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Bridging Practice And Policy: Slow Tourism Governance in Urban Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the governance of slow tourism in Salatiga, a secondary city in Central Java, Indonesia, by analyzing the relationship between formal policy frameworks and community-level tourism practices. While slow tourism has been widely discussed as a sustainable alternative to mass tourism, its governance in small and medium-sized cities, particularly in Southeast Asia, remains underexplored. Adopting a qualitative approach, this study integrates document analysis of the local tourism master plan, semi-structured interviews with government and community stakeholders, and field observations of tourism sites. The findings reveal a significant disjunction between policy and practice. Slow tourism is actively enacted through community-based initiatives emphasizing experiential depth, local engagement, and small-scale development. However, these practices remain weakly institutionalized within formal governance structures. Policy frameworks demonstrate partial alignment with slow tourism principles, particularly in terms of locality and community participation, but lack integration in key areas such as mobility planning, destination branding, and experience-based performance indicators. Governance remains fragmented, with limited coordination across sectors and a continued reliance on visitor volume metrics. This study argues that slow tourism in Salatiga exists more as a social practice than as a policy design. It contributes to the literature by demonstrating how governance gaps, rather than resource limitations, constrain slow tourism development in secondary cities of the Global South.

Keywords: Slow tourism, Tourism governance, Secondary cities, Community-based tourism, Indonesia

Introduction

Background and Objectives

COVID-19 eliminated 50 million tourism jobs in 2020 and inflicted USD 4 trillion in direct losses through 2021 (UNWTO, 2020); international arrivals recovered to 80% of pre-pandemic levels by 2023 (UNWTO, 2024). The core paradox endures: tourism drives growth and employment while accelerating environmental degradation and social inequality (Hughes et al., 2015).

Slow tourism has emerged as a primary alternative to unsustainable mass tourism (Conway & Timms, 2012; Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Rooted in the slow food movement, it emphasizes low-impact transport, extended stays, and deep community engagement (Dickinson et al., 2011; Krešić & Gjurašić, 2022; Wu et al., 2024), broadly aligned with the triple bottom line of sustainability (Gunesch, 2020).

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The literature, however, is geographically concentrated. Studies cluster in European settings—Cittaslow certification (Presenza et al., 2015), Italian heritage routes (Moscarelli, 2023), Spanish geoparks (Fusté-Forné, 2023), northern European cities (Haapakoski et al., 2024)—while governance in small-city and Global South contexts remains understudied (Edwards et al., 2008; Hall & Jenkins, 2004). Institutional weaknesses, fragmented governance, and infrastructural deficits have been noted as barriers in developing country contexts (Reindrawati, 2023; Smith, 2012), yet city-level dynamics are largely untested.

Indonesia exemplifies this gap. National policy drives international arrivals to selected destinations (Sandang et al., 2025), yet urban tourism remains predominantly fast and transit-oriented (Wiweka, 2023). Salatiga—a mid-sized city in Central Java—presents a compelling case: a recognized national heritage city with over 140 registered heritage buildings (Dinpersip Salatiga, 2021), Indonesia's most socially tolerant city for five consecutive years (Setara Institute, 2023), and a highland location along the Semarang–Surakarta corridor with proximity to the Borobudur–Dieng cluster (Figure 1).

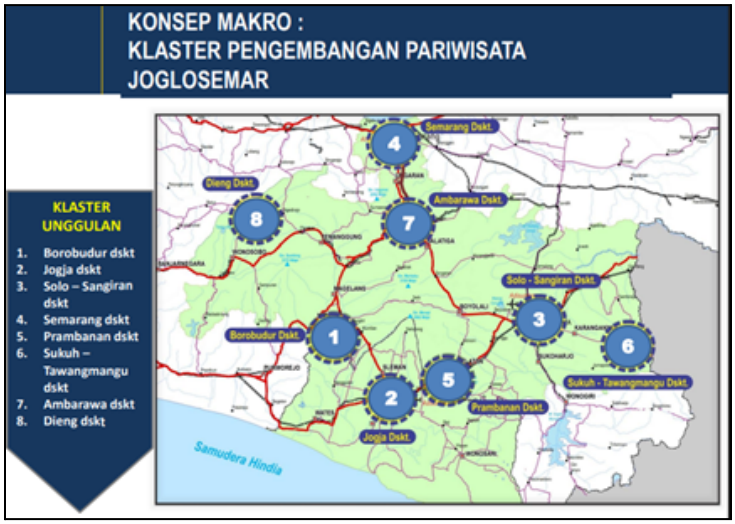


Figure 1. Macro concept of tourism development clusters in the Jogja-Solo-Semarang (Joglosemar)
Left panel: Priority clusters including (1) Borobudur, (2) Jogyakarta, (3) Solo–Sangiran, (4) Semarang, (5) Prambanan, (6) Sukuh–Tawangmangu, (7) Ambarawa, and (8) Dieng, each defined with their surrounding areas. (Source: Regional Development Planning Agency of Central Java / Bappeda Jawa Tengah)

Despite this potential, Salatiga functions predominantly as a transit city. Average domestic tourist length of stay stood at only 1.26 nights in 2024, unchanged since 2021 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). The Local Tourism Master Plan (RIPPARKOT 2021–2025) provides no explicit slow tourism strategy, and community-driven initiatives—agritourism, heritage walking tours, river-based ecotourism, and boutique hospitality—remain disconnected from one another and from formal policy. Addressing this gap requires conceptual clarity on slow tourism and the governance conditions necessary for its development.

