



Reconstructing Cultural Tourism Destinations and Communication Strategies for the Development of a National-Level Cultural Tourism Area in Gegesik, Cirebon Regency, West Java Province

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A B S T R A C T

The development of culture-based tourism has emerged as a key strategy for enhancing the competitiveness of regional destinations, including Cirebon Regency. Gegesik was chosen as the research site due to its rich artistic and cultural heritage, yet it faces challenges such as the absence of representative tourism amenities and limited human resources in tourism management. This study aims to formulate a revitalization concept for the Gegesik town square as a cultural attraction center and to design a communication strategy for developing culture-based tourism at the national level. Using an exploratory qualitative approach, data were collected through documentation, field observations, in-depth interviews with community leaders and local officials, and focus group discussions with academics, artists, and agencies. Analysis employed a communication science perspective to examine interaction patterns, community participation, and message delivery. Findings reveal the square serves as a hub for cultural, artistic, religious, and social activities, with 74 intangible cultural heritage forms, 80 local culinary types, and active art studios. However, its physical condition requires revitalization based on local wisdom. The ACADA model (Assessment, Communication Analysis, Design, Action) guided the formulation of educational tourism programs such as school cultural visits. The study emphasizes combining physical revitalization with participatory communication to strengthen Gegesik's image as a cultural tourism destination, with recommendations for consistent government support, community capacity building, and sustainable educational initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

The development of a nation requires cultural elements that serve as reminders of national identity, closely linked to the formation of national character. The advancement and preservation of culture are development mandates in line with the Master Plan for Cultural Advancement (Zubrzycki, 2018). One national development strategy that emphasizes cultural aspects is tourism, which not only provides added economic value but also strengthens national identity (Arjana, 2021). Canton (2021), shows that the tourism sector is a significant contributor to foreign exchange earnings in the Asian region, with Thailand, Macau, and Japan earning trillions of rupiah in revenue. Indonesia also ranks the tourism sector as the third-largest foreign-exchange earner after oil and gas (Yakup, 2019; Lee & Syah, 2018).

Global tourism trends are shifting from mass tourism to personalized, educational tourism, emphasizing the values of knowledge, culture, and sustainability (Abdullah & Lui, 2018). One emerging innovation is the tourist village, which offers cultural authenticity and direct interaction with the community. Indonesia, with 1,941 cultural heritage sites recorded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Ratten, 2022; Widyawati et al., 2025), has significant potential to develop cultural tourism villages as a sustainable development strategy. Successful examples include the Panglipuran Tourism Village in Bali (Remawa & Padmanaba, 2021), and the

educational tourism village model in Yogyakarta (Ikandary et al., 2024).

Gegesik District, Cirebon Regency, is a region with unique cultural and artistic diversity. However, this potential has not been fully developed into a leading tourist attraction. The main challenges lie in tourism amenities, particularly the revitalization of the Gegesik town square as a center for arts and culture, and in limited human resources for tourism, which are not yet ready to become a tourism community. Furthermore, the local government's lack of political will, which still considers tourism an additional program, has led to Gegesik's development being driven primarily by communities and cultural observers. Therefore, an appropriate communication strategy is needed to ensure that Gegesik cultural tourism develops systematically and sustainably and provides benefits to the community.

Several previous studies have highlighted cultural tourism villages, but have not addressed the communication strategy in depth. Astara et al., (2022), examined the Panglipuran Tourism Village, based on local wisdom, but did not address tourism communication strategies. Irwanto et al., (2024), studied education-based tourism villages in Yogyakarta but focused on environmental aspects rather than cultural communication. Prayudi (2022), highlighted the development of cultural tourism villages through an empowerment approach, without integrating a development communication model. Kachniewska (2015),

emphasized the contribution of tourism villages to regional development, but did not analyze gaps in tourism amenities.

Meanwhile, [Peruthová & Ryglová, \(2020\)](#), linked tourist satisfaction to destination quality but did not examine how communication can serve as an instrument for strengthening the region's image. Based on these gaps, this study presents a novel approach by integrating the ACADA (Assessment, Communication Analysis, Design, Action) model as a communication strategy in the development of Gegesik cultural tourism, particularly in the revitalization of the town square as a center of activity and a key tourism area. This research is based on development communication theory ([Cangara, 2013](#)), which emphasizes the importance of communication as a tool for mobilizing community participation in tourism development, and urban planning theory ([Lynch, 2013](#)), which emphasizes city elements such as edges, nodes, landmarks, paths, and districts as the foundation for designing public spaces.

