrated interpretation. Participants consistently identified a gap between interpretive ambition and scientific confidence, particularly in relation to geological and ecological knowledge. As Mami, a 35-year-old member of the Lombok Tourism Association, explained, this gap reflects broader systemic challenges—limited training opportunities, insufficient institutional support, and restricted access to scientific resources—that structure everyday guiding practice:

One of the biggest challenges we face is understanding geological terminology, especially when identifying different rock types. I recall a time at a waterfall when a visitor asked about a specific rock, and I struggled to answer. This highlights our limitations, as our expertise is not in geology. We can typically explain how general processes work, such as how pumice forms from rapid cooling and evaporation during a volcanic eruption, within our knowledge. However, when it comes to precise classification, explaining the exact type or determining the age of the rock, we face challenges.

Mami's account illustrates a central tension within geopark interpretation: local guides are encouraged—through UNESCO designation criteria, national geopark policies, and training frameworks—to integrate geological heritage into their narratives, yet their capacity to do so is limited. Translating geology into meaningful visitor experiences requires more than factual knowledge; it demands the ability to reinterpret scientific concepts through stories that resonate with local contexts and visitor sensibilities. This dual requirement—scientific literacy combined with narrative competence—was rarely addressed in formal training programmes, which tended to prioritise the transmission of geological facts rather than supporting guides in bridging scientific knowledge with their own experiential and cultural understanding of place.

This limitation is sometimes further shaped by the socio-educational backgrounds of many guides, who often enter the tourism sector through informal pathways and possess limited exposure to formal scientific education. Consequently, engagement with advanced geological knowledge—particularly its technical terminology, classificatory systems, and temporal scales—frequently mediated through partial understanding, simplified explanations, or, at times, avoidance strategies. Therefore, in practice, many guides adopt a cautious interpretive approach, strategically managing both the content and depth of their explanations to maintain credibility in visitor encounters.

Seen in this light, Tya's earlier emphasis on interpretive flexibility should not be read as purely voluntary or organic interpretive preference. Rather, it reflects a pragmatic response to uneven knowledge infrastructures and asymmetric expectations embedded within geopark governance. While local guides are institutionally positioned as intermediaries expected to seamlessly integrate geology, biodiversity, and culture, the burden of this integration often falls on them without commensurate access to scientific resources, training, or authoritative reference materials. As a result, guides must navigate a persistent gap between institutional ideals and practical capacities.

Within this gap, allowing culture or lived experience to serve as an interpretive entry point becomes a more reliable and accessible framework for narration—one that draws on locally held authority rather than externally validated expertise. Cultural narratives are deeply embedded in lived experience, oral tradition, and collective memory, making them more intuitive for guides to articulate and legible to diverse visitor audiences. Culture thus functions not merely as supplementary context but as an organising logic through which geological phenomena can be rendered intelligible and relatable. In this sense, geopark designation may paradoxically intensify the articulation of cultural heritage, as guides are

encouraged to translate local narratives for global audiences despite persistent constraints on geological expertise.

This dynamic becomes particularly visible in the account of Urya, a national-level actor who frequently conducts training and issues guidelines for geotour guides. In delineating the distinction between general tour guides and geotourism guides, she emphasised the latter's obligation to master geological knowledge alongside cultural understanding:

So, this is where the difference lies. A general tour guide talks about tourist destinations in a broad, general way. In contrast, a geotourism guide must truly understand geology—understanding the site's history as well as its geological background. A general tour guide would not be able to explain in detail, for example, why at the Maros-Pangkep UGGp [South Sulawesi, Eastern Indonesia] there are handprints on the rocks (Figure 7.5) and what they mean. These features have cultural significance. The question then is: what is the geological explanation behind them?

Yet, despite her explicit insistence on geological narration, the example Urya herself mobilises reveals a telling slippage. Her point of illustration foregrounds the cultural and historical meaning of the handprints rather than the geological processes that produced the rock surface on which they appear. In doing so, she inadvertently reproduces the very interpretive pattern she seeks to correct: the prioritisation of culturally legible markers over abstract geological formations. This suggests that cultural framing is not simply a compensatory strategy adopted by under-resourced local guides, but a deeply embedded mode of interpretation that circulates across institutional levels, including among those tasked with enforcing geoscientific standards.

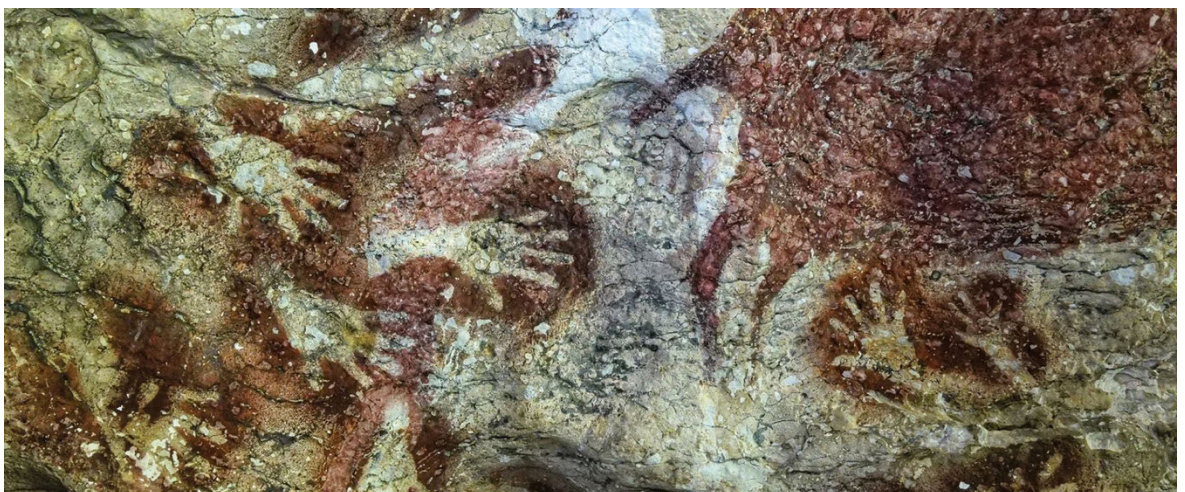


Figure 7.5 Handprints on the rocks within a geosite of Maros-Pangkep UGGp
(source: *ourislands.id*—Barry Kusuma)

A similar interpretive orientation emerges in the account of Mana, a 44-year-old official from the Geology Agency, who explicitly emphasised the inseparability of cultural elements from geological interpretation:

When giving explanations, it's not only about geological knowledge; it can also encompass culture and biodiversity, which are connected to the geological product themselves. For example, at Batur UGGp, there are several temples built from different types of stone, and these material differences are linked to volcanic processes in certain period of time. This is what makes the site compelling—because culture is embedded within it. The volcanic products themselves also support the interpretation, creating a more holistic narrative.

Here, culture does not operate as an illustrative add-on to geological explanation, but as an organising framework through which volcanic processes, built heritage, and lived religious practice are mutually constituted and made intelligible. Volcanic products function simultaneously as geological indicators and cultural media: they register eruptive histories while also materialising social relations and ritual practices within the landscape. Through this dual function, geological formations are not presented as inert scientific objects, but as active elements in ongoing cultural life. This framing underscores how geological knowledge is most effectively communicated when embedded within culturally meaningful landscape where scientific explanation, heritage, and lived experience intersect.

This caution is echoed in Sugan's reflections as an active geotour guide in Lombok, who similarly negotiates the tension between institutional expectations for geological expertise and the practical realities of guiding:

I tend to avoid lengthy discussions with visitors about geological information because I do not have in-depth expertise in the field. Although we receive some training, we typically focus on highlighting only the essential aspects rather than providing detailed scientific explanations.

Sugan's account reflects a pragmatic approach shared by many guides who are acutely aware of the limits of their expertise and the risks of misinformation. As a result, geological interpretation is often reduced to surface-level descriptions—such as identifying lava flows or rock colours—without fully articulating the deeper processes that link geology to ecological systems or cultural practices. While this strategy protects guides' interactional confidence in visitor encounters, it simultaneously fragments the integrative narrative envisioned by UNESCO and national frameworks, revealing a disconnect between governance ideals and everyday interpretive practice.

These uneven outcomes extend beyond geology to biodiversity. Suad, a member of a Lombok business association and practising geotour guide, highlighted marked disparities in interpretive confidence:

Biodiversity remains an area where our knowledge is still quite limited. For example, although there is the endemic Celepuk Owl, I have never actually seen one myself, which shows how little we still know about the region's flora and fauna. ... Cultural interpretation, however, is where we are more confident. Even before receiving formal training, we often shared stories about local tradition and heritage. After learning how these cultural elements are connected to natural and geological phenomena, our storytelling has become much deeper and more meaningful.

Suad's account reveals a hierarchy of interpretive confidence shaped by differing levels of accessibility and familiarity. While guides may recognise species or habitats through everyday encounters, they often lack a systematic understanding of ecological relationships or their connections to geological processes and cultural practices. Moreover, unlike geological features—which are often visible, fixed, and spatially anchored—biodiversity is dynamic, seasonal, unpredictable, and sometimes unobservable, posing additional challenges for consistent interpretation in the field. As a result, biodiversity is frequently communicated through fragmented observations rather than as an integrated component of the geopark's broader abiotic-biotic-cultural system.

While some participants—such as Mami, a member of the Lombok Tourism Association—perceived existing institutional arrangements as constraining, Suad's reflections point to a more enabling dimension of the geopark framework. These divergent perceptions can be understood in relation to participant's differing positionalities, degrees of involvement in geopark activities, and access to interpretive resources. Mami emphasised that formal training programmes provided limited support for guides seeking to integrate scientific knowledge with their own experiential and cultural understandings of place, particularly where training focused on the delivery of technical information rather than on developing interpretive competence.

By contrast, Suad's account highlights how the geopark structure and its associated tourism opportunities can enhance interpretive practice, especially in relation to cultural narratives. As a practicing geotour guide actively engaged in geopark initiatives, Suad had greater exposure to formal interpretive platform and materials—such as guidebooks, pocket maps, and leaflets—produced through geopark training programmes. These resources supported him in articulating familiar cultural stories that are deeply embedded in everyday life and social practice, enabling local knowledge to be translated into more structured, confident,

and meaningful interpretive narratives. In this way, uneven access to institutional support and interpretive infrastructures helps explain why the geopark framework is experienced as both constraining and enabling by different actors.

In practice, these uneven processes of integration are clearly manifested in the interpretation design of geotrails in Batur UGGp. Rather than constituting a purely technical or aesthetic issue of interpretation design, it should be understood as a structural outcome of the institutional arrangements analysed in Chapter 6. Geotrails in Batur UGGp are conceived, planned, and implemented within a tourism-led governance framework characterised by fragmented authority, overlapping bureaucratic mandates and early dominance by tourism agencies. These conditions help explain why guides consistently prioritise cultural dimensions in their interpretive practice. With strategic control concentrated at higher administrative levels and limited opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration or community participation, interpretation planning is largely detached from the realities of everyday guiding. As a result, interpretive frameworks tend to privilege short-term tourism consideration, such as visual appeal and product differentiation, over integrative approaches that meaningfully connect geological, ecological, and cultural heritage.

Under these conditions, cultural interpretation becomes a key site of agency for guides. Cultural narratives draw on everyday experience, oral histories, and socially embedded knowledge that guides can confidently mobilise without relying on specialised scientific resources or institutional mediation. The prioritisation of cultural dimensions therefore reflects not simply individual preference, but a pragmatic response to institutional arrangements that limit ecological and interdisciplinary interpretation while encouraging marketable, easily communicable forms of heritage storytelling.

This institutional logic is also evident in the predominance of a site-led approach to geotrail design. The mapping (Figure 7.6) and interpretation panels (Figure 7.7) prioritise the identification and classification of individual points of interest—volcanic landforms, sacred sites, viewpoints, and settlements—because such discrete elements are easily legible, marketable, and manageable within bureaucratic and tourism planning systems. However, this logic comes at the expense of relational storytelling. The absence of overarching interpretive theme or narrative sequencing reflects not only design choices but also the lack of institutional mechanisms to integrate geological science, ecological knowledge, and local cultural meanings into coherence interpretive framework. Consequently, the landscape is presented as a series of isolated attractions rather than an evolving system shaped by long-term geological processes and human-environment interactions.

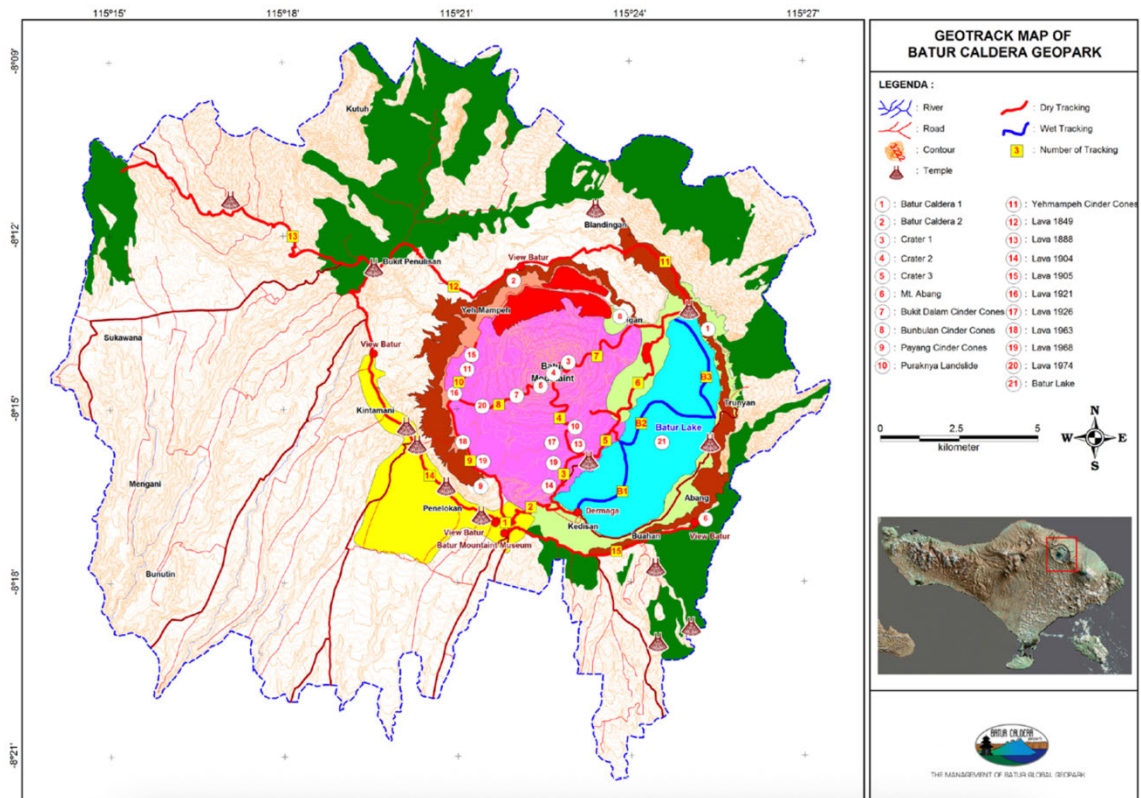


Figure 7.6 Geotrails map of Batur UGGp
(source: Management Body of Batur UGGp, 2026)

This interpretive reductionism is further reinforced by the design of the interpretation panels, which rely on a descriptive and compartmentalised mode of communication. Rather than guiding visitors through an overarching interpretive narrative, the panels typically present factual information about individual features in isolation. Geological processes are explained independently from their ecological implications, while cultural sites are described without reference to the volcanic forces that shape soils, vegetation patterns, land-use practices, and local cosmologies. As a result, geological, biological, and cultural elements are placed alongside one another without being meaningfully connected, encouraging visitors to perceive them as distinct and self-contained domains rather than as interdependent components of a single, evolving landscape.

By separating these elements, interpretation limits visitors' capacity to understand the landscape as a relational and processual assemblage, instead reinforcing a static and segmented conception of heritage that aligns more closely with classificatory and touristic logics than with the lived and continually evolving realities of the place.



Figure 7.7 Interpretation panels of Batur UGGp
(source: Author, 2024)

This uneven integration is also evident at the institutional level, particularly in the interpretive approach adopted by the Batur Geopark Museum. As an institutional gateway to the geopark, the museum is intended to play a central role in communicating the integrative geo-bio-culture framework that underpins the UNESCO Global Geopark model. According to Pian, a 46-year-old staff member of the Batur Geopark Museum, the museum was conceptually designed to embody this integrative vision through both its spatial and narrative organisation:

Ideally, visitors are encouraged to visit the museum before entering the geopark area. The museum serves as a miniature representation of the geopark, providing visitors with an overview of what can be found within the site, including key attractions and geosites. Substantively, the museum introduces the three main dimensions of the geopark: geological, biological, and cultural diversity. The interpretive flow is deliberately structured to begin with geology, then with biodiversity, and conclude with culture.

In conceptual terms, this sequencing reflects an understanding of interconnection rather than separation. However, despite this integrative intent, the museum's exhibition design largely presents each dimension in isolation (Figure 7.8). Geological displays focus on rock identification and volcanic processes; biodiversity sections catalogue flora and fauna; and cultural exhibits highlight traditions, rituals, and crafts as discrete thematic units. This

compartmentalisation reflects an institutional strategy aimed at clarity and accessibility—particularly for visitors with limited prior knowledge—by organising information into linear and easily digestible categories. Yet this approach also exposes a gap between conceptual aspiration and practical implementation. By privileging thematic separation over narrative integration, the museum leaves the relationships among geology, ecology, and culture largely implicit rather than explicitly articulated. As a result, its capacity to communicate the holistic, interconnected logic that underpins the geopark’s interpretive framework is constrained, reinforcing the broader pattern of uneven integration identified across geotrails and governance structures in Batur UGGp.