Conceptualizing Slow Tourism

This study distinguishes slow tourism from adjacent concepts—sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, heritage tourism, and experiential tourism—which are frequently conflated in prior research. Shared values such as environmental awareness and local engagement do not automatically qualify small-scale or community-based activities as slow tourism (Hughes et al., 2015; Waligo et al., 2013; Reindrawati, 2023). Slow tourism is defined, rather, by a distinct orientation toward temporality, mobility, and depth of experience (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Serdane et al., 2020; Conway & Timms, 2012).

Accordingly, this study defines slow tourism practices as activities that intentionally emphasize (1) a slower pace and longer duration of stay, (2) meaningful engagement with local culture and community, and (3) a conscious orientation toward low-impact mobility and sustainability—consistent with frameworks that frame slow tourism as a qualitative transformation of travel experience rather than simply an alternative form (Dickinson et al., 2011; Krešić & Gjurašić, 2022; Lee et al., 2024). Activities in Salatiga are assessed against these dimensions rather than solely on local or small-scale characteristics.

Slow tourism prioritizes prolonged stays, low-carbon mobility, deep cultural interaction, and equitable distribution of local economic benefits (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Fullagar et al., 2012). Fullagar et al. (2012) frame it as a social practice constituted through lived experience and relational encounters—a deliberate response to overcrowding, heritage commodification, and carbon-intensive travel (Conway & Timms, 2012; Gunesch, 2020). Institutionalizing slow tourism requires, as Barr and Shaw (2016) argue, not merely behavioral change but a fundamental reconsideration of planning systems, infrastructure, and economic practices. Barr (2018) identifies recognition, strategic planning, regulation, and promotion as the key governance agenda.

Empirically, slow tourism correlates strongly with visitor well-being and place attachment. Wu et al. (2024) found that slow tourists produce emotionally resonant autotelic experiences through slow-moving-and-pausing and consuming-and-engaging behaviors. Huang et al. (2025) demonstrated that slow travel enhances leisure satisfaction and subjective quality of life through bottom-up spillover effects. Fusté-Forné (2023) linked slow tourist motivations to discovery and eudaimonic well-being; Lee et al. (2024) found positive emotions and deeper engagement, positioning experiential quality—not visitor volume—as the appropriate performance benchmark. These studies confirm that slow tourism centers on the quality of the relational encounter between visitor, place, and community.

Operationalizing Slow Tourism in Practice

Pécsek's (2014) framework identifies four interconnected dimensions: locality (community involvement, local business participation, cultural heritage, and gastronomy); sustainability (ecological sensitivity, reduced footprint, and extended stays); social well-being (community cohesion and participatory decision-making); and experience-focus (authentic attractions

through community engagement). These dimensions provide the normative framework against which this study assesses both tourism practices and governance arrangements in Salatiga.

In small-city and secondary urban contexts, slow tourism has demonstrated potential for destination repositioning, though governance challenges frequently constrain it. Şahin (2019) found that Seferihisar's Cittaslow certification enabled effective place branding built on authentic local identity. Haapakoski et al. (2024) showed how coopetition among Rovaniemi businesses reduced overtourism while sustaining community well-being. Moscarelli (2023) documented slow tourism's revitalizing role in Italy's inner areas through linear mobility planning. Losada and Mota (2019) found that Portugal's Douro region embodied slow tourism attributes in its promotional materials but lacked a coherent destination strategy. Garau (2015) and Chao (2015) each showed that slow tourism can emerge organically through community initiatives before formal planning is in place.

Governing Slow Tourism

Governance is the critical link between slow tourism's theoretical promise and its practical realization. Presenza et al. (2015) argued that Cittaslow succeeds by institutionalizing slow tourism values within local governance frameworks, creating accountability and inclusive stakeholder participation. Park and Kim (2016) found that Cittaslow accreditation fostered community empowerment through formalized co-creation. Waligo et al. (2013) emphasized that sustainable tourism implementation requires deliberate management of diverse stakeholders to balance competing interests. Yet Dodds and Butler (2024), reviewing three decades of global sustainable tourism policy, identified persistent implementation gaps driven by fragmented governance, weak coordination, and sectoral silos. In Southeast Asia, these weaknesses are compounded by limited community participation capacity, inadequate planning expertise, and top-down governance tendencies (Reindrawati, 2023).

Three interconnected gaps frame this study's contribution. Slow tourism governance remains empirically underexplored in small and medium-sized Southeast Asian cities (Edwards et al., 2008; Smith, 2012). The relationship between organic community-driven practices and formal policy frameworks—where the two operate at different speeds and scales—remains undertheorized (Dodds & Butler, 2024; Hall & Jenkins, 2004). Indonesian tourism governance research has concentrated on major heritage destinations, leaving secondary cities with significant slow tourism potential largely unexamined. By situating Salatiga not merely as an additional empirical case but as a context through which slow tourism governance can be examined under conditions of limited institutional support, this study reframes slow tourism as a negotiated process between grassroots practices and formal arrangements—contributing to both theoretical understanding and policy-oriented discussions in developing-country contexts. The following section outlines the methodological framework through which this examination was conducted.