Based on these two theoretical foundations, communication strategies in cultural tourism development are not merely technical but are also integrated with the community's spatial and socio-cultural aspects. Therefore, this research seeks to explore the situation and challenges faced in developing cultural tourism in Gegesik District. Furthermore, this research provides design solutions for the revitalization of Gegesik Square and communication strategies for the development of Gegesik cultural tourism.

METHOD

This research employed an exploratory qualitative study. Exploratory research aims to design extensive, deliberate, and systematic data collection to maximize findings from generalization-based descriptions and direct understanding of social and psychological life. Exploratory research often uses qualitative methods for data collection because it requires creativity and flexibility, with a research design that is subject to change due to the lack of guidelines for identifying key data or information ([Mudjiyanto, 2018](#)).

Data collection began with a documentation study of the draft regional regulation for the 2020 Cirebon Regency Regional Tourism Development Plan (Riparriparda). This research focused on Gegesik, a key tourism area in the region. The documentation study was also adapted from Cirebon Regency spatial planning documents for 2020-2035. Another stage involved direct observation, including visits to the area to assess the community's social potential, particularly the Gegesik town square, which served as the focus of this research. Interviews were conducted with key actors, namely Mr. Syaifudin and the Gegesik Sub-district Head, who is also a key figure in Gegesik.

The final stage of data collection involved a focus group discussion involving the Gegesik community, the Gegesik District government, cultural heritage observers, academics from Muhammadiyah University of Cirebon, Gadjah Mada University, and the Cirebon College of Technology, as well as relevant agencies such as the Culture and Tourism Office, the Communication and Informatics Office, the Public Works Office, and the Cirebon Regency Regional Development Planning and Research Agency.

This research was conducted in 2022 in collaboration with the Cirebon Regency Regional Development Planning and Research Agency, as part of a study on area-based tourism development in Cirebon Regency. The results are presented as a

proposed concept for developing Gegesik tourist attractions and amenities through architectural design. The initial images were created in Google Earth, then converted to JPEGs and traced in vector-based software. The final rendering was produced in SketchUp using the Enscape render engine. The next stage was an analysis of the communication strategies proposed for tourism development in Gegesik.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Potential and problems of tourism development in Cirebon

The West Java Provincial Government, for the 2018-2023 period, has a flagship program: developing tourism destinations and infrastructure, including tourist villages. The strategy for developing tourist villages includes marine, religious, jabali (mountain), and arts and culture tourism ([Aurellia & Alamsyah, 2025](#)). This seriousness manifests in revitalizing town squares as community spaces for progress and cultural richness across West Java's regencies and cities. The open space is equipped with play areas, shelters for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), ceremonial fields, and amphitheatres to advance residents' innovation and creativity, increase community welfare, and enhance community enjoyment ([Chamidah et al., 2025](#)). The impact of this town square revitalization extends to serving as a green open space, a public area, and a tourist attraction. The town square is inseparable from the roots of local culture in the architectural design offered ([Bell & Jayne, 2017](#)). One example is the revitalization of areas such as the Cirebon City Square, the Pataraksa Square in Cirebon Regency, and the Sangkala Buana Square at the Kasepuhan Palace.

Cirebon boasts a rich cultural heritage influenced by two major cultural influences: Javanese and Sundanese, as well as Chinese and Arab influences stemming from its past as an international port. This unique identity is fostered through art and culinary arts. Infrastructure that enhances accessibility, such as the Trans-Java and Cisumdawu toll roads and the double-track railway, facilitates the movement of tourists. This potential serves as a reference for the Cirebon Regency government's program of developing area-based tourism, specifically in the Gunungjati, Jamblang, and Gegesik areas. The Gegesik area is dominated by a community passionate about the arts, including performing arts, theatrical plays, festivals, and other regional arts, held at the Gegesik square. These activities represent a tourism potential that can be explored and developed to increase regional income and the welfare of the surrounding community.

The Potential of Gegesik Culture

The government issued Law No. 5 of 2017 concerning the Advancement of Culture. This law states that strategic steps to advance national culture are to be taken through protection, development, utilization, and guidance, to realize an Indonesian society that is politically sovereign, economically self-sufficient, and has a distinct personality. Gegesik was designated an Object of Cultural Advancement (OPK) ([Dienaputra et al., 2022](#)). Gegesik was declared a cultural village by Regent Regulation No. 87 of 2015 and a tourist village by Regent Regulation No. 57 of 2022. This aims to preserve Cirebon's arts and culture.