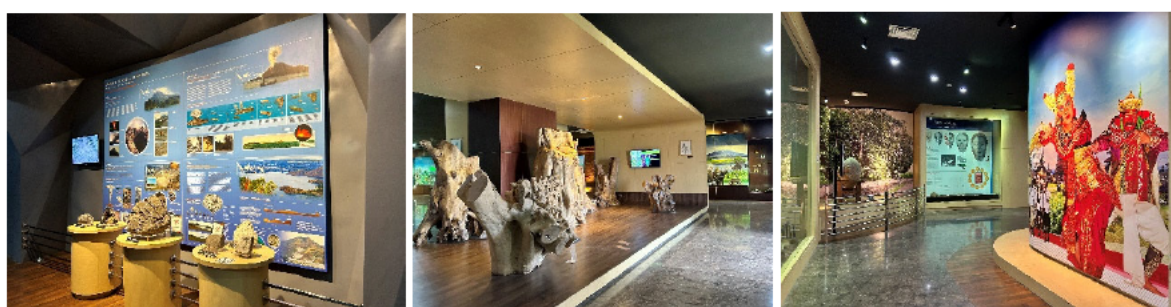


Figure 7.8 Geology, biodiversity, and cultural displays within Batur UGGp Museum
(source: Author, 2024)

Meanwhile, in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, geotrail design demonstrates a more explicit integration of narrative through the use of clearly defined thematic trails. Unlike the site-led and inventory-based approach observed in Batur UGGp, Rinjani-Lombok UGGp’s geotrails are intentionally structured around overarching storylines that link geological processes, ecological dynamics, and cultural meanings into a coherent interpretive journey. This narrative-driven approach reflects a more collaborative and process-oriented model of interpretation development.

As Waid reflected on the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp geotrail design process, interpretive narratives are developed through sustained engagement with a broad range of actors:

We encourage not only site managers but also local communities living around the sites and tourism operators, such as local guides, HPI, and ASITA members, to develop storytelling for each trail. To support this, we held a series of workshops that brought together experts in geology, biodiversity, and local culture, as well as community figures who shared valuable insights. Through these sessions, participants learned how to translate this knowledge into compelling, consistent stories about the geopark. They were also trained to communicate these stories effectively, using simple and engaging language that helps visitors easily understand and appreciate the key themes of each trail.

This participatory interpretive process reflects and is enabled by the cooperative and socially embedded governance environment identified in Chapter 6. In Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, stronger grassroots receptiveness, livelihood diversification incentives, and horizontal coordination through BAPPEDA have created institutional conditions conducive to collaboration and trust-building. Informal interpersonal networks and sustained engagement across sectors have further stabilised relationships among community actors, technical agencies, and tourism operators, reducing conflict and facilitating smoother implementation of geopark initiatives. Within this governance context, interpretive narratives are not imposed from above but negotiated through interaction, allowing storytelling to emerge relationally through community participation and the reinterpretation of everyday landscapes as meaningful geosites.

This integration of interpretation is clearly reflected in the geotrails map (Figure 7.9), which organises Rinjani-Lombok UGGp into four thematic trails that seek to weave together geological, ecological, and cultural elements. Based on the narrative presented by the management board through its official website (rinjanigeopark.com), the geotrail are structured to foreground specific temporal and spatial dimension of the landscape while collectively constructing a comprehensive narrative of the island's geoheritage:

- 1) *Trail of Ancient Volcano in the West Coast of Lombok* highlights geological remnants of early volcanic activity, including breccia, lava flows, pillow lava, intrusive rocks, and distinctive volcanic landforms shaped by successive tectonic and eruptive processes.
- 2) *Trail of Ancient Volcanic in Sembalun Valley* presents the geological history of the Sembalun Valley and its surrounding landscape as part of an ancient volcanic system, while also tracing patterns of human settlement an everyday life from early periods to the present.
- 3) *Trail of The Youngest Volcano* focuses on the 1257 Samalas eruption, one of the most significant volcanic events in the region, which led to the formation of the Samalas Caldera and Segara Anak Lake.
- 4) *Trail of Culture, Landscape, and the People of Rinjani* emphasises the long-term interactions between human communities and the volcanic environment, illustrating how Rinjani's geological activity has shaped local livelihoods, environmental knowledge, and cultural practices.



Figure 7.9 Rinjani-Lombok UGGp Geotrail Map
(source: Rinjani UGGp Management Board, 2018)

Rinjani-Lombok UGGp trails reveal a consistent interpretive structure in which geological heritage functions as the primary entry point for narration. Across all four thematic trails, geology provides the foundational explanatory framework through which biodiversity, culture, and social life are largely presented as outcomes of volcanic processes rather than as autonomous domains with their own intrinsic dynamics and values. This geology-first approach aligns closely with the scientific origins of the geopark concept, particularly its obligation to demonstrate geological significance to UNESCO audiences. However, this alignment also subtly establishes geology as the dominant epistemic authority, shaping how other forms of knowledge are incorporated and legitimised.

For local guides, this hierarchy of knowledge creates interpretive challenges similar to those observed in Batur UGGp, where limited access to scientific geological training constrained guide's confidence and agency. While guides possess rich cultural and experiential understandings of place, articulating these knowledges within a framework that privileges formal geological expertise can be difficult, often requiring translation into scientific terms that are not readily accessible through everyday practice.

As a result, thematic integration across the geotrails is achieved not through an equal weighting of geology, biodiversity, and culture, but through a hierarchical narrative structure. Geological processes act as the organising logic, while ecological and cultural elements are selectively mobilised insofar as they can be traced back to volcanic origins, such as presented in the *Trail of Ancient Volcano in the West Coast of Lombok* (Figure 7.10). Within this framework, biodiversity is present but comparatively under-emphasised.



Figure 7.10 Trail of Ancient Volcano in the West Coast of Lombok
(source: rinjanigeopark.com, 2026)

This interpretive orientation has important implications for how authenticity and participation are articulated within the geopark. On one hand, the trails effectively demonstrate the interconnectedness of landscape and society, reinforcing a sense of place

rooted in long-term environmental processes. On the other hand, by framing cultural practice and local wisdom primarily as adaptive responses to volcanism, interpretation risks slipping into a form of environmental determinism (Ernste & Philo, 2009; Meyer & Guss, 2017). Social, historical, and political dimensions—such as migration histories, land tenure arrangements, conservation conflicts, or unequal access to tourism benefits—remain largely outside the interpretive frame. Authenticity is therefore constructed through alignment with geo-scientific narratives rather than through the full diversity of lived experience and social contestation.

Crucially, this interpretive hierarchy cannot be separated from the governance structures of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. Although community participation is formally encouraged and frequently invoked in policy discourse, the framing of interpretation remains strongly influenced by expert-led modes of knowledge production. Geological expertise—embedded within scientific institutions, technical agencies, and UNESCO geopark criteria—carries greater institutional authority than ecological or cultural knowledge rooted in local practice. This epistemic asymmetry shapes which forms of knowledge are prioritised, standardised, and rendered visible in official interpretive outputs, including the geotrail map, signage, and online narratives. Therefore, knowledge production within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp tends to remain consultative rather than genuinely co-productive. This curated form of inclusivity reinforces particular ways of knowing the landscape, privileging scientific and managerial interpretations while positioning local knowledge as supplementary rather than foundational. Consequently, geology becomes the primary organising framework through which other dimensions of the landscape are explained and legitimised. In this sense, the geotrails function not only as interpretive tools but also as governance instruments that spatially stabilise a particular vision of integration that aligns with institutional priorities.

Overall, this section demonstrates that interpretation operates as a key mechanism through which geological heritage is transformed into a governable and marketable resource within geopark contexts. Interpretation does not merely communicate pre-existing geological value; it actively produces value by selecting, simplifying, and narratively organising geological features into coherent trails, exhibits, and experiences. Although geopark policy frameworks promote holistic geo-bio-cultural integration, the empirical material reveals a persistent gap between integrative ideals and everyday interpretive practice. Interpretive flexibility—particularly the strategic foregrounding of culture or lived experience—emerge as a pragmatic response to epistemic asymmetries, uneven access to scientific resources, and

institutional expectations that place integrative responsibility on local guides without commensurate support.

Comparative analysis of Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps highlights how governance arrangements shape interpretive form: tourism-led, centralised systems tend to produce site-based and compartmentalised interpretation, while more collaborative governance enables narrative coherence and thematic integration. Yet even where integration is more successfully articulated, geological knowledge remains the dominant epistemic anchor, framing ecological and cultural elements primarily as derivative outcomes of volcanic processes. Interpretation thus simultaneously enables participation and reproduces hierarchy—enhancing cultural visibility while stabilising expert-led modes of knowledge production. In this sense, geotrails and museums function not only as interpretive infrastructures but as instruments of governance that spatially and narratively fix particular understandings of heritage, authenticity, and value, while marginalising alternative social, historical, and political ways of knowing the landscape.

Chapter 8 Rethinking Authenticity Through the Tourists' Perspective

This chapter presents the findings from Study 2, which explores how tourists perceive and interpret authentic geotourism experiences within two Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGps): Batur UGGp in Bali and Rinjani-Lombok UGGp in Lombok. It addresses the second research question: “*How do tourists perceive the authenticity of their geotourism experiences in Indonesian UGGp?*” By examining the meanings tourists attach to their experiences, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of authenticity that accounts for the dynamic, subjective ways in which it is constructed through place.

The findings reveal that authenticity is not an inherent quality of places or experiences, but rather a fluid, evolving construct shaped by a complex interplay of personal expectations, cultural backgrounds, and the specific context of individual encounters. This finding highlights a tension between institutional narratives, particularly UNESCO’s emphasis on geological distinctiveness, and tourists lived experiences. While UNESCO Global Geoparks are designed to promote the unique value of geological heritage, findings suggest that this narrative does not always resonate with or influence visitors in a meaningful way. For many visitors, the experience of authenticity is not necessarily tied to UNESCO’s construction of geological knowledge or its appreciation of earth science. Instead, it often emerges from more romanticised ideas of nature and emotionally charged aspects of their visit, such as breathtaking views, sensory engagement with the natural environment, or the feeling of tranquility that comes from being immersed in nature, informed through romanticised constructions of Southeast Asian landscapes as wild, lush, untouched, and exotic.

The findings shed light on how normative frameworks, such as UNESCO’s and supply-side tourism approaches, sit in tension with the emotionally driven ways in which visitors engage with and construct these landscapes. This finding raises questions about the potential of UNESCO-managed geoparks as a means to render place distinctiveness through geotourism within the context of a competitive international tourism market, as well as the potential for UNESCO Global Geoparks to construct community-led, authentic experiences, given the influence of international visitors in defining place-based authenticity.

This chapter is structured into three main sections, each contributing to a deeper understanding of how authenticity is perceived and co-constructed by visitors within geotourism experiences in UGGps, and how this sits in tension with both UNESCO's and the supply side's framing of place. The first section examines the diverse ways in which tourists conceptualise authenticity, highlighting how personal values and backgrounds shape their interpretations of what constitutes an authentic geotourism encounter. This section reveals a spectrum of perceptions of authenticity, ranging from cultural and spiritual immersion to sensory engagement with the landscape and its biodiversity, and from encounters with the familiarity and unfamiliarity in everyday life.

The second section delves into how tourists romanticise geoparks, portraying the UGGps' landscapes as 'wild'. It discusses how the idealisation of 'untouched' or 'pristine' nature plays distinct roles in shaping perceptions of authenticity among both international and domestic tourists, albeit in different ways. These romantic lenses influence tourists' emotional connections to the landscape and reflect broader imaginaries rooted in western ideals of nature and conservation. By privileging aesthetic ideals of 'wilderness,' some tourists may inadvertently limit their engagement with the local cultural context and the educational missions central to UNESCO Global Geoparks.

The final section further brings this romantic lens into tension with the practical realities of destination management. While some tourists seek out 'wild' landscapes as a sign of authenticity, their experiences are often shaped by carefully curated encounters designed to highlight not only the geological significance, but more importantly, the local life and cultural relationships with the land. However, when tourists arrive with idealised expectations of untouched nature, the presence of certain types of human activity can be seen as detracting from the 'wildness' they associate with authentic nature. This presents a significant challenge for UNESCO Global Geoparks in Indonesia, as global tourist imaginaries may overlook or resist community-oriented narratives, alongside the infrastructural and interpretive requirements perceived as 'necessary' in the construction of nature-based tourist attractions.

8.1 Encountering Authenticity

While authenticity is widely recognized as a key factor shaping tourists' experiences and interpretations of place, much of the existing literature has been shaped by western perspectives and settings. This section builds on existing literature by exploring more

culturally nuanced and personal understandings of authenticity in the Southeast Asian context, focusing on geotourism in Indonesian UGGps.

In interviews with domestic visitors, the researcher intentionally avoided introducing the term 'authenticity' when exploring their geotourism experiences to prevent imposing a potentially limiting or unfamiliar *westernised* framework into the Indonesian fieldwork context. Despite this, participants frequently conveyed a strong sense of depth and significance in their geotourism experiences, using rich, emotive language such as *meaningful*, *unique*, *different*, and *memorable*. While domestic visitors articulated these experiences without explicitly referencing the term 'authenticity,' a few international participants did so, particularly when recounting moments of emotional resonance. Across both groups, these expressions were most often linked to experiences that evoke a sense of awe, wonder, and connection, whether through engagement with spirituality embedded in the natural landscape, encounters with biodiversity, or moment of the extraordinary within everyday life.

8.1.1 Spiritual and Sacred Dimensions of the Landscape

A central theme emerging from these accounts from both domestic and international participants was the significance of spiritual and sacred elements within the landscapes of Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps in shaping visitors' perceptions of the place's authenticity and experiences. In this context, the spiritual connection involved observing religious practices and actively engaging with or empathetically responding to the local cosmologies, rituals, sacred narratives, and religious architectures. These elements helped define the meaning and significance of the geoparks, contributing to a sense of being in a unique place and often evoking a powerful emotional or reflective response from participants.

For instance, Mount Batur in Batur UGGp was understood not so much as a geological site as a spiritually revered place in Balinese Hinduism. Lika, a 27-year-old recent university graduate from Lombok who participated in a geotour to Batur UGGp, reflected that witnessing the spiritual endurance of Hindu pilgrims on Mount Batur was both humbling and deeply inspiring. Despite the physical exhaustion from climbing the mountain, the pilgrims' determination to perform their spiritual duties left a lasting impression on her:

As a Muslim, I am used to the predominantly Muslim environment in Selong, East Lombok, where encountering Hindu communities is rare. However, in Bali, especially while climbing Mount Batur, I witnessed the strength of Hindu devotion. The hike was incredibly tiring, yet people still made the effort to reach the top to pray. That was something I found truly fascinating and inspiring.

As a Muslim unfamiliar with Hindu rituals, Lika expresses a sense of awe and admiration upon encountering Hindu devotional practice in Bali, particularly during her ascent of Mount Batur as part of the geotour she participated in. What captivates her is not merely the act of prayer itself but the level of dedication required to perform these rituals within such a physically demanding environment. Her reflection suggests that spiritual practices are experienced and interpreted not only through visual observation but also through embodied, place-based encounters in which the senses, the body, and the environment are deeply intertwined.

The spiritual dimension of Mount Batur is also apprehended most distinctly through the material expressions that structure the ascent, wherein the physical demands of climbing are continually interrupted and simultaneously enriched by material and performative expressions of the mountain's sacred life. Along the route, small shrines draped in ritual cloth and adorned with freshly prepared offerings punctuate the trail, serving as tangible markers of the sacred and points of interaction between human pilgrims and the mountain's nonhuman presence. Pilgrims frequently pause at these sites, pressing their palms together in prayer; acts that serve as both an acknowledgment of and an engagement with the mountain as an active, agentive presence. In contrast to approaches that often locate religious meaning primarily in material objects (Miller, 1987, 2002; Terzidou, Scarles, & Saunders, 2018; Terzidou, 2020), this reflexivity is grounded in the witnessing and sensing prayer as an embodied practice enacted in situ. In these moments, the mountain is experienced less as a standalone geological feature to be appreciated and more as a living, sacred landscape, leaving a lasting emotional and reflective imprint on some visitors, like Lika.

Hee, a 42-year-old researcher from South Korea who is currently based in Singapore, described a similarly profound experience during her visit to Rinjani-Lombok UGGp in Lombok. It was her first time visiting a Muslim-majority region, a trip initially motivated by her academic interest in understanding how Southeast Asian communities live with the persistent threat of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Nevertheless, rather than the expected themes of disaster and resilience, what resonated most with Hee was the deeply embedded spiritual atmosphere that permeated daily life in Lombok. She described how the

rhythmic echo of the *Azzan* (Islamic call to prayer), heard multiple times a day, and the omnipresence of mosques across the island left her with a heightened sense of cultural immersion:

I had never been to a Muslim-majority country before, so visiting Lombok was a wholly new and refreshing experience. Every few hours, I could hear the entire city filled with prayer, and I noticed mosques everywhere across the island. It made me realize how religious the place is, which shaped my experience. Because it was my first time in an Islamic culture, it struck me even more—it felt unique, authentic, and unlike anything I had experienced before.

For Hee, the spiritual resonance of Rinjani's landscape was not primarily expressed through visible rituals, but rather through the everyday presence of Islam embedded in the island's sonic and spatial rhythms, offering a different, yet equally immersive, form of sacred connection. The sound, sights, and cultural cues associated with Islamic devotion become more than background details; they heighten Hee's emotional and sensory awareness, anchoring her experience in the lived realities of the place. These spontaneous, uncured expressions of spirituality are not framed or staged for tourist consumption but were part of the everyday life of those inhabiting the geopark.