Methods

Research Design and Setting

This study employs a qualitative, constructivist-interpretivist design (Creswell, 2014). Slow tourism governance in Salatiga is understood as socially constructed through the interpretations and interactions of multiple actors, best accessed through the meanings they assign to their roles and experiences. Salatiga—a mid-sized city in Central Java along the Semarang–Surakarta corridor near the Borobudur–Dieng cluster—presents a productive case: over 140 registered heritage buildings (Dinpersip Salatiga, 2021), consistent ranking among Indonesia's most socially tolerant cities (Setara Institute, 2023), and a pedestrian-scale urban fabric, yet an average domestic tourist stay of only 1.26 nights in 2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). This tension between latent slow tourism assets and persistent governance deficits positions Salatiga as an appropriate site for examining the gap between community practice and formal policy institutionalization.

Research Questions and Analytical Alignment

Three interrelated research questions guide the study (Table 1). The first is descriptive-analytical, examining how far slow tourism principles are reflected in Salatiga's tourism plan. The second is interpretive, exploring how tourism authorities construct slow tourism as a governance object. The third is explorative-interpretive, examining how community-level actors make sense of slow tourism and identify its structural opportunities and constraints. A qualitative approach—privileging words, narratives, and meanings over quantification (Bryman, 2016)—is appropriate for inquiry spanning formal policy texts, institutional perspectives, and lived community experiences.

Table 1. Type of Research Questions and Analytical Alignment

Research Questions	Type of Questions	Purpose	Aim	Supporting Data/Evidence
What slow tourism elements are identifiable in the tourism planning document.	Descriptive–Analytical	Policy content analysis of strategic documents	To identify the extent to which slow tourism principles (locality, sustainability, social well-being, experience-focus, slow mobility) are accommodated in local tourism governance	(Salatiga's Tourism Master Plan) RIPPARKOT Salatiga 2021–2025.

Research Questions	Type of Questions	Purpose	Aim	Supporting Data/Evidence
How do the tourism authorities of Salatiga understand and position slow tourism?	Interpretive	Institutional perspective and policy framing	To understand how government actors construct slow tourism: as a normative concept, an intuitive practice, or a formally integrated strategy	Interviews with the City Office of Culture and Tourism; work programme documents; policy narratives
How do local stakeholders make sense of, respond to, and identify opportunities and challenges in slow tourism development?	Explorative–Interpretive	Field practice and actor experience analysis	To map slow tourism dynamics at community and business levels, and to identify structural opportunities and constraints	Interviews with tourism practitioners; community actors; field observations; mobility and infrastructure data

Participants and Sampling

Seven informants were selected through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) based on direct involvement in tourism planning, management, or practice in Salatiga (Table 2). Three government officials represent the City Offices of Culture and Tourism, Public Works and Spatial Planning, and Transportation—reflecting slow tourism's cross-sectoral governance demands. Four community practitioners represent Pitu Rooms (accommodation), Argotelo (agritourism), Sitalang (river tubing), and Telusur Kota (heritage walking tours), each embodying core slow tourism dimensions—experiential depth, local economic integration, and low-impact mobility—regardless of whether the label has been explicitly adopted.

Table 2. List of Participants

No	Participant / Data Source	Description
1	Head of Division, City Office of Culture and Tourism, Salatiga Senior tourism official.	Discussed city branding, the role of government in tourism, implementation of the Local Tourism Master Plan (RIPPARKOT), support for Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as well as city events and attractions.
2	Yosef — Manager, Sitalang River Tubing Destination Community-based destination manager.	Discussed the condition of Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), the 4A framework (attractions, accessibility, amenities, ancillary services), community-based tourism (CBT), sustainable tourism development (STD), and visitor volume management.

No	Participant / Data Source	Description
3	Ary Indra — Founder, Pitu Rooms Salatiga Boutique accommodation operator.	Discussed slow tourism potential grounded in experiential stays, sport, and nature; length-of-stay challenges; limitations in tourism data; the absence of an event calendar; and governance gaps.
4	Nur — City Office of Public Works and Spatial Planning (PUPR), Salatiga Urban infrastructure official.	Discussed city infrastructure, public space planning, and physical support for slow mobility and slow tourism activities.
5	Dewi — Manager, Argotelo Salatiga Educational agritourism operator.	Discussed cassava-based agritourism, local food education, links to slow tourism principles, and local economic multiplier effects.
6	Rahadian — City Office of Transportation, Salatiga City transportation official.	Discussed urban transport systems, mobility patterns, and the potential for slow tourism-oriented transport solutions, including walking, cycling, and local public transit.
7	Abel Jatayu — Founder, Telusur Kota Heritage walking tour initiator.	Discussed history-based tourism, pedestrian-oriented urban exploration, and deep experiential engagement as forms of urban slow tourism practice.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected between September 2025 and January 2026 through semi-structured interviews and non-participatory field observation (Angrosino, 2007; Creswell, 2014). Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and lasted sixty to ninety minutes each, addressing how slow tourism is understood within Salatiga's governance framework, its accommodation in planning, and actor-identified opportunities and constraints. Field observation ran from November 2025 to January 2026 across six purposively selected sites—the Jalan Jenderal Sudirman heritage corridor, Lapangan Pancasila, Pasar Raya Salatiga, Argotelo, Sitalang River Tubing, and Telusur Kota routes—each visited two to four times to capture temporal variation. A structured observation protocol documented four dimensions: tourist movement patterns, activity rhythm and duration, visitor–community interactions, and spatial conditions affecting slow mobility. Field notes recorded systematically after each visit triangulated and contextualized interview findings.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed two tracks. RIPPARKOT was examined using qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009), assessing the presence, absence, or partial accommodation of five slow tourism elements—locality, sustainability, social well-being, experience-focus, and slow mobility—in formal policy language and programmatic content. Interview transcripts and observational notes were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006). Open coding inventoried units of meaning; axial coding grouped these into sub-themes; selective coding consolidated them into four major themes: (1) the rhythm of the