Gegesik District is located in the north-west of Cirebon Regency, bordering Indramayu Regency. The distance from Gegesik District to the Cirebon Regency Government Center is 22 kilometers. Gegesik has one town square surrounded by four

village halls at each corner: Gegesik Lor, Gegesik Kidul, Gegesik Kulon, and Gegesik Wetan. These four areas converge into one large area. This region boasts numerous active studios showcasing Cirebon's distinctive arts. Gegesik artists showcase their performing arts at various cultural events and celebrations across Cirebon. Glass painting and sculpture are renowned and sought after by art lovers, becoming a signature Cirebon souvenir.

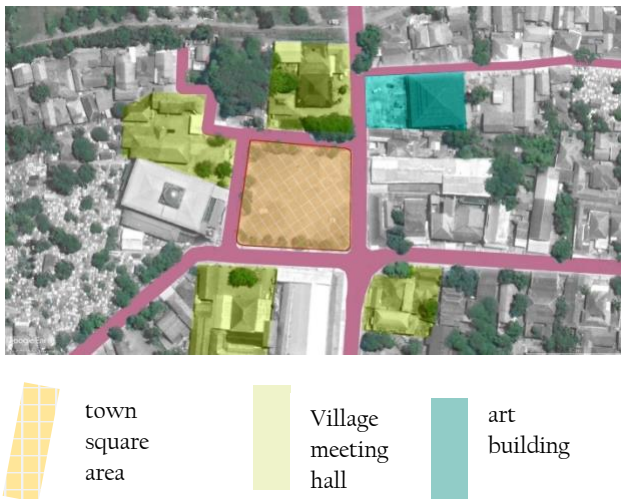
Cultural rituals, which are still preserved, serve as a platform for self-actualization and for expressing gratitude, featuring entertainment such as shadow puppetry, plays, and carnivals. These activities are organized and enjoyed by the community. This serves as a key element in the program's development, with community participation and involvement. If managed effectively, this can have significant economic value, attracting tourists. For example, Bali holds numerous cultural carnivals. Research has recorded 74 varieties of Cirebon cultural heritage in Gegesik (Mok, 2019; Sedana & Foley, 2016). Furthermore, there are more than 80 types of Cirebon specialties found in the Gegesik area.

Gegesik Square as a tourist and cultural attraction

Currently, Gegesik Square is surrounded by essential buildings: four village halls, the Al-Barkah Gegesik Grand Mosque, and the Gegesik Arts Building. Gegesik is a bustling area in the northwestern part of Cirebon Regency, bordering Indramayu Regency. The square, as an open space, is used for various activities, including mass gatherings for religious, cultural, entertainment, and sports activities. drying rice during harvest season. Several national events have been held featuring colossal mask dances, young puppeteers, and national-level glass painting (Ahmed & Memish, 2019).

Figure 1:

Aerial Photo Map and Existing Conditions of the Gegesik Square Route



Given the current condition of the town square, it is a relatively flat area with paving blocks, bordered by an iron fence, which is often used as a platform for street vendors. This certainly detracts from the area's attractive image. In the future, the town square needs to be developed more thoughtfully, one that does not attract activities that could damage the area's image. This development and transformation of the town square is expected

to create a new image for Gegesik, thereby enhancing the local image throughout Indonesia and internationally.

The Gegesik town square is used for various events. There are annual events held at the Gegesik town square, as well as incidental or special events. The following is research data obtained from Gegesik arts and culture activists.

Table 1.

Annual art performance schedule at the Gegesik town square

No	Event	Time	Participants
1	Muludan Gegesik	Maulid Month	All Levels of Society
2	Cultural Parade	April	Art Studios and Groups in Gegesik
3	Creative Gegesik Festival	June	Gegesik Studios and MSMEs
4	Grand Barikan	August	All Levels of Society
5	Fireball Tournament (Welcoming Ramadan)	End of Ruwah (Javanese excerpt)	Al-Barkah Community Council and All Youth in the Mushola in Gegesik
6	Acoustic Gegesik (Welcoming New Year)	New Year's Eve	Community
7	1 Muharram Carnival	1 Muharram	Kindergarten/Preschool
8	Heroes' Day Carnival	November	PGRI/Art Studios/Community

Source: results of observations and documentation of Gegesik cultural activists 2022

Figure 2.

Klana Masked Rampak at Gegesik square in 2019



Source: Youtube Gegesik.ID

The far-from-beautiful condition of Gegesik Square outweighs the annual events and the cultural potential for tourism development. The square was last revitalized in 2001 with funding from the Cirebon Regency Government. Among the outdoor venues supporting cultural tourism are the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Festival in Bali, the Ramayana Ballet Prambanan Ballet in Yogyakarta, and the Kecak dance performance at Ulu Watu, Bali. Cirebon also boasts an outdoor performance with the Sunyaragi Cave as its backdrop.