Meanwhile, Nell, a 27-year-old visitor from the Netherlands who had visited both geopark areas, thoughtfully reflected on how cultural and religious contexts shaped her tourist performance, particularly during her time in Lombok. Coming from a secular western background and not identifying with any specific religion, Nell initially approached the journey with an open mind. However, being immersed in a predominantly Muslim community prompted her to become more attuned to the cultural environment around her. She described how the visibility of religious practice led her to reflect on her own presence in the space and adjust her behavior accordingly, including being more mindful of how she dressed:

In Lombok, the majority of the population is Muslim, whereas in Bali, Hinduism is more prominent. The interactions with locals also felt different due to their distinct cultural values, especially in clothing. In Lombok, the predominantly Muslim culture is reflected in how people dress. Since I am not religious, I have become more mindful of adapting, such as avoiding bikinis in certain places and dressing more appropriately. That awareness stood out to me the most.

Nell's cultural sensitivity reflects a performative engagement with local norms, in which authenticity is not merely passively observed but co-constructed through an ongoing, contextually aware, and responsive process of ethical, embodied performativity. Rather than

simply observing cultural differences from a distance, Nell positioned herself as a participant in the social and spiritual landscape she was visiting by carefully adjusting her behavior in subtle ways that acknowledged and respected the host community's values and expectations.

This mode of engagement stands in contrast to patterns identified in previous research, which suggest that non-Muslim tourists frequently struggle to adapt to specific cultural dimensions of Muslim-majority destinations, including norms surrounding dress, gender relations, and everyday social conduct (Brown & Osman, 2017; Ghaderi, Hall, Scott, & Béal, 2020). Nell's willingness to adapt instead indicates that she perceived Rinjani-Lombok UGGp as the site of the 'authentic' destination—one that could not be accessed through insulated or standardised tourism infrastructures. By moving beyond the comfort and predictability of the 'tourist bubbles', she encountered environments not designed to accommodate tourists' expectations of familiarity or comfort (Garrod & Nicholls, 2022). This exposure heightened the need for cultural negotiation and behavioural adjustment, reinforcing an experience in which authenticity emerged through participation, ethical attentiveness, and embodied engagement with place, rather than through passive observation or consumption alone.

Nell's mode of engagement also appears to be influenced by the extended time she spent at the site. Garrod and Nicholls (2022) argue that most tourists remain in destinations for relatively short periods, reducing both the necessity and the motivation to adapt to unfamiliar cultural environments. Short-term visits often limit opportunities for sustained interaction, observation, and cultural learning, allowing tourists to rely on familiar routines or the protective structures of tourism infrastructure. In contrast, longer stays foster deeper exposure to everyday social norms and rhythms, increasing the likelihood of reflexive learning and behavioural adjustment. In Nell's case, prolonged immersion within the landscape of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp seems to have facilitated a heightened sensitivity to local expectations, reinforcing her willingness to move beyond the 'tourist bubble' and engage more fully in the social and spiritual life of the destination.

Taken together, and similar to Hee's experience, Nell's engagement was significant not because it was guided or instructed but because it emerged organically through quiet, embodied moments of cultural negotiation and self-reflection. In this way, authenticity is produced through a reflexive awareness of one's positionality to difference. Importantly, Nell's reflective engagement suggests a desire not to disrupt or impose upon this authenticity, but to contribute to it ethically and attentively, aware that her very presence could influence how the encounter unfolded.

While Newman, Bloom, and Knobe (2014) argue that people tend to perceive others' actions and behaviors as more authentic when they align with their own moral values and ethical beliefs, Lika's, Hee's, and Nell's experiences offer an alternative perspective. Their accounts suggest that in the geopark context, authenticity is not solely—or even primarily—about moral congruence. Instead, it emerges in moments where everyday cultural performances diverge from one's personal value system and sense of familiarity. Authenticity here is experienced not through confirmation of the self but through encounters with otherness, in which the distinctiveness in contrast to one's everyday life invites empathy, openness, and a willingness to engage meaningfully.

However, there were contrasts in how the two geoparks integrate and communicate these cultural elements and performances. In Batur UGGp, sacred practices and rituals often appear to be framed within the context of heritage and tourism, potentially detaching from their ongoing role in the lived experiences of local communities. By way of example, one of the most profound—and unusual—sacred practices that UNESCO has remarked as part of cultural diversity within Batur UGGp is found in Trunyan Village.

Situated on the eastern shore of Lake Batur, Trunyan is home to the Bali Aga people, an indigenous community regarded as the island's original inhabitants, who have preserved a distinct set of spiritual and ritual traditions over centuries. Central among these is an ancestral mortuary custom in which deceased bodies are not cremated, as in mainstream Balinese Hinduism, but instead placed in bamboo cages beneath the shade of the sacred Taru Menyan (Figure 8.1). According to local belief, the tree's fragrance purifies the surrounding air, neutralizing odours, allowing bodies to decompose naturally in the open.



Figure 8.1 An ancestral burial custom in Trunyan Village, Batur UGGp
(source: Author, 2024)

While this burial site continues to hold profound spiritual significance for the Trunyan community, honouring ancestral ties and the cyclical relationship between humans and nature, it has also become a prominent feature in Batur UGGp’s cultural tourism narrative as a distinctive heritage landmark. Frequently featured in tour packages and promotional materials (Figure 8.2), the site is presented as an exceptional cultural ‘must-see’, with visits commonly paired with Mount Batur and the geopark museum. Within this promotional logic, the burial site is positioned as one attraction among many, valued for its ability to complement a coherent and marketable itinerary. This framing subtly reorients the site away from its role as a locus of living spiritual practice embedded in the everyday life of the indigenous community, and towards a curated point of observation whose significance is increasingly filtered through heritage narratives designed for visitor consumption.



Figure 8.2 Geopark promotional materials that featured Trunyan Village
(source: Instagram [geoparkyouthforum.id](https://www.instagram.com/geoparkyouthforum.id), 2025)

The process at work here can be understood as one of commodification, in which the site’s meaning is reshaped through market volarisation. Spiritual significance, which is relational, ongoing, and often inaccessible to outsiders, is translated into cultural value that is legible, displayable, and economically productive. In this translation, emphasis is placed on those aspects of the site that can be easily communicated—its visual distinctiveness, historical framing, or symbolic uniqueness—while the temporal rhythms, ritual obligations, and ethical

relationships that sustain its sacredness are rendered peripheral or invisible. As a result, the burial site risks being apprehended less as a space of active spiritual engagement and more as a heritage object to be viewed, photographed, and incorporated into a tourist itinerary.

Market valorisation thus does not simply diminish spiritual significance; rather, it reconfigures how that significance is encountered. By encouraging brief, observational forms of engagement aligned with tourism schedules and expectations, commodification privileges spectatorship over participation and efficiency over attentiveness. In doing so, it subtly detaches the site from the lived practices through which its sacred character is continually reproduced, reshaping visitor encounters in ways that prioritise consumption over relational or reverential engagement.

Edo, a 26-year-old Indonesian postgraduate student who works part-time as a photographer, videographer, and tour guide, reflected that the Trunyan burial ritual is in fact the village's defining cultural uniqueness. Nevertheless, as someone who was born and raised in the nearby area, he cautioned that opening such rituals indiscriminately to all tourists raises significant ethical concerns. For Edo, these ceremonies are not staged cultural performances designed for external audiences but sacred communal practices embedded in local cosmologies and social obligations:

The unique aspect of Trunyan village is its funeral tradition, which is essentially what they are known for: the ceremonies. However, I feel it is somewhat unethical to make it openly accessible to all tourists. Still, it is undeniably something that attracts interest. The challenge, of course, is that we cannot predict when someone will pass away. So when tourists visit, there may not actually be a ceremony.

As Edo pointed out, the timing of death cannot be predicted, meaning that tourists may visit when no ceremony is taking place. Thus, the encounter must rely solely on the interpretation panels (Figure 8.3) or curated narratives provided within the village, making it impossible to guarantee the kind of 'authentic' encounter that tour narratives might implicitly promise. In this sense, Edo's reflection underscores the tension between cultural heritage as a live practice and cultural heritage as a tourism product, highlighting the ethical dilemmas that emerge when sacred traditions are incorporated into the logics of cultural display and commodification.



Figure 8.3 Terunyan's grave panel interpretation
(source: Author, 2024)

By contrast, in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, spiritual and sacred elements were often portrayed and experienced as part of everyday life. The expression of sacredness takes a different form, shaped by the Islamic cultural context integral to the everyday lives of local Sasak communities. As Hee explained earlier, one example from her experience is the *Azzan*, the Islamic call to prayer, which is broadcast from mosques five times a day, structuring the temporal flow of community life audibly. The sound reverberates across the landscape, carrying through fields, markets, and homes, creating an auditory link between the landscape and the spiritual life of its inhabitants. As such, the encounter is grounded in situ and in the everyday temporalities of the host community rather than in exceptional, performance-oriented events. This unfiltered engagement offers a form of authenticity rooted in the lived, spatial, and sonic textures of local life, illustrating how ordinary practices, when viewed through the lens of cultural differences, can assume an extraordinary significance for the outsider.

Whereas in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, such experiences of authenticity arise from immersion in encounters that are organically part of everyday life, in Batur UGGp, they may also be encountered in ways less embedded in everyday routine and more through moments of cultural dissonance. For example, Len, a 26-year-old medical student from Germany, reflected on the prohibition of swimming at Lake Batur, one of the key geosites in Batur UGGp. Len provided further insights into how perceived authenticity came through a sense of difference, surprise, and the unexpected:

I found it unique that swimming is not allowed there. I did not expect that, but given its historical and spiritual significance, it makes sense. It is quite different from Europe, where I am aware of no places that altogether prohibit swimming for such reasons.

Swimming is prohibited at Lake Batur due to its sacred status in Balinese Hinduism. The lake is believed to be the dwelling place of holy spirits and a source of spiritual purification for the local communities. As such, entering the water with leisure-based intentions is seen as disrespectful to its sanctity, in contrast to Len's Eurocentric conception of the lake as a place for aquatic leisure. While such restrictions may be unexpected—even confusing—for some tourists, they also offer important moments of cultural reflection. This perspective, partly, reflects what Urry (1990) describes as the *tourist gaze*—whereby, for Len, the lake is viewed through a Eurocentric lens, where it is considered consumable and available, valued primarily for its ability to provide leisure or pleasure—contrasting with the localised permissible rules of engagement in ways that lead to reflection. What is different here, however, is that the tourist gaze grants sole power to the visitor and the tourism industry in constructing perceptions of place, suggesting that places become understood unquestionably through the gaze of the tourist. Contrasting with this perspective, we see how Len's touristic gaze is brought into question through this encounter, forcing cultural reflection and different ways of seeing and performing in place.

At the same time, Len's inability to participate in aquatic leisure prompts a reconfiguration of her mode of tourism, shifting it towards longer, slower forms of engagement that privilege sustained physical presence and spiritual attunement to the landscape and its atmosphere. Rather than consuming the lake through anticipated leisure practices, Len becomes more attentive to how the place is felt, inhabited, and experienced over time. This transformation aligns with Larsen and Urry's (2011) reconceptualization of the tourist gaze as plural, embodied, and performative, where tourism experiences are produced not only through visual consumption but through multisensory engagements involving smellscapes, soundscapes, and touchscapes. Lake Batur, therefore, is not simply gazed upon but encountered through embodied practices that foreground alternative meanings of place, revealing how landscape can resist and reshape touristic performances.

The lake's sacred status within Balinese Hinduism resists being reduced to a site of leisure, instead forcing a confrontation with cultural values that are not negotiable. In this moment, the tourist gaze is unsettled, producing what might be considered a 'refracted gaze', whereby local cosmologies and rules of engagement challenge and reorient visitor expectations.

Notably, the encounter also demonstrates how sacredness and authenticity can serve as forces of resistance to the hegemony of the tourist gaze, opening up more reciprocal and reflective modes of seeing and being in place. The encounter illustrates that authenticity can operate not as a tourist desire staged for consumption, but as an uncompromising quality of place that, to some extent, interrupts Eurocentric frames.

This encounter was so provocative for Len that she shared it as part of the photo elicitation exercise (Figure 8.4). By choosing a wide-angle composition that stretches from the water's surface to the volcanic caldera in the background, Len conveys not only the physical scale of the landscape but also the spiritual resonance that defines the lake's sacredness. The absence of swimmers or boats in the frame draws attention to the restriction on recreational use. Instead of assuming the distance, a consumption-oriented gaze, often associated with Eurocentric tourism, confronted Len with a gaze that required her to receive rather than possess—to acknowledge the values embedded in the landscape that exceeded her own expectations or desires as a tourist.

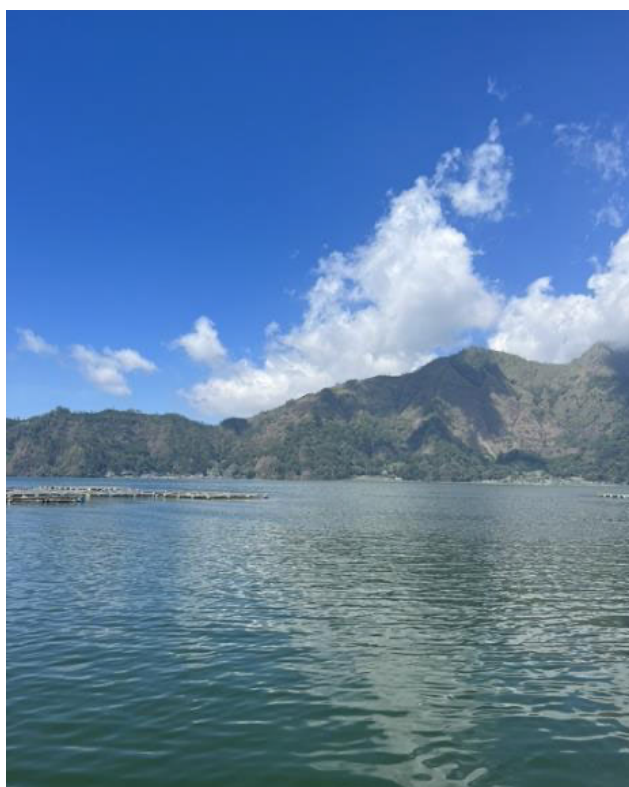


Figure 8.4 Prohibited leisure practices at Lake Batur
(source: *Len*, 2024)

In this way, authenticity emerges as a relational process that interrupts and unsettles Eurocentric frameworks. The sacred restrictions around the lake challenged Len to inhabit the gaze differently: less as an external observer extracting meaning and more as a

participant negotiating her own assumptions in relation to indigenous cultural understandings of place. Such moments reveal the possibility of a gaze that is reflexive, situated, and responsive to the cultural and spiritual values that animate the landscape. This encounter adds to existing scholarly debates regarding authenticity and the tourist gaze, in which both authenticity and the tourist gaze are understood as situated, performative processes in which tourists actively participate in and engage with place (Moore et al, 2021).

At the same time, however, while Len described this moment as spiritually significant due to the lake's sacredness, her visual framing aligns with aesthetic values commonly found in western imaginaries of authentic nature—empty landscapes, still, and visually 'pure' (Mels, 2002; Kupper, 2012). Len's discursive and visual reflections highlight important insights into the construction of authenticity by international visitors in the geoparks, whereby the absence of humans in Lake Batur, as required by Balinese Hinduism, may be read by Len as exhibiting authenticity because it adheres to westernized constructions of authentic nature as devoid of humans.

Alongside these natural and spiritual associations, cultural architectural elements within the landscape also played a significant role in shaping participants' perceptions of authenticity. These features were not perceived merely as aesthetic additions but as distinctive markers that enhanced the place's identity. For Nan, a 30-year-old participant from the United Kingdom, such elements offered her a sense of discovery and cultural richness. She recounted moments of encountering temples in unconventional locations, embedded within the landscape, such as those perched along beaches, which contrasted sharply with her previous similar encounters of 'sacred' architecture:

I cannot recall ever seeing a temple on the beach, but I have seen temples built into the mountains. It was a fascinating experience with a uniquely immersive atmosphere.

Such responses highlight how Nan constructs authenticity through the interplay of the physical, geological, and cultural landscapes. In her view, the temple seems modest in scale yet striking, growing organically from the volcanic rock on which it is built (Figure 8.5). This unique interplay between the coastal geological landscape, spiritual built environment, and cultural interpretation contributes to a layered experience that feels 'true'.



Figure 8.5 A powerful human-made temple harmoniously aligned with nature
(source: Nan, 2024)

Nan's fascination with the temple stemmed not only from its striking coastal setting but also from her sense of its uniqueness during her extended travels around Lombok. Having spent a month exploring the island, Nan developed familiarity with the region's cultural and architectural norms, allowing her to perceive this temple not simply as visually appealing, but as culturally and spatially significant within a localised frame of reference:

It was not just the beach location that stood out, but the architecture itself. This style is not widely found across Lombok, so after traveling around the island for a month, I recognized its uniqueness, which made me even more eager to visit.

Her appreciation of the temple's difference was thus shaped through a process of temporal immersion and accumulation of local knowledge. What might be unremarkable to a short-term visitor became strikingly authentic to her through comparison and familiarity, suggesting that authenticity can be influenced by temporality and familiarity. Nan's account challenges a dominant critique of contemporary tourism—that encounters with place have become increasingly superficial, with tourists more focused on capturing photogenic moments than engaging in meaningful, embodied experiences (Lund, 2023).

Her photograph (Figure 8.6) vividly underscores the importance of longer interpretive processes within the visitor experience. The first image captures the intricacy of Balinese Hindu temples, which are typically found in Bali rather than in Lombok. The ornate ornamentation and guardian statues in the second image introduce an aesthetic and spiritual grammar to Nan, which is read as atypical within the local context, a reading accessible to Nan given her temporal immersion. Her appreciation highlights how authenticity evolves, shaping diverse interpretations of what is regarded as unique and authentic.



Figure 8.6 Unique characters of the temple in Lombok
(source: Nan, 2024)

Drawing together insights from tourists, we understand that the spiritual connections experienced within Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps are crucial elements in the perception of authenticity—a somewhat surprising finding, given that the sites are promoted through the official UGGp narrative primarily for their distinctive *geological* features. The findings suggest that geological features, as standalone objects, did not feature heavily in participants' reflections on authenticity, highlighting significant disconnections regarding constructions of authenticity between the three stakeholder groups: UNESCO, the supply side, and visitors.