city and the experiential texture of slowness; (2) everyday tourism practices as implicit slow tourism; (3) stakeholder constructions of slow tourism across institutional positions; and (4) the recognition and mainstreaming of slow tourism within formal governance. These themes move analytically from lived experience through enacted practice to structural governance conditions, collectively revealing why slow tourism in Salatiga operates more powerfully as a social reality than as institutionalized policy design. Credibility and trustworthiness were ensured through data triangulation (Patton, 2015), a reflexive research journal maintained throughout fieldwork, and selective member-checking with key informants.

Findings

The findings are organized around four analytically layered themes derived from thematic analysis of interview transcripts, field observations, and policy documents: the experiential texture of slow tourism in Salatiga's urban environment; slow tourism as enacted community practice; the governance architecture of slow tourism at the policy level; and stakeholder interpretations of slow tourism across institutional positions. The discussion that follows synthesizes these themes against the theoretical framework established in the Introduction and the comparative slow tourism literature, responding to each of the three research questions identified in table 1.

The City as A Slow Tourism Setting

Fieldwork conducted across Salatiga's central urban core revealed a city whose scale, social pace, and spatial organization create conditions naturally conducive to slow tourism experience. The Jalan Jenderal Sudirman heritage corridor functions not as a thematically packaged tourist zone but as a living streetscape in which colonial-era buildings, historic churches, traditional commercial shophouses, and the routines of everyday public life coexist without the commercial pressure characteristic of purpose-built tourist infrastructure. Observation at Lapangan Pancasila during afternoon hours revealed residents walking, cycling, and socializing in patterns more consistent with a neighborhood park than a managed attraction — producing an ambient quality of unhurriedness that constitutes what Fullagar et al. (2012) describe as the relational encounter between visitor, place, and community that defines slow tourism at its experiential core.

The city's culinary landscape reinforces this character. Rather than concentrating in a unified commercial food precinct, Salatiga's food experiences are distributed across neighborhood warungs, historic coffee houses, and traditional markets such as Pasar Raya Salatiga — settings in which eating is embedded in social interaction, intimate spatial atmospheres, and conversations about locally sourced ingredients and generationally transmitted recipes. This pattern is consistent with Putri et al.'s (2023) finding that Salatiga's traditional culinary offerings generate tourism value primarily through relational depth rather than through spectacle or scale. The city's everyday social texture, in this sense, constitutes an experiential substrate that naturally supports slow tourism even where formal slow tourism programming is absent.

Nevertheless, a structural paradox defines Salatiga's tourism condition. The very qualities that make the city amenable to slow tourism — its small scale, low-intensity social rhythm, and absence of mass visitor infrastructure — have also constrained its emergence as an independent destination. With an average domestic tourist length of stay of only 1.26 nights in 2024, a figure that has remained effectively stagnant since registering 1.29 nights in 2021 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025), Salatiga continues to function primarily as a transit point along the Semarang–Surakarta corridor rather than as a destination in its own right. This condition reflects the pattern identified by Dewa and Buchori (2021), whereby spatial development in the city has been driven more by regional connectivity logic than by deliberate destination planning, reinforcing a transit-oriented framework that structurally limits extended visitor engagement.

Community-Based Slow Tourism in Practice

Four community-level initiatives identified through fieldwork and interviews demonstrate that slow tourism values are already being enacted in Salatiga, frequently without explicit reference to the slow tourism concept. Each embodies distinct dimensions of the Pécsek (2014) slow tourism framework — locality, sustainability, social well-being, and experience-focus — and together they constitute what Fullagar et al. (2012) describe as the enacted dimension of slow tourism: tourism as social practice embedded in particular places, relationships, and rhythms rather than in formal program design.

Pitu Rooms, a boutique accommodation property established by Ary Indra, was deliberately designed not as a conventional hotel but as an experiential hospitality space emphasizing personal host-guest relationships, small-scale intimacy, and an unhurried ambient atmosphere. The property's limited room count enables relational depth structurally incompatible with volume-based hospitality models. In interview, Ary Indra described slow tourism as "not merely a tourism activity, but a change in perspective toward travel — different from the pattern of mass tourism that is dense with itineraries and that chases as many points as possible in a single day" (A. Indra, interview, January 19, 2026). The emphasis on return visits — the priority of guests "coming back again" over viral reach — reflects the stay-longer, return-deeper logic that distinguishes slow tourism from high-volume visitor circulation. Significantly, Ary Indra offered a governance diagnosis of Salatiga's condition, observing that the city lacks "a backbone mechanism" in tourism management and that operators function independently in the absence of coordinated direction — an assessment that aligns with the governance fragmentation identified in the comparative literature on small city tourism (Dodds & Butler, 2024; Waligo et al., 2013).