From UNESCO's perspective, authenticity is grounded in a predominantly Eurocentric, scientific framework in which geological features are valued as discrete objects of study—types of rocks, formed in specific ways—that can be categorised and appreciated apart from their cultural and spiritual contexts. In this mode of presentation, authenticity derives from scientific accuracy, classification, and expert validation. The visitor, however, engaged with the same geological features in a markedly different way, rarely reflecting on them as

isolated objects but instead situating them within a broader network of cultural and spiritual meaning. The geological features were not absent from visitors' authentic encounters. Instead, the geological features are central to the meaning of the encounter; yet they are not objects to be deconstructed in a scientific sense.

While geological features were thus encountered as culturally and spiritually embedded rather than scientifically dissected, participants' understandings of authenticity were not limited to the landforms themselves. Attention also shifted towards living elements of the landscape, where biodiversity introduced a different, yet complementary, dimension of authenticity grounded in ecological vitality and presence.

8.1.2 Biodiversity and Ecological Significance

Complementing a focus on culture and spirituality, wildlife and other elements of biodiversity were often described by some participants as authentic, a consequence of the spontaneity and aliveness they brought to the landscape. Wildlife encounters were rarely planned; animals move unpredictably, and ecological rhythms unfold beyond human control. It was this very informality that rendered authenticity. As Arcy, a 23-year-old data analyst from the Netherlands, shared when reflecting on a guided tour of Batur:

I think the highlight of the day was seeing a few monkeys at the top of Mount Batur (Figure 8.7). You do not get that in the Netherlands, so it was exciting to experience it in another country.

Such encounters with wildlife—particularly when fleeting or incidental—can become powerful anchors of memory, reinforcing a connection to place that feels spontaneous, unrehearsed, and consequently special and unique. For Arcy, the unexpected appearance of monkeys at the summit of Mount Batur, though not formally included in the guided trek's structured itinerary, introduced a moment of unscripted wonder that contrasted with the otherwise predictable flow of the tour. Unlike staged performances or curated landscapes, wildlife encounters are not guaranteed. The unstaged nature of this spontaneous encounter highlights the inherent paradox in UNESCO's requirements for constructing authentic tourist experiences—whereby Arcy's encounter is authentic precisely because of its unpredictability, indicating that authenticity in this context is something that can stand as an antithesis to the staged, curated, and commodified touristic encounters sought through the UNESCO requirements.



Figure 8.7 Unexpected encounters with monkeys at the top of Mount Batur
(source: Arcy, 2024)

Whilst biodiversity was key to shaping perceptions of authenticity, it was interesting to see that visitors shared starkly different perceptions regarding the richness of the flora and fauna within the geoparks. The following reflection underscores this point, whereby, in contrast to Arcy, Hee drew attention to the perceived absence of biodiversity in Batur UGGp and the implications this had for her sense of engagement:

When I first visited Batur, I asked around about its biodiversity. The response I got was mainly about the Kintamani dog, which, to be honest, is not really related to the Geopark itself. That made me realize that Batur has less biodiversity, likely due to the region's geological characteristics.

The divergent responses from Arcy and Hee suggest that the presence of fauna is interpreted as an authentic expression of natural diversity, but that this authenticity is not uniformly perceived. Instead, the same site can yield divergent meanings depending on which species or biodiversity features were encountered, highlighted, or rendered legible through interpretation. This suggests that visitor perceptions of biodiversity may not always align directly with ecological conditions. Instead, they reflected the interplay of expectations, interpretive cues, and cultural framing. In this sense, Batur UGGp becomes a valuable case for illustrating how the perceived authenticity and distinctiveness of geoparks are shaped by the communication of these biodiversity features and the spontaneous, unpredictable lived experiences of different visitors.

This dynamic also illustrates why UNESCO and geopark managers often privilege curated and predictable encounters as the preferred expression of authenticity. While spontaneous, serendipitous moments can feel especially authentic, they cannot be guaranteed and may leave other visitors dissatisfied when nothing similar occurs. However, by scripting authenticity into controlled experiences, the very qualities that make them feel genuine are diminished, leading them to risk appearing manufactured and overly constructed. This raises broader questions about the prioritisation of place distinctiveness and authenticity, whether authenticity can be managed and staged, and the extent to which its very essence lies in the unpredictability that such management practices inevitably diminish.

What is interesting here is that Batur was designated a UNESCO Global Geopark due to its distinctive geological features. Nevertheless, it is these same features that diminish Hee's perceptions of biodiversity and, in turn, its consequential distinctiveness. For Hee, this paradox becomes evident when locals pointed to the Kintamani dog as an emblem of biodiversity. While the dog holds cultural value and is associated with the region, it is not a wild species tied to the caldera's geological or ecological processes, as she had expected. This disconnect highlighted to Hee that there was no strong, visible link between biodiversity and geology in Batur UGGp.

In contrast, encounters with biodiversity in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp were described as far more immediate and immersive. Mett, a 22-year-old Master student from France, recalls her first visit to Gili Trawangan, a geosite located in the coastal area of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, as a deeply immersive, multisensory experience shaped by the presence of vibrant marine biodiversity:

My first impression was that it felt like paradise—the blue sea, the white sand, the lively parties, and the vibrant atmosphere filled with young people. It was also the first time I saw so many fish, colourful corals, and turtles, which made the experience even more unforgettable.

In her reflection, the interplay of environmental elements—marine life, seascape, and social atmosphere—converged to produce a rich and layered sense of place. The visibility of marine biodiversity, from colourful corals to unexpected turtle sightings, played a pivotal role in intensifying her emotional response and reinforcing a sense of authenticity. These experiences were not curated or staged but unfolded spontaneously, making them feel both personal and meaningful. It adds an untamed, unpredictable quality to the experience,

reinforcing the idea that authentic encounters in UGGps are often rooted in the unpredictable rhythms of nature rather than in formal interpretation of planned itineraries.

Importantly, Arcy's, Hee's, and Mett's accounts offer a nuanced disruption of the normative and often deterministic narrative. Together, they foreground the fluid, context-dependent nature of geotourism authenticity, challenging the tendency to treat abiotic features as fixed and foundational sources of meaning in geoparks. Rather than privileging geology as the origin point, their reflections open space for understanding authenticity as something co-constructed through diverse, situated encounters with biodiversity, nature, and place. This reframing invites a more critical stance—one that remains attentive to the risk of naturalising complex socio-environmental relationships.

These reflections offer a compelling reconsideration of the geotourism model advanced by Dowling and Newsome (2018), an ABC approach and evident within UNESCO's interpretive approach for geotourism practice in UGGps—which positions the Abiotic environment (geological formations, landforms, and climate) as the foundational layer through which the Biotic (flora, fauna, ecosystem), and the Cultural (human activity, heritage, and identity) emerges. Within this logic, authentic geotourism experiences are understood to begin with and be grounded in geological awareness, a view that assumes a linear and hierarchical relationship between nature and culture.

This brings us back to the foundational concept of distinctiveness, which lies at the heart of UNESCO's Global Geopark mandate. As this research has demonstrated, distinctiveness is not a static attribute tied solely to either geological, ecological, cultural, or social processes—it is a product of meaning-making, lived experience, and ongoing negotiation between people and place. Nevertheless, despite this complexity, many geopark interpretive frameworks continue to rely heavily on treating geological features as fixed and foundational, which resonates with *UNESCO's gaze*, positioning them as the primary source of value and meaning within the landscape, to be appreciated by visitors as distinct and separate features. It implies a one-way causal relationship in which physical environments passively shape ecological and cultural patterns, rather than acknowledging the complex, reciprocal interactions between humans, ecosystems, and the geological world. Such approaches risk flattening the rich, multidimensional character of geoparks.

In contrast, more contemporary and relational approaches to landscape and heritage argue that cultural landscapes are not merely the end result of environmental conditions, but co-constitutive elements in a dynamic, processual system (Aktürk & Dastgerdi, 2021;

Cockburn, Rosenberg, Copteros, Cornelius, Libala, Metcalfe, and Waal, 2020; Bürgi, Bieling, Hackwitz, Kizos, Lieskovský, Martín, McCarthy, Müller, Palang, Plieninger, and Printsmann, 2017). People do not just respond to geology; they interpret it, inscribe meaning onto it, and transform it through cultural, spiritual, and economic practices. In this sense, meaning is not layered after the abiotic is understood; it is produced through ongoing human-environment relationships that shape, and are shaped by, more than just physical conditions. Geopark interpretation must extend beyond linear causality and adopt a more integrated, reflexive approach—one that values cultural narratives, indigenous knowledge, and community relationships alongside scientific explanations, rather than subordinating them.

While these broader human-environment relationships shape how landscapes are understood and interpreted, they are ultimately realised through lived, everyday encounters with place. Attending to how familiarity and unfamiliarity are experienced in these moments provides an important lens for understanding how meanings of place are negotiated and how authenticity emerges—an issue explored in the following subsection.

8.1.3 Familiarity and Unfamiliarity in Everyday Experience

Authenticity was not always found in unfamiliar landscapes, monumental sites, or rich biodiversity. Instead, for some, authenticity also emerged through small, unanticipated moments that disrupted visitors' expectations and offered intimate glimpses into the richness of everyday life. As shared by Izah and Anda, two female participants from Lombok who joined the geotour to Batur UGGp, the modest and everyday distinctive food experiences held surprising emotional value. Izah, a 26-year-old Indonesian school teacher, shared, *"Having Pop Mie on top of the mountain was an unforgettable experience."* For her, the instant noodles became a celebratory reward after the physically demanding climb to the summit of Mount Batur. Eating *Pop Mie* at that moment was not just about satisfying hunger with a familiar food; it marked a personal achievement, a moment of reflection, and an intimate connection with the surrounding landscape.

The warmth of the food contrasted with the chilly mountain air and dramatic, unfamiliar surroundings, creating a heightened sensory experience. While the food itself offered comfort through its familiarity, its setting in an unfamiliar landscape made the moment especially memorable. In this way, authenticity emerged from the dynamic interplay between the familiar and the unfamiliar shaped by Izah's Indonesian identity set against an unknown landscape. Taken together, authenticity was produced through the tension between

comfort and displacement, as the disruption of habitual consumption transformed eating into an intensified sensory encounter that wove together self, place, and taste (de Jong & Wait, 2022).

Meanwhile, Anda, an Indonesian 38-year-old local Central Bureau of Statistics officer, recounted a seemingly memorable but straightforward moment where the familiar and unfamiliar came together during her trek to Mount Batur:

I still remember when we were trekking up—the tea glass stood out! When we ordered tea, instead of a small cup, they gave us a huge one—like a big glass! Typically, tea is served in smaller cups, but not this time!

In Indonesia, tea is often served in modest-sized cups or glasses, particularly in homes or local eateries. Receiving tea in a larger-than-expected glass disrupted her expectations of a familiar ritual, making the moment more vivid, and almost comical and playful. Anda's use of 'normally' in her reflection points to an expectation shaped by her cultural and personal identity as an Indonesian, which was brought into question, prompting reflection. The oversized glass of tea, offered at the end of a tiring journey, also symbolized generous hospitality that felt comforting and almost humorous in its exaggeration, provoking her to take a photo to capture the memory (Figure 8.8).



Figure 8.8 The tea is served in a large glass
(source: Anda, 2024)

These familiar, yet unfamiliar instances that were particularly noticeable within the encounters of (Indonesian) participants who were more likely to be familiar with local

customs and performances reveal how authenticity is not always tied to renowned cultural and environmental sites and performances but dynamically constructed through seemingly small and everyday acts whereby authenticity emerges not from spectacle but from the interplay between the everyday and the spectacular, the mundane and the playful.

Edensor (2001) argues that tourism should not be viewed as a distinct or isolated realm of social life, but rather as an interwoven part of the rhythms and practices of everyday life. By situating tourism and experiences of authenticity within the broader framework of daily life, we understand authentic tourism experiences not as necessarily extraordinary or detached, but as shaped by routine, familiarity, and social norms. Remaining mindful of the value of this complex interplay may be productive in considering authenticity within geoparks, as supply-side stakeholders seek to balance distinct, memorable experiences with the preservation of ways of life and a sense of place.

However, these ordinary and embedded engagements with landscape often coexist with, and are shaped by, more idealized representations that elevate nature beyond the mundane. As such, geopark landscapes may simultaneously be lived, worked, and inhabited spaces, and symbolic sites imbued with emotional, cultural, and spiritual significance. The following section therefore explores how Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps are constructed as romanticised landscapes, examining how processes of idealization interact with everyday experiences to shape perceptions of nature and place.

8.2 Romanticization of Landscape

Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps were constructed by participants as romanticized spaces where nature is idealized and invested with emotional, cultural, and even spiritual meaning. For many participants, authenticity emerged through these constructions of beauty, whereby ideas of nature were drawn upon in various ways that idealized the landscape as wild, exotic, and other. International visitors were particularly likely to construct the geopark landscape in this way. Nell, for example, a visitor from the Netherlands, shared that driving through what she perceived as the ‘lush’, ‘green’ landscapes of Lombok evoked a deep sense of calm and peace. This experience felt more genuine than structured tourist activities. She explained, *“Driving around Lombok, I noticed it is much greener than Bali, which gave me a greater sense of peace and relaxation.”*

For Nell, Lombok’s greenery felt more expansive and less manicured, less interrupted by commercial development than Bali, and as such, was understood to offer a sense of solitude.

This perception of the landscape as raw and less performative distinguished Lombok for her, making the experience feel more authentic than what she had previously experienced in Bali. Lombok's relative remoteness from the tourist trail, compared to Bali, where green spaces are often interwoven with dense tourist infrastructure—such as resorts, cafes, and curated scenic spots—in line with higher visitor numbers, may influence these constructions.

At the same time, this account draws attention to the role of mobility—particularly automobility—in shaping how romanticised landscapes are encountered and felt from a western vantage point. From a tourism mobilities perspective, familiar practice of movement play central role in producing idealised and romanticised encounters with nature that are subsequently interpreted as extraordinary, tranquil, or authentic (Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014). As Larsen, Axhausen, and Urry (2006) suggest, certain modes of travel enable deeper engagements with place through 'sensescapes', facilitating heightened sensory and affective connections while in motion. In this context, car affords Nell a sense of autonomy, control, and freedom, allowing journeys to be shaped according to individual rhythms, routes, and experiential desires (Butler & Hannam, 2012). Importantly, Larsen (2001) argues that car has increasingly assumed this role by offering sensations of openness and unpredictability associated with the open road. Featherstone (2004) further conceptualises automobility as bound up with 'cultural dreams of adventure', enabling drivers to imagine unrestricted exploration and self-directed movement. Through car-based travel, tourists may experience a range of affective relations with landscape—including intimacy, escapism, solitude, and anonymity (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Larsen, 2001; Sheller & Urry, 2000; Trauer & Ryan, 2005; Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014). In this way, automobility does not merely facilitate access to geopark landscapes but actively shapes their romanticised construction as spaces of tranquility, freedom, and authentic encounter.

Furthermore, Nell's experiences trekking Mount Batur reveal how international visitor constructions of 'nature' often appeared to align with westernised ideals that hold humans and nature in opposition:

For me, when it gets that busy, the hike itself feels... how do I put it? Less special, less interesting. It is frustrating to feel that way, especially since the place is truly beautiful. I was enjoying the view, but the sheer number of people made it overwhelming.

Her response illustrates how western romanticised conceptions of nature—where solitude, quietness, and the absence of other people are taken as markers of an authentic wilderness experience—remain influential among international tourists (Fletcher, 2014; Karlsdóttir,

2013; Hose, 2011). From this perspective, the presence of 'crowds' disrupts the imagined purity or 'wildness' of the landscape, thereby reducing the perceived value of the experience. However, such expectations sit uneasily with understandings of place that emphasise sociality and co-presence. As Hannam, Sheller, and Urry (2006) argue, places are constituted through proximities and the bodily co-presence of people who happen to be there at the same time, engaging in shared activities and moments of physical closeness. In this sense, the very conditions that Nell experiences as overwhelming are also integral to how place are produced and lived. This tension highlights how romanticised ideals of solitary nature can obscure the relational and social dimensions of landscapes, particularly in popular tourist sites where shared presence and collective movement are unavoidable aspects of place-making.

Nell's photograph (Figure 8.9) powerfully encapsulates this tension between awe-inspiring landscapes and the disruptive presence of tourism, highlighting that the authenticity of a tourism experience is not only tied to the uniqueness of the landscape but also to the ability to engage with it in a way that feels private and undisturbed.



Figure 8.9 The density of tourists on the Mount Batur trekking trail
(source: Nell, 2024)

This illustrates how the perception of authenticity among some international tourists is deeply entangled with expectations shaped by western cultural imaginaries of nature as remote, untouched, and exclusive, thereby questioning the usefulness of authenticity as a guiding concept in the construction of tourist experiences within UNESCO Global Geoparks in non-European settings. When landscapes in Southeast Asia are increasingly interpreted,

curated, or valued through dominant western ideals of what constitutes 'authentic nature', tensions can emerge between external tourism imaginaries and locally grounded understandings of place. Although visitors may not consciously seek to impose such perspectives, these aesthetic preferences can inadvertently privilege particular representations of nature while rendering other cultural, historical, and social dimensions less visible. From a postcolonial perspective, such dynamics raise important questions about whose understandings of authenticity become dominant within tourism development and how external frameworks of value may shape the representation of geopark landscapes.

Duncan and Duncan (2001), for example, critique this aesthetic idealisation of landscapes, arguing that romanticized depictions tend to erase the lived experiences of local communities and the socio-environmental histories that have shaped those spaces. Such selective appreciation of non-human landscape elements, where only certain aspects are celebrated, serves to erase or view specific forms of lived experience as out of place, which ultimately facilitates the commodification and control of landscapes, transforming them into consumable products designed to prioritise the specific aesthetic and cultural expectations of international visitors (Smith, 2006; Perlik, 2011).

Paradoxically, the very act of framing these landscapes through a European lens undermines their original authenticity, producing spaces that appear authentic to visitors but are, in fact, staged to satisfy external imaginings. This process transforms living environments into spectacles, where local traditions and landscapes are reinterpreted to align with colonial frameworks of meaning. Taken together, these dynamics reveal that the pursuit of authenticity does not simply preserve or honour local realities; instead, it re-inscribes colonial hierarchies of knowledge and values by privileging European criteria of authenticity over indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Along these lines, Hee shared that she perceived Rinjani-Lombok UGGp as a more authentic destination than Batur UGGp, due to its perceived natural beauty and a feeling of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp as less structured and commercialized. Unlike Batur UGGp, where tourism activities were highly organized and programmed, Rinjani-Lombok UGGp offered a sense of openness and spontaneity that allowed her to feel more immersed in the environment, fostering a deeper and more personal connection with the landscape:

From my experience, Rinjani in Lombok felt more authentic. Maybe it is due to the size difference, but when I visited Batur, everything felt very structured, with many organized programs available. I think the authenticity comes from Rinjani being less commercialized.

For Hee, authenticity was not just about what she saw, but also about how she could experience the place freely and with minimal mediation. In her view, the natural environment around Rinjani-Lombok UGGp appeared more intact and less shaped by tourism infrastructure, which contributed to a feeling that the landscape retained its original character and spirit:

...the natural environment in Lombok also feels better preserved than that of Bali. Rinjani still has a more pristine nature, which is part of why it felt more authentic to me—there was less human interference, and the environment felt more untouched.

When invited to share photographs that represented her meaningful experiences during her visit to Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps, Hee shared Figure 8.11, which captures a panoramic view of the green valleys and majestic mountain ranges within the Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, conveying a sense of raw natural beauty and geographic vastness. The absence of overt signs of tourism infrastructure, and, importantly, of any local culture or human presence, gives the photograph an ‘untouched’ quality that Hee perceives as authentic. When paired with Hee’s reflections, this photograph communicates that place authenticity is often constructed not only through what is present but also through what is absent. This visual purity helps explain why visitors like Nell and Hee perceive Rinjani-Lombok UGGp as more ‘authentic’ than other, more developed geopark sites, such as Batur UGGp.

This perception of a more ‘untouched’ environment was central to how Hee defined and experienced authenticity. These insights highlight the expectations of international visitors seeking light-touch tourism management within geoparks, as a means to foster perceptions of authenticity. Such insights raise important questions for the management of designated geoparks, where UNESCO upholds expectations that a certain level of signage and management will be implemented to control tourist interpretation and behaviour; requirements that run counter to the desires of international visitors seeking authentic ‘nature-based’ experiences.



Figure 8.10 The striking landscape of Mount Rinjani
(source: Hee, 2024)

Authenticity as untouched nature is echoed in Len's reflections, who emphasized how Lombok's environmental vibrancy and geological uniqueness, particularly its volcanic features and dense jungle, differed from her experiences of mountain landscapes in Germany. For Len, this striking difference heightened her experience of novelty and authenticity, not merely because the environment was new to her but because it disrupted her pre-existing mental images of what mountain landscapes could or should look like:

Lombok has a more natural jungle vibe, with abundant greenery and trees—everything from vibrant greens to earthy browns. In contrast, the mountains in Europe, particularly in Germany, are pretty different. In Lombok, you will often find a random waterfall that lacks the same volcanic context. That is what makes it so unique and remarkable in Lombok!

By framing Lombok's landscape as fundamentally different from European nature, Len constructs it as exotic—a place outside the ordinary—that contributes to a romanticized vision, thereby setting the geopark site apart through its distance from familiarity and cultivation. This mirrors a persistent tendency in both popular understandings and the

international tourist imaginary to treat landscape not as a lived or relational space, but as an object of visual consumption, or even more reductively, as a mere tract of land (Minca, 2007). Such framings strip the landscape of its social, historical, and inhabited dimensions, reducing it to scenery, a backdrop to be admired and consumed.

Len was particularly drawn to capturing the lush greenery and ecological diversity of Lombok through different sites. One of the key examples she shared is a photograph of Sendang Gile Waterfall (Figure 8.11). This geosite is one of the most visited within Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, attracting large numbers of domestic travellers. Interestingly, while the researcher met Len at Sendang Gile Waterfall during a hectic moment packed with visitors, the image she produced during that same encounter told a markedly different story. Her photograph excludes any sign of human presence; instead, it frames the waterfall and surrounding vegetation in a way that suggests untouched, pristine wilderness, absent of touristification, in contrast to the researcher's image, which sought to represent the touristic dimensions of the setting.



Figure 8.11 Len's (left) and the researcher's (right) documentation of the site
(source: Len, 2024; Author, 2024)

This act of selective framing is not accidental; it is deeply entangled with the expectations and desires that shape the tourist gaze. What is sought through the act of photography is not necessarily a complete representation of what was experienced, but a curated version that aligns with pre-existing imaginaries of nature, authenticity, and escape. In this sense, the photograph reflects a process of romanticisation through which particular elements of the landscape are foregrounded while others are omitted. Such visual practices allow visitors to engage with the landscape primarily as an aesthetic object, often detached from its social,

historical, and everyday realities. While these representational choices do not necessarily imply a deliberate colonising intent, they can nevertheless reproduce broader visual hierarchies through which destinations are valued according to external aesthetic frameworks. In this way, photographs may contribute to what some scholars describe as processes of visual colonisation (Johnstone, 2023; Steinbach & Fletcher, 2025), whereby local landscapes become interpreted through outsider expectations that privilege particular ways of seeing while marginalising alternative meanings and lived experiences. Certain features of the landscape are foregrounded because they satisfy aesthetic or ideological desires, while other aspects are strategically excluded or erased (Scarles, 2009). Len's photographic choices thus subtly reveal that the tourist gaze is not only outward-facing but also self-reinforcing, enacting a visual logic already embedded in how some western tourists might be positioned to perceive value and seek out landscapes, which is used to validate the worth of the experience.

At the same time, there is a paradox in the way such images circulate: they attempt to present the encounter as singular and unrepeatable, as though the tourist has discovered or accessed something rare and unique. In reality, however, these images are mass-produced and endlessly reproduced—the same photograph of landscapes from nearly identical vantage points. This act of erasure can be read as an attempt to reinstate a sense of uniqueness and personal authenticity, in which the photograph symbolically claims ownership of the site by imagining its experience as singular, even as it is embedded in a structure of collective repetition.

Importantly, these representational practices shape expectations of what constituted an 'authentic' landscape and inform how destinations are valued and consumed. The following section therefore turns to authenticity and destination management, examining how visitor subjectivities translate into management priorities and influence the governance of geopark landscapes.

8.3 Authenticity and Destination Management

Building on the previous discussion, it is clear that visitor subjectivities significantly inform how geoparks and their landscapes are perceived. Many international visitors associated authenticity with minimal human presence, viewing infrastructure or visible management as detracting from the experience. This highlights the need to critically assess how different tourists' perceptions shape management priorities and interpretations of authenticity.

In contrast to international visitors who often romanticize the ‘untouched’ and wild landscapes of geoparks, framing their experiences around notions of remoteness and natural purity, some local and domestic visitors preferred more developed, managed tourism environments. These visitors tended to value aspects of comfort and accessibility. For them, the presence of well-maintained infrastructure, such as paved paths, directional signage, interpretive information, and readily available amenities, significantly enhanced their engagement with the site. Eli, a 36-year-old Manager at Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, offered a revealing example of this preference by highlighting her positive experience when she joined a geotour at Batur UGGp. She noted:

Camping there is quite enjoyable, mainly because it does not require the intense effort that a place like Rinjani does. For instance, reaching the lake is very easy; you can ride a motorbike to the parking area and walk just a short distance. It is incredibly convenient and makes the whole experience much more relaxing.

For Eli, the convenience and ease of access offered by the Mount Batur hiking trail enhanced her enjoyment without diminishing her sense of authenticity. Her account suggests that reduced physical demands and simplified logistics enabled a more relaxed, enjoyable, and emotionally satisfying engagement with the landscape. Rather than locating authenticity in physical challenge or the absence of infrastructure, Eli’s experience reflects a form of *existential authenticity*, in which authenticity emerges through affective engagement and personal meaning-making rather than through notions of ‘untouched’ nature. In this sense, accessibility constitutes a core component of her ideal tourism encounter, facilitating comfort, ease, and sustained attentiveness to the environment. Rather than seeking to ‘escape civilization’ through hardship or remoteness, Eli values forms of nature access that are manageable and accommodating, allowing her to remain present and emotionally connected. This reveals that the appeal of Batur UGGp, for some domestic visitors, lies not in ideals of wildness or remoteness but in its capacity to facilitate structured, controlled encounters with nature that nonetheless feel immersive, meaningful, and personally authentic.

Importantly, Eli’s commentary is more than a tourist review; it is an embedded form of professional reflection. It presents the perception that successful geopark management must recognize and accommodate the socio-cultural realities of its domestic audience. Her comments provide nuanced insight into how different geopark settings and management infrastructure shape visitor expectations and forms of engagement. This highlights that comfortable, manageable experiences can be just as immersive and significant as more

demanding ones, whilst also signifying the central role of subjectivity in perceptions of authenticity.

Similarly, Mad, a 51-year-old senior tour guide from Lombok, emphasized the importance of physical accessibility and visitor comfort in shaping the appeal of a geopark destination from locals' perspectives. Drawing on his experiences at both geoparks, he highlighted the contrast between the demanding terrain of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp and the ease of Batur UGGp. Reflecting on a memorable aspect of his visit, he shared:

What I like most is the hot spring in Batur UGGp. The experience there felt much more comfortable and accessible. I particularly appreciated the accessibility—unlike at Rinjani-Lombok UGGp in Lombok, where you have to hike up to Segara Anak Lake to reach the hot spring, which is quite a distance.

Mad's comment reflects a practical understanding of how physical demands, infrastructure, and landscape shape the quality of a tourism experience. As a seasoned tour guide familiar with both domestic and international visitors' preferences, he offers valuable insight into the broader expectations of local tourists. His awareness of the strenuous nature of Rinjani's landscape and the contrasting convenience of Batur points to a key consideration in geopark planning: the reality that different visitor groups demand competing forms of tourism management. The tension, then, lies in the geopark's attempt to reconcile these competing demands within a single landscape, highlighting the broader difficulty of creating a universally satisfying model of management in contexts shaped by diverse audiences, values, and meanings of place.

In line with these perspectives, Ais, a 24-year-old freelancer from Lombok, adds a valuable domestic voice that reflects broader cultural understandings of nature, leisure, and the body. In Indonesian contexts, where social outings with family or friends are often communal, recreational, and focused on enjoyment rather than individualised endurance, the idea of travel as physically challenging or rugged may not carry the same romantic or self-validating associations it does for some international visitors. The emphasis is more commonly on togetherness, relaxation, and the enjoyment of natural beauty through accessible and comfortable means:

Visiting the lake in Batur UGGp is relatively easy. You can visit there with minimal preparation, in contrast to reaching Segara Anak Lake in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, which requires proper planning, as it involves trekking up Mount Rinjani. ...however, going with friends made the experience especially enjoyable.

Her comment reflects a different mode of relating to nature—one rooted less in personal conquest and more in social experience. This reflection is vividly embodied in the photograph Ais shared (Figure 8.12), which captures their geotour group, gathered near Lake Batur, relaxed and casually dressed. The absence of specialized gear, strenuous hiking, or extensive preparation signals that the value of the encounter lay not in surmounting physical challenges but in a setting where nature could be appreciated without strain.



Figure 8.12 The scene exudes ease and relaxation at Lake Batur, Batur UGGp
(source: Ais, 2024)

These contrasting values—between ease and challenge, between curated accessibility and wild immersion—reveal deeper tensions in how management itself is imagined and enacted within geopark spaces. This raises critical questions for geopark management: What does it mean to manage a landscape when different audiences hold opposing views on the nature of management? These tensions underscore the limitations of universal models of site management and interpretation, as outlined in the criteria for UNESCO Global Geopark designation. While these frameworks promote important goals such as education, conservation, and sustainable development, they often rest on assumptions about how geosites should be presented, accessed, and experienced.

Signage, for instance. UNESCO’s guidelines for aspiring Global Geoparks emphasize the provision of clear, easily identifiable signage to mark the boundaries of geopark territory, while also recognizing that visibility mechanisms must adapt to local legislative contexts. Although framed as flexible and adaptable to local legislation, these recommendations nonetheless carry an implicit pressure toward standardization, thereby foregrounding the

geopark as a branded, managed space. This emphasis on visibility and legibility profoundly shapes how visitors are guided to experience place. By directing attention through panels, markers, and curated points of interpretation, signage privileges encounters that are mediated by institutional narratives. However, in doing so, it can marginalize alternative relationships to place—whether rooted in local cultural traditions, spiritual associations, or visitors’ desire for less mediated, more spontaneous immersion. Thus, what UNESCO positions as a seemingly neutral infrastructure of communication becomes a subtle exercise of power—curating not only how visitors move through the territory but also which experiences are deemed valid. As such, the desire to meet global standards can conflict with local realities and specific meanings attached to place by different groups.

The contrast becomes particularly pronounced in the case of Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, where infrastructure is more limited and access to key geosites remains challenging. Here, the lack of formal management may appeal to visitors seeking unmediated wilderness experiences. However, it can also lead to confusion, disappointment, or exclusion for those who expect more explicit guidance or more developed facilities. This was exemplified by Izah, a 26-year-old Indonesian school teacher who participated in both Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGp tours, who shared a disheartening reflection about visiting one of the Samalas outcrops—a historically significant site in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, which is believed to have once been a village destroyed by a volcanic eruption:

The history of Black Lava in Batur UGGp seems somewhat similar to the Samalas outcrop in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp, which I believe was once also a village. However, the site we visited in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp remains undeveloped and has not been transformed into a tourist spot, as it is still privately owned land. We had to walk through cassava fields to access the outcrop, as no designated path had been established yet.

Izah's expression during the interview revealed a clear sense of disappointment. Her frustration appeared to stem from the symbolic and emotional disconnection that can arise when access to heritage is hindered by a lack of infrastructure, including basic accessibility. For domestic visitors like Izah, this type of engagement in Batur UGGp may feel more meaningful than encountering an ‘undeveloped’ site that offers little guidance or interpretive support. In this sense, infrastructure was not perceived as a threat to the naturalness or authenticity of the destination, but rather as an enabler of knowledge that enhanced the visitor experience by making geological narratives more legible and accessible. This finding challenges assumptions within authenticity literature that tourism infrastructure and

management interventions necessarily diminish authentic experiences. Instead, it suggests that authenticity may be experienced differently across visitor groups, depending on their expectations, prior knowledge, physical abilities, and desired modes of engagement.

From a destination management perspective, these findings highlight the importance of balancing conservation objectives with accessibility and interpretation. UNESCO Global Geoparks are expected not only to protect geological heritage but also to communicate its significance to diverse audiences. Infrastructure such as pathways, viewing platforms, interpretive signage, and guided experiences can therefore play an important role in enabling visitors to understand and connect with geological landscapes. Rather than viewing accessibility and authenticity as inherently conflicting goals, destination managers may need to consider how carefully designed forms of mediation can support meaningful engagement while maintaining the character of the site.

The findings also contribute to discussions of inclusive tourism by demonstrating that limited infrastructure may inadvertently exclude certain visitors from fully participating in or benefiting from geopark experiences (Apaza-Panca, Ramos, Noriega, Epiquén, & Nole, 2025; Rahmafitria, Dirgahayani, Putro, Rosyidie, & Hudalah, 2022). While some visitors may value minimally developed environments and associate them with authenticity, others may require interpretive support, physical accessibility, or basic visitor facilities to meaningfully engage with heritage landscapes. Authentic experiences therefore cannot be assumed to emerge from a single model of destination development but must be understood in relation to the diverse capabilities, preferences, and expectations of different visitor groups.

Izah's photograph, captured at Black Lava—one of the geosites in Batur UGGp (Figure 8.13)—offers a different dimension to the discussion of accessibility: not merely in terms of physical ease, but in how infrastructure facilitates emotional and symbolic engagement. Her relaxed posture and calm smile, set against the dramatic backdrop of Mount Batur's hardened lava flow, signal more than enjoyment; they reflect a sense of ease, comfort, and openness that allowed her to connect meaningfully with the landscape. This contrasts sharply with her earlier reflection on Rinjani-Lombok UGGp's site, where the lack of infrastructure left her feeling disconnected and uncertain about the site's significance. For domestic visitors like Izah, this type of engagement may feel more meaningful than confronting an undeveloped site that offers little guidance. In this sense, infrastructure for Izah was not seen as a threat to the 'naturalness' of the destination, but rather as an enabler of knowledge, which enhances the experience by making geological narratives more legible and accessible.



Figure 8.13 Pose a sense of comfort while exploring the geosite
(source: Izah, 2024)

Nevertheless, it is important to note that there were not always clear distinctions between the perceptions of international and domestic visitors. While it might be assumed that international visitors approach geoparks with perspectives shaped by global tourism imaginaries and domestic visitors through locally embedded cultural frames, in practice, these categories often overlapped and blurred. Maya, a 19-year-old student from Lombok who also visited Batur UGGp, for example, shared a sentiment that more commonly aligned with an international perspective:

Mount Batur does not really feel like a mountain. When we think of a mountain, we usually imagine staying overnight, trekking through forests, and crossing rivers. However, Mount Batur is not like that; it is pretty ordinary.