Argotelo, an educational agritourism destination established in 2019, evolved from a cassava processing enterprise into a participatory destination engaging local residents across multiple economic and facilitation roles — catering, transportation, waste education, agricultural labor, and youth facilitation. The manager described the model as designing experiences that are "conducted slowly, so that participants can follow the complete sequence of activities," ensuring that visitors are "not merely spectators but directly involved in every activity" (D. Dewi, interview, January 20, 2026). This participatory orientation is consistent with the social well-being and

locality dimensions of Pécsek's (2014) framework and with Conway and Timms' (2012) characterization of slow tourism as a holistic umbrella integrating community tourism, heritage practice, and locally embedded economic activity. With approximately twelve thousand annual visitors, including a significant proportion of returning institutional clients, Argotelo demonstrates that experiential depth generates sustained relational value beyond the initial encounter.

Sitalang River Tubing emerged from a 2018 city government initiative encouraging each urban ward to identify and develop its local potential. Revitalized in 2020 following a pandemic-induced pause, the destination combines river tubing with environmental education, tree planting, and camping activities. Capacity is managed deliberately: monthly visitor numbers average approximately 200, against an annual target of 2,000, ensuring that scale remains consistent with the environmental carrying capacity of the river ecosystem and non-negotiable safety standards. When asked about slow tourism in interview, the manager, Yosef, acknowledged unfamiliarity with the term while simultaneously articulating values substantively consistent with it, identifying Salatiga as a city "known as a quiet retirement city" (Y. Yosef, interview, January 16, 2026) — grounding the city's tourism character in its social and spatial temperament rather than in any externally defined conceptual framework. The destination also confronts a concrete governance visibility gap: outdoor promotional signage for destinations outside Salatiga is more prominent within the city than signage directing visitors to local tourism sites, a deficit that constrains the conversion of existing slow tourism assets into visitor arrivals.

Telusur Kota, a heritage walking tour organization founded by Abel Jatayu, was revived in 2024 after an initial prototype dating to 2011. The organization's structure and operating philosophy were described in interview as follows: Telusur Kota has two divisions — a research division and a trip division. The research division is responsible for finding and exploring historical and cultural information from archives and local narratives, while the trip division delivers the results of that research to participants. (A. Jatayu, interview, January 20, 2026)

Nine thematic routes have been developed, addressing Islamic heritage, colonial urbanism, post-independence civic identity, and the former European residential district of Diponegoro, among others. Each trip is capped at approximately twenty-five participants, and prospective participants are required to submit a written motivation statement as an experiential pre-selection mechanism. In 2025, total participation across all trip types reached approximately 700 individuals — a figure reflecting deliberate scale management rather than promotional underperformance. Telusur Kota exemplifies Pécsek's (2014) experience-focus dimension: the walking route serves as a medium for reflective urban reading rather than as a vehicle for rapid site coverage. Collaborations with local dance and gamelan studios and with textile artisans in the Tingkir district extend the experiential scope to include embodied cultural practice and locally embedded economic exchange, while a network relationship with Pitu Rooms creates linkages between the accommodation and heritage-experience sectors that are characteristic of the integrated slow tourism ecosystem described in the comparative literature (Haapakoski et al., 2024).

Taken together, these four initiatives confirm that slow tourism is already being practiced in Salatiga at the community and enterprise level. Each actor independently arrived at core slow tourism values through local knowledge, community creativity, and an intimate reading of the city's spatial and social character — none adopted the slow tourism label as a precondition for practice. This confirms the pattern described by Fullagar et al. (2012): slow tourism emerges from the quality of actors' relationships with place, not from the application of an externally prescribed concept.

Slow Tourism in Salatiga's Governance Architecture

Policy Document Analysis

Qualitative document analysis of Salatiga's Tourism Master Plan (RIPPARKOT 2021–2025) against the five slow tourism elements identified in the literature reveals a pattern of partial normative alignment without explicit strategic integration, as illustrated in Table 3.

The locality and social well-being dimensions are normatively addressed through provisions on cultural heritage preservation and community empowerment via Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), with the document mandating maintenance of tourism attractiveness and facilitation of increased community organizational roles. The experience-focus dimension remains underdeveloped, with the policy framework organized around destination category development and marketing channel allocation rather than visitor experience quality metrics. Most critically, the slow mobility and slow destination branding dimensions are entirely absent: the RIPPARKOT's chapters on destination development strategy contain no provision for integrating walking, cycling, or low-emission public transit into tourism spatial planning, and promotional strategy is addressed generically without articulating Salatiga's positioning as a distinctive slow tourism location.

At the national level, Law Number 18 of 2025 on Tourism strengthens the normative foundation for slow tourism-compatible development by mandating integrated, sustainable, and ecosystem-based tourism planning encompassing destination management, community empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability as a unified system. This legislative framework is conceptually well-aligned with slow tourism principles. However, the persistent gap between national legislative intent and local operational strategy — a structural feature of Indonesian tourism governance identified by Reindrawati (2023) — remains evident in Salatiga's current planning architecture.