Maya's description reveals how expectations of what constitutes a 'mountain experience' can be shaped more by globalized imaginaries of adventure tourism and nature-based recreation. Maya further provided her photograph as a visual referent for her critical reflection on the trekking experience on Mount Batur with her tour group (Figure 8.14).



Figure 8.14 Maya and her tour group are posing at the signboard of Mount Batur
(source: Maya, 2024)

In the photograph, the group stands in front of formal elements such as the signboard and well-marked trail, emphasizing Batur's role within a structured, commercial tourism framework. Their casual attire highlights the trekking experience, prioritizing convenience and efficiency. While this inclusivity can be viewed positively as a democratizing nature, Maya's insights introduce a contrasting concern: prioritizing convenience and efficiency risks diluting the depth and richness of engagement that mountains traditionally represent in certain cultural narratives. This contrast reveals a key tension: the balance between accessibility and the pursuit of perceived authenticity. Thus, Mount Batur appears not only as a physical site but also as a discursive arena where larger issues surrounding the commodification of nature, the performance of authenticity, and the emotional aspects of tourism are explored.

It was not only physical accessibility that mattered. Riva, a 25-year-old villa manager based in the Batur UGGp area, explains how accessibility was also about availability:

What makes Mount Batur different is that there are things I could not do on other mountains, only in Batur. For example, the access is not necessarily better, but it is more open because it is already highly commercialized. Moreover, you do not really need to bring much. If carrying things like bags or gear is a hassle, you can opt for just yourself, and that is perfectly fine. At the summit, you can rent blankets or purchase food, so you do not need to worry. Just make sure you bring some cash. However, it does not feel like you are at a mountain summit. It feels more like a commercial space.

According to Riva, what makes Mount Batur distinct is not simply its accessibility, but the extent of its commercialization. Unlike other mountains, where access may be limited and self-sufficiency is expected, Batur offers a highly commodified experience. For him, the issue is the risk that overt commercial venues pose to commodifying the experience and detaching visitors from the sense of being in a natural landscape, thereby eroding the authenticity that visitors value.

This tension has important implications for destination management within UNESCO Global Geoparks. On the one hand, accessibility initiatives, visitor facilities, and tourism services can support more inclusive forms of tourism by enabling participation among visitors with different physical abilities, level of outdoor experience, and resource constraints. Such interventions seek to reduce barriers and make heritage landscapes accessible to diverse audiences. On the other hand, excessive commercialisation may risk undermining the very qualities that some visitors associate with authentic nature-based experiences, particularly those seeking challenge, self-reliance, and a sense of discovery. The findings therefore suggest that accessibility and authenticity should not be understood as inherently opposing concepts but as objectives that require careful negotiation within destination planning.

While many domestic tourists expressed a preference for structured, well-managed experiences, specific settings were viewed as overly managed and thus commodified. Maya and Riva's reflection introduce an important layer of ambivalence into the discussion, illustrating that preferences for less-curated encounters with nature also existed among domestic tourists. While Riva acknowledges the practical advantages of commercialization in reducing logistical burdens and making the experience more flexible, he also questions the authenticity of such highly serviced encounters. The transformation of the summit into a 'commercial space' disrupts traditional expectations of mountain tourism as a sublime, isolated, or spiritually enriching experience. This ambivalence highlights how commercialization, while increasing access, may also alter the site's emotional significance for some domestic visitors. Shifting meanings of the site—from awe to accommodation, from challenge to consumerism. In this light, Maya and Riva's accounts are not simply commentaries on infrastructure but are reflections on how place meanings are negotiated and reshaped through tourism development.

The contrasting perspective of Maya and Riva further highlight the importance of visitor segmentation in understanding authenticity. While some visitors valued infrastructure, interpretation, and service provision because these facilitated learning and participation,

others perceived the same interventions as evidence of over-commercialisation that diminished the symbolic significance of the mountain experience. These differing expectations indicate that visitors do not consume geopark landscape in uniform ways. Rather, they bring distinct motivations, cultural values, prior experiences, and desired levels of comfort that shape how authenticity is evaluated. Consequently, a management strategy designed to satisfy one visitor segment may unintentionally diminish authenticity for another.

UNESCO Global Geopark requirements impose more clearly defined parameters, stipulate that infrastructure and interpretation must never compromise the conservation of geological heritage, and that developments should be explicitly tied to geo-education, community engagement, and sustainable tourism principles. While these requirements safeguard conservation, they also restrict managerial flexibility, limiting the ability of geopark managers to respond quickly to changing market conditions or shifting visitor demands, which may reduce competitiveness in the tourism market. Moreover, strict conservation can also sometimes conflict with local economic aspirations, particularly in communities that may want more commercially oriented forms of tourism or infrastructure investment to generate immediate revenue.

Therefore, it is essential to recognize that while some geopark areas can be preserved in their more natural and unstructured states for those seeking immersive, challenging experiences, others may be enhanced with thoughtful design, interpretive materials, and improved accessibility to cater to local and domestic markets. Doing so can ensure that geoparks remain inclusive spaces that cater to diverse audiences while maintaining their conservation and sustainable tourism missions. Importantly, local indigenous communities should be central to this process, not only as knowledge holders and custodians of the land but also as beneficiaries of tourism and conservation initiatives. Their cultural narratives, ecological expertise, and heritage practice can enrich interpretive materials and visitor experiences. It ensures that local and domestic publics, whose support is crucial to the long-term sustainability of geoparks, are not marginalized by narrow assumptions about what constitutes an ‘authentic’ nature-based tourist experience. In this way, fostering inclusive understandings of authenticity not only enhances social sustainability but also actively reinforces the long-term conservation and protection of geopark sites.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Despite its centrality, the role of governance in shaping geotourism experiences has received limited attention in the literature. This chapter argues that existing scholarship often focus on the identification of geoheritage and examine the conservation-tourism nexus without addressing how power, institutional arrangements, and stakeholder negotiations influence the practical construction of geotourism experiences. This gap is further magnified by the competitiveness of the global tourism marketplace, which emphasises the importance of differentiation, whereby UNESCO requires each geopark to demonstrate not only geological significance but also a distinctive sense of place and narrative. As a result, distinctiveness thus comes to form as a key agenda for geopark governance, and is particularly critical given that some geoparks share broadly comparable thematic geological features, such as Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGp in Indonesia. This dissertation therefore traced the process through which these two sites sought to render themselves distinct.

Building on this focus, the chapter now turn to the key contributions of the dissertation. Guided by three interrelated objectives, the study shows how geotourism experiences are actively shaped, negotiated, and legitimised within Indonesian UGGp. The following section outline these contributions and their broader implications.

9.1 Research Contribution

The study was guided by three objectives. First, to explore tourism suppliers' and key governance actors' authentication positions of geotourism practices and how they contribute to informing geotourism experiences. In particular, the research investigated how tourism suppliers perceive authenticity and how these perceptions are shaped by their positionalities, including their institutional roles, professional expertise, and proximity to decision-making processes. It also examined how different suppliers interact and negotiate these interpretations in practice, and in consequence, how the broader governance structure comes to privilege certain constructions of authenticity over others. Shifting from governance to the demand side, the second focus of this dissertation centred on tourists' perceptions of authenticity. The study investigated how visitors interpret and evaluate the authenticity of their experiences, considering the ways in which expectations, prior knowledge, and cultural

frameworks shape their judgements. It also examined the alignment—or lack thereof—between tourists’ perceptions and the experiences provided by the geoparks. By integrating the perspectives of visitors alongside those of suppliers and governance actors, the research provides a holistic understanding of how authenticity operates as both an experiential quality and a negotiated cultural construct. Lastly, the third objectives moves from perception to strategy, interrogating how authenticity is actively mobilised to produce destination distinctiveness.

In exploring these objectives, four main contributions emerge, each shedding light on distinct but interrelated dimensions of authenticity in geotourism. Together, they reveal the complex interplay between governance structures, local actors, and visitors, showing how power, institutional frameworks, and socio-cultural practices shape what is recognised as authentic, which meanings are legitimised, and how geotourism experiences are rendered both meaningful and marketable.

9.1.1 The Binary Top-Down/Bottom-up

The first key contribution highlights the asymmetric interplay between top-down governance and bottom-up practice in shaping authentic geotourism experiences, revealing how governance structures actively mediate what is recognised as legitimate and meaningful within Indonesian UGGps. Geopark governance under UNESCO is often framed as a ‘bottom-up’ model: in principle, local communities are expected to initiate proposals, participate in site management, and contribute to the shaping of geotourism practice.

In practice, however, the findings show that the ‘bottom-up’ ideal is circumscribed by strong top-down pressures. UNESCO and national actors act as central arbiters of legitimacy, establishing criteria such as geological integrity, material preservation, and global legibility that define the baseline for recognition, certification, and international visibility. These criteria, while presented as objective and scientifically grounded, function as normative filters that discipline how place can be known and represented. Regional actors largely reproduce these standards, embedding them into planning, interpretation, and branding strategies that stabilise geotourism development while narrowing the scope of acceptable meanings. In effect, authentication operates as a regulatory technology that aligns conservation science, institutional credibility, and market differentiation into a coherent but exclusionary framework.

Crucially, this regime does not merely marginalise local meanings through oversight; it renders many of them structurally peripheral. Forms of authenticity grounded in affect, memory, spirituality, or everyday practice struggle to gain recognition because they do not conform to the evidentiary and visual logics privileged by governance institutions. Yet the findings also complicate any straightforward narrative of top-down imposition. Local supply-side actors are not positioned entirely outside these structures; rather, they frequently internalise and strategically adapt to them. In seeking economic viability and institutional approval, local actors often translate relational and lived experiences into curated narratives that align with tourist expectations and global heritage discourses. This reveals a more subtle dynamic in which commodification and governance are mutually reinforcing, and where inclusion operates on conditional terms. Authenticity, therefore, emerges not as a pluralistic negotiation among equal stakeholders, but as a managed and uneven field in which dominant regimes of expertise set the parameters within which alternative meanings can be expressed—if they can be expressed at all.

This dynamic underscores a subtle but critical tension in geopark governance. UNESCO's 'bottom-up' model is intended to empower local actors and integrate community knowledge, yet the operational reality is shaped by the top-down regulation, scientific standards, and market logics. As a result authenticity is neither intrinsic to landscapes nor freely constructed by communities; it emerges as a mediated, relational, and contingent outcome of institutional power, regulatory frameworks, and local strategic adaptation. Understanding authenticity in this light foregrounds the central role of governance: it is not a passive backdrop but an active mechanism that shapes what can be seen, experienced, and valued in geoparks, and defines the terms under which local knowledge can be expressed.

9.1.2 The Dominance of Eurocentric

The second contribution highlight the dominance of Eurocentric and technocratic framework in shaping what is recognised as authentic in geoparks, shaping both governance practices and visitor experiences. UNESCO and national authorities privilege critieria such as material preservation and scientific legibility as central to legitimacy. These standards reflect conservation philoshophies developed in Western contexts.

However, a growing unease has emerged in parts of Asia regarding the transferability of cultural conservation philosophies and practices developed in Western contexts. These concerns stem from the argument that Asia is materially, culturally, and historically distinct

from Europe, where many dominant conservation frameworks were originally formulated. In particular, critics contend that Western conservation paradigms are grounded in material-centred understandings of heritage, privileging the preservation of original fabric as the primary marker of authenticity. By contrast, many Asian heritage traditions place less emphasis on the retention of original material substance and greater value on function, ritual practice, craftsmanship, and cultural meaning. Consequently, the transplantation of Western material-based conservation models into Asian contexts may generate tensions (Winter, 2014).

Empirically, this thesis contributes to geotourism scholarship by providing insights from the Global South on how authenticity is co-produced through the interaction of global heritage frameworks and local socio-cultural realities. This contribution is particularly significant given the Eurocentrism that dominates geotourism literature and the rapid growth of geotourism across non-Western contexts. Eurocentric perspectives often inadequately capture the socio-cultural, spiritual, and economic complexities that shape tourism in these regions. In Indonesia's geoparks, these limitations are particularly evident: local communities, domestic tourists, and regional stakeholders bring distinct ways of valuing, engaging with, and interpreting geological landscapes. Moreover, the interplay between stakeholders illustrates how authenticity is actively negotiated rather than passively inherited. These findings provide empirical evidence of how geoparks in non-Western contexts mediate between global conservation agendas and local socio-cultural realities, offering a more plural, grounded understanding of geotourism in the Global South.

9.1.3 Distinctiveness Features

Taking these above intersection between geotourism, governance and distinctiveness, the study explored, how under the UNESCO framework, processes of differentiation are closely mediated through authenticity, particularly in how geological features are framed and communicated within geotourism experiences. Authenticity was found to function as a stabilising interpretive frame, condensing scientific authority, heritage legitimacy, and experiential value into a form that was perceived to be intelligible to diverse tourism audiences. In this sense, narratives of authenticity became central to establishing destination distinctiveness and positioning geoparks in a competitive global heritage and tourism landscape.

Rather than treating authenticity as a pre-existing quality that naturally differentiates place, this study reveals that authenticity and distinctiveness are mutually constitutive processes. Distinctiveness does not simply flow from authentic resources; it is actively assembled through the relational work of defining, stabilising, and circulating particular versions of authenticity. In this sense, authenticity functions as both a discursive and operational mechanism through which geoparks construct recognisable difference within a competitive global tourism landscape.

A central but often obscured dynamic is that distinctiveness is produced not through possession but through positioning. Geological rarity, sacred landscapes, and cultural practices do not inherently guarantee uniqueness. They become distinctive only when authenticated—when actors establish their legitimacy, integrity, and value in ways that resonate across governance frameworks, visitor imaginaries, and market expectations. Authenticity operates here as a form of translation: it converts material and cultural features into legible markers of difference. This translation is selective and strategic. Certain elements are elevated as emblematic, while others are backgrounded or rendered invisible. What appears as natural uniqueness is therefore the outcome of curated alignment between place, narrative, and institutional recognition.

Importantly, the relationality between authenticity and distinctiveness exposes a productive tension between differentiation and standardisation. Geoparks mobilise authenticity to assert singularity, yet they do so within shared international frameworks of certification, conservation discourse, and branding logics. In seeking to distinguish themselves, they often rely on comparable tropes: deep geological time, sacred cosmologies, community stewardship, immersive experience. Thus, authenticity generates distinctiveness through patterned repetition. The pursuit of uniqueness unfolds within structurally similar scripts, revealing that difference is produced within, rather than outside, institutional convergence. This paradox remains largely hidden when authenticity is understood as an intrinsic attribute rather than a regulated practice.

Critically, geopark distinctiveness emerged in three interrelated forms. First, as geological distinctiveness, emphasising rare or dramatic landforms and material integrity. Second, as cultural-spiritual distinctiveness, grounded in ritual, sacred sites, and everyday practices that convey moral and affective meaning. Third, as experiential distinctiveness, created through curated encounters, immersive interpretation, and visitor engagement, which collectively transform the landscape into a singular, memorable, and recognisable destination. These

forms are relational, co-constituted through human-environment interactions, and always negotiated within institutional, cultural, and market pressures.

Ultimately, unfolding the relational dynamics between authenticity and distinctiveness reveals that authenticity operates as a structuring logic of difference. It organises how places are made comparable, how they compete, and how they claim legitimacy. Distinctiveness is not the possession of unique attributes but the outcome of sustained relational work—between actors, institutions, narratives, and embodied experiences. By foregrounding this co-productive relationship, the study reframes geoparks not as sites of inherent uniqueness, but as arenas where authenticity is strategically assembled to stabilised identity while remaining responsive to shifting governance, market, and cultural conditions. In doing so, the research advances debates on authenticity by demonstrating that its significance lies not in determining whether a place is ‘truly’ authentic, but in understanding how authenticity functions as a mechanism for organising visibility, authority, and competitive differentiation. Destination distinctiveness, therefore, is less an endpoint than an ongoing achievement—produced through the recursive interplay of material landscape, cultural meaning, institutional power, and visitor engagement.

Together, these areas of inquiry provide a comprehensive framework for understanding authenticity as a dynamic, multi-scalar, and relational process within Indonesian UGGs. By examining the positions and practices of governance actors, the perceptions of tourists, and the strategic deployment of authenticity for differentiation, the study illuminates the complex interactions through which geotourism experiences are constructed, legitimised, and experienced. This approach not only contributes to scholarly debates on authenticity in tourism and geopark management but also provides insights into the broader governance and operational challenges faced by geoparks seeking to balance conservation, education, and economic objectives while asserting a distinctive presence in a crowded global tourism landscape.

9.1.4 Extended Duration of Visit

The study examines how extended duration of a visit, relational interactions, and growing familiarity collectively shape tourist’ sense of authenticity—an area that has received limited attention in previous research. Evidence from the international participant indicates that prolonged stays enable tourists to move beyond superficial observation and gradually engage with the daily rhythms, cultural practices, and ecological patterns of the site. This temporal

depth facilitates what Daugstad's (2008) describes as a standpoint change, whereby tourist's perspective shift from that of an 'outsider' to an 'insider'. Crucially, this transformation is not merely cognitive: it is relational and embodied, allowing visitors to inhabit the space in ways that integrate social and cultural knowledge. This relational dimension, captured through Maoz's (2005) concept of the 'mutual gaze', complements the temporal process by emphasizing the co-constitutive nature of authenticity. Tourists adjust their behaviours to align with local practices, while residents simultaneously observe, interpret, and modulate their performances of cultural identity in response. Extended stays intensify this reciprocal process, as tourists become increasingly attuned to local norms and subtleties, and hosts refine their interactions to foster meaningful engagement. This iterative feedback loop positions authenticity as emergent property, produced through the ongoing negotiation between hosts and visitors rather than existing as an intrinsic quality of the landscape or static perception

Familiarity further amplifies this system by shaping the sensory and embodied dimensions of experience. According to Tuan (1993), as visitors grow familiar with a place, perception extends beyond the visuals to include other sense—such as touch, smell, hearing, and even bodily movement—to experience the landscape as lived and meaningful. Short-term visitors, in contrast, often engage predominantly visually, scanning and framing the landscape from a distance, which limits depth of understanding. Within this integrated system, familiarity, extended stay, and mutual gaze interact synergistically: time allows sensory engagement to deepen, relational interactions contextualise experience, and familiarity anchors understanding within the rhythms of everyday life. Together, these process transform tourists from detached observers into active participants, fostering a richer, more authentic engagement with the place.

Theoretically, this framework advances tourism and geopark scholarship by conceptualising authenticity as a systemic, emergent phenomenon, shaped simultaneously by temporal, social, and sensory dimensions. By moving beyond static or one-dimensional models, it highlights how extended stay, mutual gaze, and familiarity operate interdependently to co-construct authentic experiences. This approach offers a holistic lens for understanding how authenticity is generated, negotiated and sustained, emphasising that it is both relational and embodied, rather than solely perceived or measured.

9.2 Practical Contribution

The findings of this research offer several practical contributions for geopark governance, tourism planning, and destination management by demonstrating that authenticity within geoparks is shaped not only by geological significance but also by the relationships between local communities, governance structures, cultural narratives, environmental conditions, and visitor experiences. The study highlights the importance of context-sensitive governance approaches that recognise the social, cultural, spiritual, and ecological particularities of each geopark rather than relying on universalised development models or standardised UNESCO-oriented practices. In practice, this means that geopark management strategies should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate differing community relationships with landscapes, local histories, cultural values, and tourism capacities across different sites. In recognition, four recommendations are identified.

First, the findings suggest that local knowledge should be more systematically integrated into UNESCO-oriented geopark management rather than positioned as secondary to scientific expertise. One practical mechanism for achieving this is the establishment of participatory governance structures that formally involve local communities, indigenous groups, cultural practitioners, tourism operators, and local guides within decision-making processes. This could include community advisory boards, collaborative interpretation committees, participatory planning workshops, or co-management arrangements between government institutions and local stakeholders. Such mechanisms would allow local actors to contribute not only to tourism activities but also to decisions regarding conservation priorities, visitor management, interpretation strategies, and heritage representation.

However, the findings also suggest that the limited inclusion of local communities is not simply the result of absent participatory mechanisms but is shaped by broader power relations embedded within geopark governance. UNESCO designation processes, scientific conservation frameworks, state-led development agendas, and tourism growth objectives often privilege forms of expertise that are formalised, technical, and institutionally recognised, while local knowledge may be treated as supplementary, anecdotal, or primarily valuable only as a tourism resource. Consequently, participation risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive if existing power asymmetries remain unaddressed.

To avoid this, participatory governance should move beyond consultation-based approaches toward forms of shared decision-making that provide communities with genuine influence over outcomes. This may require redistributing authority within governance structures,

ensuring community representation in leadership and management bodies, creating transparent processes through which local concerns can shape policy decisions, and recognising local knowledge as a legitimate form of expertise alongside scientific and technical knowledge. Capacity-building initiatives should also be designed as reciprocal learning processes, where institutional actors engage with community knowledge systems rather than assuming knowledge transfer occurs only from experts to local residents.

Particular attention should be given to question of representation, as communities are rarely homogeneous. Participatory processes should therefore seek to include diverse local voices, including women, youth, elders, cultural practitioners, and groups that may otherwise be marginalised within local decision-making structures. By addressing these underlying power relations, participatory governance can become a mechanism for knowledge co-production and community empowerment rather than a procedural exercise in stakeholder engagement. Importantly, ongoing review of these participatory mechanisms would be required to ensure they are effectively facilitating representative democratic decision making.

Second, the findings indicate that different visitor groups engage with geopark environments in distinct ways and therefore require different forms of interpretation, infrastructure, and levels of engagement. However, rather than positioning tourism development primarily around visitor preferences, the findings suggest that geopark planning should begin by recognising, valuing, and foregrounding local communities as the primary custodians and knowledge holders of the landscape. In this context, thematic geotrails could be developed not simply as tourism products but as community-centred interpretive spaces that celebrate and communicate local histories, cultural practices, spiritual meanings, agricultural traditions, ecological knowledge, and everyday ways of life. Organising trails around these themes would allow geoparks to present the landscape through locally grounded narrative while also accommodating diverse forms of visitor engagement.

For visitors seeking deeper and more immersive engagement, thematic geotrails could be developed around community-defined cultural and environmental themes, creating opportunities for visitor to engage locally valued knowledge, practices, and ways of life. Such trails may incorporate longer trekking routes, community homestays, locally guided walks, storytelling sessions, participatory workshops, and other forms of interaction that allow residents to share their own interpretations of the landscape. Rather than positioning local communities as attractions within the tourism experience, these activities can provide platforms through which communities communicate the cultural, spiritual, historical, and environmental meanings they associate with particular places. These experiences would

benefit from minimal and low-impact infrastructure that preserves the sense of place, environmental integrity, and cultural context that communities themselves often value.

Other thematic trails could be designed to improve accessibility and inclusivity for a broader range of visitors, including families, educational groups, visitors with limited mobility, and those with limited time. Such routes may incorporate visitor centres, interpretive signage, viewing platforms, designated photo points, shuttle transport, rest facilities, and digital interpretation tools such as mobile applications, audio guides, and interactive maps. Importantly, these interpretive materials should be developed in collaboration with local communities to ensure that the stories and values presented reflect local perspectives rather than solely externally constructed tourism narratives. These facilities can improve accessibility while reducing physical pressure on environmentally sensitive areas.

Framing visitor experiences through a hierarchy of thematic geotrails also provides a practical mechanism for balancing community aspirations, conservation objectives, and visitor access. More accessible trails can concentrate visitor use within robust and well-managed areas, while immersive and low-impact routes can be carefully managed through local guiding systems, visitor quotas, or zoning approaches in environmentally or culturally sensitive locations. Such an approach enables communities to play a more active role in determining how places are accessed, experienced, interpreted, and protected. It may also help address the tendency identified in the findings for local voices and cultural meanings to become overshadowed by internationally marketable tourism narratives.

At the same time, geopark managers should remain attentive to the potential commodification of culture that may arise when local traditions, stories, or identities become incorporated into tourism products. Community participation should therefore extend beyond implementation to include decision-making authority over how cultural elements are represented, which aspects of local life are shared with visitors, and which knowledge or practices remain private or restricted. Such safeguards can help ensure that thematic geotrails contribute not only to visitor engagement and destination development but also to cultural integrity, community empowerment, and the long-term sustainability of geopark landscapes.

Third, the findings further suggest that interpretive strategies become more meaningful when geological knowledge is presented alongside local narratives, spiritual meanings, oral histories, and everyday cultural practices. Geological science often relies on technical terminology, abstract formation processes, and deep timescales that can feel detached from the everyday experiences of local communities and visitors. As a result, scientific expertise

may remain concentrated among specialists, researchers, and institutional actors, while local communities are positioned primarily as tourism performers or beneficiaries rather than active contributors to knowledge production and interpretation. This dynamic can unintentionally reproduce hierarchical governance structures in which scientific narratives dominate how geoparks are represented, managed, and promoted.

One effective strategy to bridge this gap is to build on local knowledge systems, which provide familiar reference points that communities can relate to. When geological science is placed in dialogue with indigenous knowledge and local narratives, traditional hierarchies of expertise are reconfigured. This integration of scientific and local knowledge yields multiple benefits. Visitors gain richer, more immersive experiences, encountering both the geological significance of the site and the cultural context that gives it meaning. At the same time, communities develop stronger engagement with their environment, contributing to the long-term sustainability of the geopark. Destination managers may therefore benefit from developing co-created interpretation programmes in which scientific explanations are integrated with community storytelling, local guiding practices, indigenous ecological knowledge, and culturally grounded understandings of the landscape. This approach can help reduce hierarchical distinctions between expert and local knowledge while also creating more engaging and emotionally resonant visitor experiences.

Finally, fourth, the study indicates that authenticity within geoparks often develops through prolonged and relational engagement rather than brief encounters with the landscape. Recognising that authenticity develops over time, policymakers and tourism planners may therefore benefit from encouraging slower forms of tourism through multi-day itineraries, thematic geotrails, locally hosted cultural experiences, and educational exchanges that encourage visitors to spend more time interacting with landscapes and communities. This approach demonstrates that enhancing authenticity is not only about presenting scientific or cultural facts but about fostering relational and embodied experiences that emerge through extended, interactive engagement. Importantly, slower forms of tourism may generate greater benefits for local communities by creating more opportunities for locally owned business, guides, homestay operators, artisans, and cultural practitioners to participate in and benefit from tourism activities. Extended visitor stays can also facilitate more meaningful exchanges between visitors and residents, enabling local communities to play a more active role in sharing their knowledge, cultural practices, and perspectives on the landscape. In this way, slower tourism can contribute not only to more authentic visitor experiences but also to community empowerment, cultural continuity, and the more equitable distribution of tourism benefits within geoparks.

9.3 Limitation and Future Research

This study offers nuanced insights into how authenticity is conceptualised, operationalised, and experienced across governance levels and among visitors in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGp). Despite its contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged, which also point to directions for future research.

First, sample composition and contextual scope present limitations. Tourism suppliers and institutional actors data included 38 participants across two case studies, with slightly uneven representation between Batur and Rinjani-Lombok UGGps. Access dynamics, including the researcher's prior professional networks, likely influenced participation, potentially resulting in an overrepresentation of well-connected actors, while peripheral or less-involved stakeholders were underrepresented. On the visitor side, the sample consisted of 27 participants (19 domestic, 8 international), which similarly limits generalisability and underrepresents perspectives from international travelers and independent tourists. Furthermore, the study is contextually bounded to two Indonesian UGGps, meaning that findings may not fully translate to geoparks in other regions or countries with different governance structures, tourism circuits, or cultural contexts.

Second, the iterative, ethnographic approach, while enhancing responsiveness and interpretive depth, reduce replicability and situates findings within a specific temporal and contextual frame. Semi-structured interviews and participant-generated photographs successfully captured relational, affective, and reflective dimension of experience; however, they cannot fully disentangle the influence of social dynamics, peer interactions, or guide-mediated narratives on individual meaning-making. In addition, the dual mode of data collection—online and in-person—though effective, may have constrained observation of certain site-specific and relational nuances, particularly within online settings. Among visitor participants, post-experience online interviews, while ethically and logistically necessary, may have introduced retrospective bias, as participants reconstruct experiences rather than reporting them in situ. Similarly, participant-generated photographs, while valuable for eliciting reflective narratives, captured selectively curated moments and may have overlooked ordinary, fleeting, or mundane experiences that nonetheless contribute to the construction of authenticity.

Future research could address these limitations in multiple ways. Expanding the study to additional geoparks, both within Indonesia and internationally, would allow cross-contextual comparison and reveal variations in authenticity governance, interpretation, and experience.

Mixed-methods designs—integrating qualitative interviews with visitor surveys, behavioral observation, spatial mapping, or content analysis—could triangulate insights and link governance narratives with visitor experiences more robustly. Longitudinal studies could examine how perceptions of authenticity evolve over time, capturing the temporal dynamics of memory, reflection, and repeated engagement. Finally, further research exploring the translation of international frameworks into local practice could illuminate policy-practice gaps and the process of adaptation, negotiation, and contestation within geopark governance, providing deeper insight into co-production of authenticity across scale.

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Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet for Tourism Suppliers



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

AUTHENTICITY AND THE GEOTOURISM EXPERIENCE FOR DESTINATION DISTINCTIVENESS IN INDONESIAN UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Amanda Fauziah, who is a PhD student in the School of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Glasgow, supervised by Dr Guillaume Tiberghien and Dr Anna de Jong. Before you decide whether or not to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the study, what your involvement would entail, and any potential risks or benefits associated with participating. Please take the time to carefully review the information provided below. If there is anything unclear or if you would need further information, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher with the contact details attached at the end of this information sheet.

Project description

The purpose of this study is to assess geopark stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity of geotourism experiences as means to enhance the destination distinctiveness in the Batur UGGp and Rinjani-Lombok UGGp. We aim to gain insight into various tourism stakeholders' authentication positions on geotourism practices and how they contribute to informing geotourism experiences at UNESCO Global Geopark (UGG). This study involves a range of geopark stakeholders, including the public sector, private sector, and local communities, which represent different levels of authority: local, provincial, national, and international. There is no restriction for participants' gender and educational background but expected to be over 18 years old. The total number of participants involved is around 45 people.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview and a consent form will be given to you for signature. The interview will involve a one-on-one conversation with the researcher, during which you will be asked a series of open-ended questions related to your perception of authenticity of geotourism practices in the geopark. The interview will be conducted by Amanda Fauziah and will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Some interviews may be conducted

online using Zoom or WhatsApp calls, as needed. Interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate capturing of the conversation.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in this study. All information obtained during the interview will be anonymized and treated with strict confidentiality. Your identity and personal details will not be disclosed in any reports or publications resulting from this study. Participants' private information, the transcript of the interview, and the recorded file will be stored on the researcher's encrypted computer, with a password-protected folder. Data will be stored securely and only accessible to the researcher and the supervisors. Following the submission of the PhD thesis, the participant and research data will be securely stored at the University of Glasgow data repository for ten years.

Please be aware that we uphold confidentiality commitments diligently unless there is evidence of misconduct or potential harm. In such instances, the University may be obligated to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies. While we will strive to make every effort to maintain your confidentiality, it is important to understand that due to the research' location and the limited number of participants, absolute confidentiality may be impossible to assure. If any information comes to light that could potentially harm someone, we will report this to the relevant authorities.

What if I decided to withdraw?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw until 30 September 2025, without providing a reason. If you decide to withdraw, any data collected up to that point will be securely destroyed and not included in the analysis. You will be informed once the data is completely removed. No other information would be gathered about you, and no other research procedures would be performed.

What is the risk by participating in this study?

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. However, discussing certain topics during the interview may evoke some emotional or personal responses. Should you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, you may choose to discontinue or skip any questions. If you experience any issues regarding emotional, psychological, or physical concerns while participating in the study, the researcher will recommend that the participant contact:

Rinjani-Lombok UGGp (Lombok)

- **RSUD Provinsi NTB**
Address: Jl. Prabu Rangkasari, Dasan Cermen, No. 1, Kec. Sandubaya, NTB, 84371
Open Hours: Every day, 24 hours (Phone:
- **RSJ Mutiara Sukma Provinsi NTB**
Address: Jl. Ahmad Yani, No. 1, Selagalas, Kec. Sandubaya, NTB, 83237
Open Hours: Monday to Friday, 8 am – 1 pm (Phone:

Batur UGGp (Bali)

- **Klinik Kintamani**

Address: Banjar Bugbugan, Jl. Yudistira, No. 11X, Batur, Kec. Kintamani, Bangli, Bali 80652

Open Hours: Every day, 24 hours (Phone:

- **Bali Provincial Mental Hospital**

Address: Jl. Kesumayudha, No. 29, Kawan, Kec. Bangli, Bangli, Bali 80661

Open Hours: Every day, 24 hours (Phone:

What will happen to the results of the study if I take part?

Your voluntary act as a participant in this study will contribute to the advancement of knowledge to the literature in the field of authenticity and the geotourism experience from a multistakeholder approach. The findings will contribute to filling the gap of research in understanding the experiential outcomes of tourists engaging in geotourism experiences, which are largely absent in the geotourism literature. Your participation will also provide a significant contribution to help define the geoparks' distinctive characteristics and construct practical insights for geopark managers into the UNESCO managerial strategies and practices on sites towards local sustainable tourism development.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee. To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research, please contact the Lead for Ethical Review, College of Social Sciences (socsoci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk).

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation, please feel free to contact the researcher via email at a.fauziah.1@research.gla.ac.uk or the supervisor Dr Guillaume Tiberghien at Guillaume.Tiberghien@glasgow.ac.uk.

Thank you!

Appendix 2: Privacy Notice

Privacy Notice

Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project: Authenticity and the geotourism experience for destination distinctiveness in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks

Name of Researchers: Amanda Fauziah

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project: 'Authenticity and the geotourism experience for destination distinctiveness in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks'. This privacy notice will explain how The University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details in order to conduct our research. We need your name and contact details to arrange interviews or potentially follow up on the data you have provided. We only collect data that we need for the research project and will de-identify your personal data from the research data (your answers given during the interview or focus group discussions, for example) through pseudonymization. In any publications resulting from this study, your personal data will only be named by professional post with your written consent. All collected data, including the transcript of the interview and recorded file, will be securely kept in a separate, password-protected folder on the researcher's computer. Please note that absolute confidentiality may be impossible to assure but the researcher will make every effort to maintain your confidentiality as much as possible.

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for Academic Research, we will be relying upon Task in the Public Interest in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories of data collected, we will be processing this on the basis that it is necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes, or statistical purposes.

Alongside this, in order to fulfill our ethical obligations, we will ask for your consent to take part in the study. Please see the accompanying Consent Form.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by Amanda Fauziah, a PhD student at the School of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Glasgow. In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe. All collected data, including the transcript of the interview or focus group discussion and recorded file, will be securely kept in a separate, password-protected folder on the researcher's computer. Backup storage will take place in a password-protected OneDrive folder and a password-protected external hard drive. The researcher will not share the data with others unless participants request to share

their related interview or focus group discussion transcript. Qualitative analysis will be conducted after collecting your data. Please consult the Consent form and Participant Information Sheet which accompanies this notice.

What are your rights?

GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including to request access to, copies of, and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of personal data and data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see UofG Research with personal and special categories of data.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the webform or contact dp@gla.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.

Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee or the relevant School Ethics Forum in the College.

How long do we keep it for?

Your personal data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of ethical approval 30/09/2025. After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your research data will be retained for a period of ten years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines. Specific details in relation to research data storage are provided on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

End of Privacy Notice _____

Appendix 3: Consent Form for Tourism Supplier



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: Authenticity and the geotourism experience for destination distinctiveness in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks

Name of Researcher: Amanda Fauziah (Student); Dr Guillaume Tiberghien (Supervisor); Dr Anna de Jong (Supervisor).