Table 3. Alignment of RIPPARKOT 2021–2025 with Slow Tourism Elements

Slow Tourism Element	Substance in RIPPARKOT	Level of Integration	Reference from Policy Document
Locality	Cultural heritage preservation, tourism attractions, and local identity development	Normatively present	"Maintaining and preserving tourism attractions" (article 8)

Slow Tourism Element	Substance in RIPPARKOT	Level of Integration	Reference from Policy Document
Social Well-Being	Community empowerment and Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) support	Normatively present	"Facilitation of increased roles for community organizations (Tourism Awareness Group/Pokdarwis)"; policy direction for "Development of Tourism-Aware Communities toward Sustainable and World-Class Tourism" (p. 60)
Experience-Focus	Destination development and tourism marketing	Not specific to experience quality	Policy pillars cover "Destination Tourism; Tourism Marketing; Tourism Industry Planning; Tourism Institution" (article 10) — without experiential quality metrics or visitor engagement objectives
Slow Mobility	No integrated tourist mobility design	Absent	No explicit provision for slow mobility integration (walking, cycling, low-emission transit) in the Destination Development Strategy chapter (Chapter II)
Slow Destination Branding	Not explicitly mentioned	Absent	Only "Tourism Marketing" as a generic policy axis (article 10); no positioning of Salatiga as a slow tourism destination with defined market segmentation

Source: RIPPARKOT Salatiga 2021–2025; analysis by authors against slow tourism framework (Barr, 2018; Pécsek, 2014).

The Slow Mobility Deficit

The slow mobility dimension represents the most pronounced governance deficit in Salatiga's slow tourism architecture. Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) argue that mobility is not peripheral to slow tourism but constitutive of it: the journey is integral to the experiential quality of slow travel, and transport mode fundamentally shapes how visitors encounter place. Fieldwork and interviews with the Salatiga Transportation Office confirm that Salatiga's mobility system does not currently function as a slow tourism enabler. Road condition data from the Salatiga Public Works and Spatial Planning Office, presented in Table 4, indicate that physical infrastructure quality is not the primary constraint.

Of the 337.471 kilometers of roads under city jurisdiction, approximately 91.1 percent are in good or moderate condition in 2024, indicating that infrastructure quality per se is not the binding constraint on mobility. The challenge lies instead in system integration. The city's public

transport fleet — 408 urban transit vehicles, 120 buses, and 440 minibuses as of 2024 — serves a ridership base dominated by students and low-mobility residents, with tourist use negligible. Private vehicle and ride-sharing dominance further marginalizes public transit as a tourism mobility option. An official from the City Transportation Office acknowledged in interview that "the city's movement pattern is not yet integrated" and expressed support for using urban transit vehicles as tourist transport — "easier and more accessible to reach destinations" — while noting that this proposal remained at the discussion stage (Rahadian, interview, January 20, 2026). The potential introduction of electric vehicles as a slow mobility option has similarly been discussed but faces investment cost, infrastructure readiness, and community acceptance barriers. This implementation gap is consistent with Barr's (2018) observation that sustainable mobility is a governance challenge demanding systemic coordination across sectors rather than incremental adjustment within any single agency.

Table 4. Alignment of RIPPARKOT 2021–2025 with Slow Tourism Elements

Road Condition	2023	2024
Good (Baik)	240.42 km	226.311 km
Moderate (Sedang)	86.62 km	84.071 km
Damaged (Rusak)	7.37 km	22.767 km
Severely Damaged (Rusak Berat)	3.07 km	4.322 km
Total	337.47 km	337.471 km

Source: Salatiga Public Works and Spatial Planning Office (2024). Only roads under city jurisdiction are included.

Promotional Framing and Destination Branding Deficits

The promotional dimension of slow tourism governance reveals a structural mismatch between the organic dynamism of community-level innovation and the formal promotional infrastructure of the city government. A senior official from the Salatiga Culture and Tourism Office acknowledged the asymmetry directly, noting that "when tourism grows, it grows directly from social media... the reach of government cannot keep pace" (H. Mulyani, interview, December 15, 2025). The same official affirmed the government's facilitative rather than directive role, recognizing that "the creativity of community members is extraordinary" and that "tourism packages have already been initiated by accommodation operators and community groups, while the government's role is to facilitate and expand" (H. Mulyani, interview, December 15, 2025). Tourism growth in Salatiga has been driven predominantly by informal digital networks and word-of-mouth rather than by coordinated strategic communication. While the RIPPARKOT includes a Tourism Marketing policy axis, it does not articulate Salatiga's positioning as a slow tourism location, with defined market segments or a differentiated communication narrative. The narrative of Salatiga as a "slow city" has emerged in public discourse and was affirmed in government interviews but has not been formalized into a consistent, data-grounded branding strategy. This absence limits the city's capacity to convert its latent slow tourism assets —

heritage depth, culinary authenticity, community-based experiential offers — into a coherent destination identity capable of competing with better-positioned cities in Central Java's tourism network.

Stakeholder Interpretations of Slow Tourism

Interviews revealed significant divergence in how different actor categories interpret and position slow tourism as a concept and as a governance object. Government officials from the Salatiga Culture and Tourism Office articulated a broadly affirmative orientation toward slow tourism as a conceptual fit for the city's character, with the view that Salatiga is "more suited to slow tourism than mass tourism" and that a "slow city" narrative has organically developed in public discourse. However, this normative recognition did not translate into operational specificity: slow tourism was framed as an intuitive fit with the city's identity rather than as a formally integrated strategy with defined indicators, budget allocations, or cross-sectoral coordination protocols. The government's self-positioning as a facilitator of community creativity, while appropriate in spirit, also reveals an accountability gap: facilitation without institutional architecture risks leaving slow tourism permanently dependent on community resilience rather than supported by structural governance.