Please tick as appropriate

- Yes ☐ No ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to interview being audio-recorded
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to notes being taken.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by a pseudonym.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

I agree that:

- Yes ☐ No ☐ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymized.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ Participants will be identified by professional post in any publications arising from the research.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be treated as confidential and always kept in secure storage.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.

- Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research (for a maximum of ten years).
- Yes ☐ No ☐ The research data may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this study.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ Depending on the volume and richness of the data produced, the NVivo software (qualitative data analysis computer software) may also be used.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

The researcher information is:
Amanda Fauziah, a.fauziah.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Name of Participant Signature
.....

Date

..... **End of consent form**

Appendix 4: Indicative Set of Questions for Tourism Suppliers

INDICATIVE SET OF QUESTIONS

‘Authenticity and the Geotourism Experience for Destination Distinctiveness in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks’

The purpose of this study is to assess geopark stakeholders’ perceptions of authenticity of geotourism experiences as means to enhance the destination distinctiveness in the Batur UNESCO Global Geopark and Rinjani UNESCO Global Geopark. The researcher aims to gain insight into various tourism stakeholders’ authentication positions on geotourism practices and how they contribute to informing geotourism experiences at UNESCO Global Geopark (UGG). To address this aim, three research questions are presented.	
Objective 1. <i>To explore tourism suppliers’ authentication positions on geotourism practices and how they contribute to informing geotourism experiences at UGGps.</i> 1.1. What is the role of different tourism suppliers in the process of authentication of geotourism experiences at UGGps? 1.2. How do tourism suppliers commodify geological heritage for tourism development and provide authentic experiences to geotourists? 1.3. To what extent does UNESCO align with the local community and tourism agency in the development and delivery of the geotourism experiences?	
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW	
Professional Information	Can you provide a brief overview of your professional background?
	How many years of experience do you have in this field?
	Can you describe your roles and responsibilities at geoparks?
Authenticity	In your opinion, what is authenticity?
	What does authenticity mean to you in the context of travel and tourism?
	How would you define an authentic tourism experience?
	What aspects or elements of that experience made it feel authentic to you?
	How do you differentiate between an experience that feels authentic versus one that feels staged or inauthentic? Are there specific cues or indicators that help you make this distinction?
	Do you think the geotourism experience delivered in UGGp Batur / UGGp Rinjani is authentic? Why?
Authentication	How do you contribute to the development of the geotourism experience?
	What is your degree of involvement in the development and delivery of the geotourism experience?
	How important is it for you to engage in developing/delivering a geotourism experience?
	What factors do you consider important when developing/delivering a geotourism experience?
	In what ways do you engage with other stakeholders in the development/delivery/management of geotourism experiences?
	How do you collaborate with other geopark stakeholders to ensure the long-term viability and authenticity of geotourism experiences?
	Are there any opportunities and challenges in the collaboration with other geopark stakeholders in the development and delivery of the geotourism experience?

Commodification	How do you incorporate geological heritage into your tourism offering? Can you provide examples of specific geological sites or features that you have included in your tourism products or services?
	What factors do you consider when selecting geological sites for tourism development? Are there specific criteria or characteristics of the destination that you would prioritize?
	Can you describe the steps involved in the process of commodifying geological heritage for tourism?
	How do you incorporate UNESCO Guidelines into your geotourism offerings?
	How do you elaborate biotic (flora, fauna) and cultural components into your geotourism offerings?
Experiential Outcomes	How do you inform geotourists about the geological significance and value of the geotourism destinations they visit? What methods or tools do you use to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the geological heritage?
	How do you think the geotourism experience delivered at the geoparks contributes to tourists' understanding and appreciation of geological heritage?
	What do you expect of the experiential outcomes of geotourism experience?
	Do you think the geotourism experience contributes to tourists' personal growth or self-reflection?
	In your opinion, what are the key elements that make a geotourism experience successful in delivering meaningful and transformative outcomes for tourists?
	Can you describe any emotional or affective responses from tourists during the geotourism experience? How do you think these emotions contribute to their overall satisfaction?
Destination Distinctiveness	How would you describe the distinctiveness or uniqueness of your UGGp compared to others?
	In your opinion, what are the key attributes or features that make a destination stand out from the competitors?
	Can you identify any specific abiotic, biotic, and cultural components that contribute to the distinctiveness of your UGGp?
	Do you believe that the authenticity of geotourism experience enables destination distinctiveness? If so, how?
Sustainable Development	How important is it for you to engage in sustainable tourism practices?
	Can you share examples of initiative or practice you have implemented to promote sustainability in relation to geological heritage?
	Do you think the geotourism experience fosters a sense of responsibility or environmental stewardship?

Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet for Tourists



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

AUTHENTICITY AND THE GEOTOURISM EXPERIENCE FOR DESTINATION DISTINCTIVENESS IN INDONESIAN UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Amanda Fauziah, who is a PhD student in the School of Social and Environmental Sustainability, University of Glasgow, supervised by Dr Guillaume Tiberghien and Dr Anna de Jong. This study is funded by The Indonesian Education Scholarship (LPDP) – Ministry of Finance Republic of Indonesia for the purpose of a doctoral thesis. Before you decide whether or not to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the study, what your involvement would entail, and any potential risks or benefits associated with participating. Please take the time to carefully review the information provided below. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation, please feel free to contact the researcher via email at a.fauziah.1@research.gla.ac.uk and WhatsApp the supervisor Dr Guillaume Tiberghien at Guillaume.Tiberghien@glasgow.ac.uk and Dr Anna de Jong at Anna.deJong@glasgow.ac.uk

Project description

The purpose of this study is to explore tourists' perceptions of authenticity of their geotourism experiences at the Indonesian UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGs). According to UNESCO, the UGGp label aims not only to preserve the geological heritage of geopark but also contribute to developing a well-recognizable and distinctive tourism destination, a crucial criterion for their designation. Defining the distinctive characteristic of UGGps requires evaluating various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity of the geotourism experience, a complex interplay between UNESCO, local tourism stakeholders, and tourists. Understanding these perceptions is essential as they shape the overall tourist experience and satisfaction. Therefore, this study aims to uncover the factors that enable visitors' authentic geotourism experiences and how they contribute to informing destination distinctiveness at Indonesian UGGps. This study involves different categories of participants: participants who are planning to visit Batur UGGp or Rinjani UGGp by joining a geotour and participants encountered personally on-site, or those who agree to participate in the study through social media recruitment. The only exception to participation is that the participants must be aged 18 years old, or above. The total number of participants involved is around 30 people.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview, online photo diaries, and participant observations. A consent form will be given to you for signature. The interview will involve a one-on-one conversation with the researcher, during which you will be asked a series of open-ended questions related to your perception of authenticity of your geotourism experience in the geopark. Some interviews may be conducted online using Zoom/MS Teams/WhatsApp audio call, as needed. Interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate capturing of the conversation. The interview will last approximately one hour.

For online photo diaries, you will be asked to send 3-5 different photos of a special, memorable, or meaningful geotourism experience, along with a short description detailing your reflections on the photo. This approach aims to further explore the authenticity of your geotourism experience and provide deeper insight into destination distinctiveness. You can use your cameras and smartphones to collect photos. Photos of individuals who have not given consent will not be included in any published outputs. Any photos containing images of yourself will remain anonymous in publishing outputs, through the use of blurring over images of faces. To the extent possible, you will be asked to send the photos and narratives to the researcher's email or WhatsApp account within one month after you complete the tour. If necessary, a follow-up interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes, may be conducted to discuss the photos and their meanings, ensuring accurate interpretation. Consent regarding the follow-up interview will be provided in the consent form. Your involvement in the online photo diaries is entirely voluntary. You have the option to participate solely in the semi-structured interviews or engage in both the interviews and online photo diaries.

Lastly, participants' observations will be conducted to capture a broader context of your feelings, interactions, and communications with the tour guides/local communities within the UGGPs settings. Observation will not begin until you have been fully briefed and have given your explicit consent by providing a signature on the consent form.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in this study. All information obtained during the interview discussions, online photo diaries, and participant observations will be anonymized and treated with strict confidentiality. Your identity and personal details will not be disclosed in any reports or publications resulting from this study. Importantly, however, anonymity cannot be assured and it may be possible that you are recognisable to some within published outputs. Participants' private information, the transcript of the interview discussions, and the recorded files, as well as photo diaries, will be stored on the researcher's encrypted computer, with a password-protected folder. Data will only be accessible to the researcher and the supervisors. Following the submission of the PhD thesis, the participant and research data will be securely stored at the University of Glasgow data repository for ten years.

Please be aware that we uphold confidentiality commitments diligently unless there is evidence of misconduct or potential harm. In such instances, the University may be obligated to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies. While we will strive to make every effort to maintain your confidentiality, it is important to understand that due to the research' location and the limited number of participants, absolute confidentiality may be impossible to assure. If any information comes to light that could potentially harm someone, we will report this to the relevant authorities.

What if I decided to withdraw?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw until 30 September 2025, without providing a reason. If you decide to withdraw, any data collected up to that point will be securely destroyed and not included in the analysis. You will be informed once the data is completely removed. No other information would be gathered about you, and no other research procedures would be performed.

What is the risk by participating in this study?

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. However, discussing certain topics during the interview may evoke some emotional or personal responses. Should you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, you may choose to discontinue or skip any questions. If you experience any issues regarding emotional, psychological, or physical concerns while participating in the study, the researcher will recommend that the participant contact:

Rinjani-Lombok UGGp (Lombok)

- **RSUD Provinsi NTB**
Address: Jl. Prabu Rangkasari, Dasan Cermen, No. 1, Kec. Sandubaya, NTB, 84371
Open Hours: Every day, 24 hours (Phone:
- **RSJ Mutiara Sukma Provinsi NTB**
Address: Jl. Ahmad Yani, No. 1, Selagalas, Kec. Sandubaya, NTB, 83237
Open Hours: Monday to Friday, 8 am – 1 pm (Phone:

Batur UGGp (Bali)

- **Klinik Kintamani**
Address: Banjar Bugbugan, Jl. Yudistira, No. 11X, Batur, Kec. Kintamani, Bangli, Bali 80652
Open Hours: Every day, 24 hours (Phone:
- **Bali Provincial Mental Hospital**
Address: Jl. Kesumayudha, No. 29, Kawan, Kec. Bangli, Bangli, Bali 80661
Open Hours: Every day, 24 hours (Phone:

What will happen to the results of the study if I take part?

Your voluntary act as a participant in this study will contribute to advancing knowledge regarding authenticity and the geotourism experience. Your participation will contribute significantly to uncovering the factors that contribute to authentic geotourism experiences from the tourists' perspectives, and the extent to which they contribute to the planning and development of destination distinctiveness for UGGps.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been considered and approved by the University of Glasgow, College of Social Science Research Ethics Committee. To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research, please contact the Lead for Ethical Review, College of Social Sciences (socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk).

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation, please feel free to contact the researcher via email at a.fauziah.1@research.gla.ac.uk and WhatsApp messages or the supervisor Dr Guillaume Tiberghien at Guillaume.Tiberghien@glasgow.ac.uk and Dr Anna de Jong at Anna.deJong@glasgow.ac.uk

Thank you!

Appendix 6: Consent Form for Tourists



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: Authenticity and the geotourism experience for destination distinctiveness in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks

Name of Researcher: Amanda Fauziah (Student); Dr Guillaume Tiberghien (Supervisor); Dr Anna de Jong (Supervisor).

Please tick as appropriate

- Yes ☐ No ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to the interview being audio-recorded
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to the follow-up interview being audio-recorded
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to the photos being shared and used for any published outputs
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to notes being taken during participant observation.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by a pseudonym.

I agree that:

- Yes ☐ No ☐ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymized.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be treated as confidential and always kept in secure storage.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research (for a maximum of ten years).

- Yes ☐ No ☐ The research data may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this study.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ Depending on the volume and richness of the data produced, the NVivo software (qualitative data analysis computer software) may be used.
- Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

The researcher information is:
Amanda Fauziah, a.fauziah.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Name of Participant Signature
.....

Date

..... **End of consent form**

Appendix 7: Indicative Set of Questions for Tourists

INDICATIVE SET OF QUESTIONS

'Authenticity and the Geotourism Experience for Destination Distinctiveness in Indonesian UNESCO Global Geoparks'

This study aims to uncover the factors that enable visitors' authentic geotourism experiences and how they contribute to informing destination distinctiveness at Indonesian UGGps. Accordingly, the research questions are:

1. How do tourists perceive the authenticity of their geotourism experiences in Indonesian UGGps?
2. How is destination distinctiveness embodied through authenticity?
3. How can tourism visitors' perception of authenticity of the geotourism experiences contribute to the planning and development of destination distinctiveness for UGGps?

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Participant's Demographic Information

Before we start with the main interview questions, I'd like to gather some background information about you. This helps me better understand the context of your responses.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Age | Could you please tell me your age? |
| Gender | How would you identify your gender? |
| Education Level | What is the highest level of education you completed? |
| Occupation | What is your current occupation? |
| Location | Where do you currently live? |
| Origin | Could you tell me where you're originally from? |
| Travel Experience | Is it your first geotourism experience?
Is it the first time you have traveled to a geopark? If not, what other geopark did you visit? |

Initial Motivations and Impressions of UGGps

Thank you for sharing your demographic information. Next, I'm interested in exploring your first impressions of the UGGp. First impressions play a significant role in shaping how we perceive and connect with a place from the moment we arrive. Understanding what captured your attention initially can provide information on potential indicators and factors that contribute to memorable tourism experiences.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Initial Motivations | What motivated you to visit UGGps over other types of destinations?
Did you seek out information about the geotourism experience provided in the Indonesian UGGp before your visit?
Were there any particular aspects of the geopark's offerings (or reputation) that influenced your decision to visit?
Did you find the UNESCO designation or international label influenced your travel decision? If so, why? |
| Initial Impressions | Can you describe your first impressions upon arriving at the UGGp?
What aspects did you find most captivating? What made you feel that way? |

Geotourism Experiences

Now, I'd like to discuss your geotourism experiences. Understanding your level of engagement during these experiences will help me gauge how involved and interested you are in geotourism information and activities. Please share as much detail as possible about your experiences and what you found most engaging, meaningful, and memorable.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Participation | How would you describe a memorable and meaningful tourism experience?
Were there any specific encounters, features, or activities conducted at the UGGps that contributed to having those meaningful/memorable experiences?
Did you participate in any hands-on activities? What did you find most engaging about them? |
|----------------------|---|

Interaction	How did you interact with the natural and cultural environments during your geotour/trip? How did you feel about it? What kind of interaction were you interested in, and why? Can you describe a particular moment that felt unique or special during your visit? What made it feel that way?
Information and Interpretation	How important were local guides or experts to your overall experience? Can you recall a time when a local guide provided insights or stories that deepened your appreciation of the sites? If yes, how and what is special about it? How did the information displayed at the geopark contribute to your understanding and appreciation of the place?
Reflections and Impact <i>Please share your reflections on your geotourism experience. Feel free to highlight any experiences or lessons learned that have left a lasting impact on you. Reflecting on these moments can reveal profound insights into how travel has shaped your worldview, values, and personal growth.</i>	
Life Perspective	Looking back at your geotourism experiences, how did they impact your life perspectives?
Lesson Learned	What important life lessons did you learn through your travels to UGGp? How did these experiences contribute to your personal development? How did learning about the geopark features enhance your understanding and enjoyment of the place? Do you think your previous tourism experiences or understanding of the geopark's geological, ecological, and cultural significance influenced your experience of the place? If yes, in what way?
Destination Distinctiveness <i>Next, I am also interested in your reflection on specific destinations' features that have left a lasting impression on you due to their distinctiveness. Understanding what makes a destination stand out is crucial to developing memorable and enriching geotourism experiences.</i>	
Distinctive Features	What are the first things that come to your mind when you think of a destination that stands out to you? What makes it distinctive or unique? Can you describe a particular moment or feature that felt unique or special during your visit? What made it feel that way?
Comparative	How would you describe the distinctiveness of the UGGp you visited compared to other tourism destinations (or other UGGps)?

Appendix 8: Visual Prompt

Online Photo Diaries Guidelines

Method description

The online photo diaries aim to capture and share features or moments from your geotour that you consider special, memorable, or meaningful. This method combines visual documentation with personal reflection, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of your geotourism experience.

During your geotour, use your camera or smartphone to take photos of your geotourism experience you would like to share with the researcher. For each photo, please write a short narrative explaining why it was meaningful to you, providing context about the moment, its significance to your geotourism experience, and any other personal reflections you may have. After submitting your photos and narratives, you may be invited to participate in a follow-up interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. This interview will aim to discuss the photos in more detail to ensure accurate interpretation, enriching the understanding of your geotourism experiences and providing deeper insights into the significance of the captured moments.

Submission instructions

You will be asked to select 3-5 photos of your tour and include a narrative directly beneath each photo attachment within one month after your trip. This timeframe allows for fresh yet thoughtful reflections about your travel in the geoparks. Please submit your photos in JPEG format and narratives via email to a.fauziah.1@research.gla.ac.uk or through WhatsApp messages to Please use secure, encrypted email services and ensure that WhatsApp messages are end-to-end encrypted. Avoid using public or unsecured networks when sending your data.

Privacy and consent

Privacy and consent are crucial. Ensure that all photos respect the privacy of individuals. Photos of yourself will be anonymized in published outputs by blurring faces, and you should not include photos of people who have not given their consent. Only photos with proper consent will be published.

Data storage and protection

Your photos and narratives will be stored in a password-protected folder on the researcher's computer, with backup copies on a password-protected external hard drive kept in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Glasgow (Maxwell Building, Dumfries Campus). If you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will be securely destroyed.