Among community-level and business actors, familiarity with the slow tourism concept varied considerably. Operators such as Ary Indra of Pitu Rooms and Abel Jatayu of Telusur Kota demonstrated sophisticated practical understandings of slow tourism values — experiential depth over visitor volume, relational engagement over transactional consumption, and the long-term logic of return visits over one-time throughput. By contrast, Yosef of Sitalang River Tubing acknowledged no prior familiarity with the slow tourism term while simultaneously enacting values — community involvement, safety-managed capacity, environmental stewardship — substantively consistent with it. This divergence illustrates a pattern consistently identified in the slow tourism literature: the conceptual label circulates more slowly through practitioner networks than through academic and policy discourse, even as the underlying values are actively practiced in community settings (Fullagar et al., 2012; Serdane et al., 2020).

A shared concern across informant positions was the perceived misalignment between existing tourism governance logic — oriented toward visitor volume metrics, event-based activity calendars, and short-term promotional campaigns — and the longer-term, quality-oriented logic that slow tourism demands. As Lee et al. (2024) demonstrate, slow tourism generates subjective well-being effects through the depth of relational engagement rather than through the breadth of site coverage. A governance framework organized primarily around visitor count maximization is structurally ill-suited to nurturing these dynamics, a concern voiced explicitly by accommodation operators and community practitioners who identified the absence of a coordinated governance architecture — described by one operator as a missing "backbone mechanism" — as the primary constraint on slow tourism development, not the absence of slow tourism assets themselves.

Discussion

Slow Tourism as Social Practice Before Policy Design

The findings confirm and extend Fullagar et al.'s (2012) premise that slow tourism is a social practice—a mode of relating to place, time, and community—that can precede formal policy recognition. In Salatiga, slow tourism is already enacted across boutique accommodation, agritourism, river ecotourism, and heritage walking by actors who have independently arrived at its core values through local knowledge and an intimate reading of the city's spatial character. This inverts the conventional assumption of top-down governance: rather than policy producing slow tourism, community practice generates the experiential and evidential foundation from which governance frameworks might subsequently be constructed.

This inversion parallels comparative cases. Garau (2015) found that sustainable tourism success in Sardinia's Marmilla region depends on the integration of cultural heritage, landscape, and community cohesion—conditions cultivated through practice, not legislated through policy. Chao (2015) showed that Green Island, Taiwan, developed slow tourism organically through geography-constrained mobility, with formal governance providing integrative architecture for what communities had already built. Salatiga replicates both patterns: community practice is substantively well-developed; integrative governance architecture has yet to emerge.

Pécsek's (2014) framework maps where practice is robust and where deficits persist. The locality dimension is well-represented across all four initiatives, each drawing on Salatiga-specific assets—cassava-based food culture, river ecosystems, colonial and Islamic heritage, boutique urban identity. The social well-being dimension is evident through inclusive benefit distribution at Argotelo and Sitalang, and through Telusur Kota's engagement of young local researchers and performers as cultural mediators. The experience-focus dimension is demonstrated in the deliberate management of scale, experiential quality, and relational depth across all four initiatives, consistent with Wu et al.'s (2024) finding that slow tourist behaviors combine slow-moving-and-pausing with deep cultural engagement. The sustainability and slow mobility dimensions, however, mark the boundary between practice and governance. Individual actors adopt environmentally conscious measures—annual river cleaning at Sitalang, waste education at Argotelo—but no city-level sustainability monitoring framework exists. Slow mobility is the most acute structural gap: Salatiga's transport infrastructure is physically adequate but unorganized for slow tourism mobility circuits, and integration of public transport with destination access remains aspirational.

Structural Opportunities and Governance Challenges for Slow Tourism Development

The findings of this study, synthesized in Table 5, confirm that Salatiga possesses a robust foundation for slow tourism governance while facing structural challenges that currently prevent the transition from community-level practice to coherent citywide strategy.

Salatiga's compact spatial scale enables the walkable destination clustering that Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) identify as foundational to slow tourism mobility, where the journey between sites is itself an experiential resource. Its social tolerance and informal inter-actor collaboration generate the trust and connective capacity that Waligo et al. (2013) identify as preconditions for effective multi-stakeholder governance. The four community initiatives already constitute a network of practice nodes that, once connected through coordinated governance, could form a coherent slow tourism offer capable of extending average length of stay and distributing economic benefits more broadly.

Three structural challenges constrain this potential. First, the dominant governance logic remains organized around visitor volume and event-based programming rather than the experiential quality indicators—length of stay, depth of engagement, return visit rates, community benefit distribution—that slow tourism requires. Dodds and Butler (2024) identified this tension between quantitative governance metrics and qualitative sustainability outcomes as a persistent cross-contextual failure mode; Salatiga replicates it. Second, stakeholder coordination remains fragmented: each community initiative operates effectively within its own domain without systematic interconnection, precluding the integrated slow tourism ecosystem that Rovaniemi (Haapakoski et al., 2024) and Cittaslow-certified cities (Presenza et al., 2015; Park & Kim, 2016) demonstrate to be necessary for sustained destination repositioning. Third, the mobility system has not been designed to serve slow tourism, and reorienting it faces the cross-sectoral coordination challenges that Barr (2018) identifies as central to sustainable mobility transitions.

The Cittaslow comparison is instructive. Presenza et al. (2015) and Park and Kim (2016) argued that Cittaslow succeeds by institutionalizing slow tourism values within formal governance structures, converting value alignment into operational strategy through accountability mechanisms and inclusive participation. Salatiga currently inverts this sequence: slow tourism values are present in practice but institutionalization is incomplete. The path forward—consistent with Barr's (2018) governance agenda—requires, at minimum: explicit recognition of slow tourism as a destination strategy in successor planning documents; cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms linking tourism, transport, urban planning, and community development; governance performance metrics that complement visitor volume data with indicators of experiential quality and community economic benefit; and formalization of a "slow city" identity into a consistent, market-segmented destination brand.

These findings carry implications for the broader literature on slow tourism governance in Global South and Southeast Asian contexts. Reindrawati (2023) identified institutional weaknesses, fragmented governance, and infrastructural deficits as the primary barriers to slow tourism adoption in developing countries. The Salatiga case confirms this diagnosis while adding a constructive qualification: the community-level practice constituting the raw material for slow tourism governance is already present and substantively developed. The governance challenge is therefore less one of capacity building from scratch and more one of orchestrating

existing assets within a coherent institutional framework—a distinction that shifts policy emphasis from program creation to integration, coordination, and strategic communication.

Table 5. Synthesis of Slow Tourism Development Opportunities and Challenges in Salatiga

Analytical Dimension	Opportunities in Salatiga	Challenges Identified	Governance Implications
Slow Mobility (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Dickinson et al., 2011)	Compact city scale; walkable distances between destination nodes; temperate climate supporting cycling and pedestrian mobility	Transport system not integrated with tourism destinations; private vehicle dominance; public transit perceived as non-touristic	Develop integrated tourist mobility circuits; designate thematic pedestrian corridors; connect public transit routes to destination clusters
Locality (Pécsek, 2014)	Local-asset-based community practice: Argotelo, Sitalang, Telusur Kota, local MSMEs networks; Salatiga-specific heritage and culinary identity	No unified destination narrative packaging these assets; attractions remain disconnected from one another and from formal branding	Develop destination packaging grounded in city identity; curate a coherent slow tourism narrative connecting existing practice nodes
Social Well-Being (Pécsek, 2014)	Community involvement in tourism operations; inclusive local economic benefit distribution; inter-actor informal collaboration	Governance support inconsistent and unstructured; Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) coordination weak; operators function independently	Strengthen cross-sectoral coordination; institutionalize community-based tourism within city planning frameworks
Experience-Focus (Pécsek, 2014; Fullagar et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2024)	Immersive, small-scale experiential offers; relational host-guest dynamics; repeat-visit orientation; deliberate scale management	Governance performance metrics still organized around visitor volume and event counts rather than experiential quality	Adopt experience quality indicators alongside visitor volume data; include length-of-stay and return visit rates in governance KPIs

Analytical Dimension	Opportunities in Salatiga	Challenges Identified	Governance Implications
Governance & Coordination (Barr, 2018; Waligo et al., 2013)	Creative, adaptive community initiatives demonstrating slow tourism values without formal categorization	Stakeholder fragmentation; limited promotional signage; slow tourism not integrated as formal destination strategy	Develop collective orchestration mechanisms; formalize slow tourism in successor RIPPARKOT; implement integrated branding strategy

Note. Framework dimensions drawn from Barr (2018), Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010); Dickinson et al. (2011), Pécsek (2014), Fullagar et al. (2012), Lee et al. (2024), and Waligo et al. (2013).

Conclusion

This study examined slow tourism governance in Salatiga across three research questions: policy-practice alignment, institutional construction of slow tourism as a governance object, and community-level enactment of slow tourism values. Analysis of RIPPARKOT 2021–2025 reveals partial normative alignment: provisions on heritage preservation and community empowerment address locality and social well-being, yet experience-focus remains underdeveloped and slow mobility is entirely absent. Tourism authorities recognize slow tourism as an intuitive normative fit, but without operational specificity, defined indicators, or cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms—leaving development permanently dependent on community resilience. At the community level, Pitu Rooms, Argotelo, Sitalang River Tubing, and Telusur Kota already enact slow tourism values through experiential depth, deliberate scale management, and relational host–guest dynamics, regardless of formal conceptual awareness. These findings expose a governance tension between a logic of acceleration—event programming, visitor count targets—and a logic of care practiced by community actors who prioritize relational engagement and inclusive benefit distribution. Salatiga possesses the community practice foundation necessary for slow tourism development. What is absent is the governance architecture to integrate, coordinate, and sustain it.

Theoretically, this study extends slow tourism governance frameworks by demonstrating that bottom-up enactment can precede and exceed formal policy recognition, contributing to the underrepresented small-city and Southeast Asian literature. Empirically, the findings suggest that secondary Indonesian cities may already hold the community practice necessary for slow tourism, and that policy design should prioritize integration and coordination over program creation—a practical contribution for a national development agenda increasingly oriented toward sustainability and community empowerment.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest in the writing, review, and editorial process of the article entitled "Bridging Practice and Policy: Slow Tourism Governance in Urban Indonesia." The authors declare that this manuscript is free from any form of conflict of interest and has been processed in accordance with the applicable provisions and policies of the journal in order to prevent any deviation from publication ethics in all its forms.

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