Figure 3. Photo of the existing condition of Gegesik Square



Source: Researcher documentation (2022)

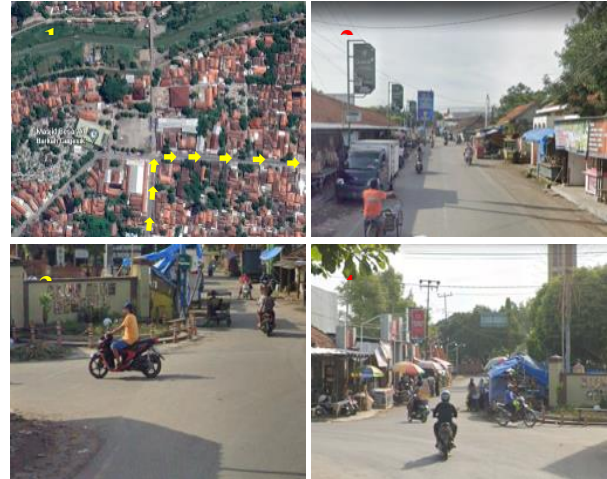
Reconstruction of the Gegesik Square Tourist Destination

This quality improvement is related to the area's image and the strengthening of identity. According to Lynch (2013), his research discovered the importance of mental images. A clear image provides many crucial benefits to the community, such as the ability to orient easily and quickly, a sense of comfort from avoiding getting lost, a strong sense of place identity, and harmonious relationships with other places. The image of a city is the impression formed by the general public, not individuals. It also places greater emphasis on the physical environment and the qualities of physical objects (such as color, shape, and strong structure), thereby creating a distinctive, eye-catching appearance. This aims to foster appropriate policies for the community, including their socio-economic or political impacts (Hariram et al., 2023).

The results of research conducted through a series of observations and interviews yielded provisions that must be addressed to accommodate the needs of the Gegesik town square. Renovation of the town square should not only be artistic and functional but also based on local wisdom. Function and aesthetics must be considered while maintaining Cirebon's cultural identity and representation. Some of these provisions are:

1. The town square's floor height must not exceed the floor level of the mosque. This is a sign of respect and elevates the place of worship.
2. The town square should not have any backdrops or decorative pillars that serve as backdrops for events such as public religious studies, festivals, and other events. The goal is to provide cost-effectiveness during the event and to enhance the artistic value of the red brick design. According to community leaders, the red brick design is intended to be removed because it does not obscure the mosque's facade. The mosque's facade is fully exposed, serving as a reminder of the divine value as a primary value.
3. The town square will still be accessible to vehicles for loading goods during performances and also for cars loading rice after drying during the main harvest.

Figure 4. Aerial photo of the town square area



Source: Researcher analysis (2022)

After observing the objects to be developed as priority tourism areas, several issues emerged that appear to require serious attention. This development certainly cannot be separated from considering the functional approach of the area. Some of these important aspects are as follows:

a. Signage

Signage is designed to clarify the area's name and enhance its image, making it easier for the public to remember. The floor of the town square is designed so that it does not exceed the height of the mosque floor. Based on observations, the town square is used to accommodate Eid prayer congregations. Therefore, according to religious principles, the floor is not recommended to be higher than the imam. Furthermore, the ground level of the town square is kept low to accommodate users with disabilities.

b. Edges

Boundaries within an area are intended to mark the area. In this case, the Gegesik town square is currently bordered by a concrete and iron fence. This boundary is used by some street vendors to anchor their stalls. This undoubtedly contributes to the deterioration of the area's image. Therefore, the proposed design for the town square (alun alun-alun) allows for the exclusion of massive barriers such as fences, but rather focuses on raising the floor to mark the area's boundaries. Removing the boundaries also allows for the four village halls, the mosque, and the arts building to be exposed, while the red brick fence surrounding the village hall remains visible as a relic of the past.

c. Main Entrance

In the design of the area, the orientation of the main entrance is essential to establish a clear spatial hierarchy. In Javanese culture, a door or gate symbolizes the entrance to an area. In this case, the design of the Gegesik town square applies a cultural concept that is contextual to the surrounding environment, as seen throughout the area. The use of the Candi Bentar gate is taken from the Siti Inggil building of the Kasepuhan Palace, a gate originating from Majapahit and acculturated into Cirebon culture. The placement of this gate is oriented along an imaginary axis aligned with the direction of the mosque, thus representing local culture. One of the entrances to the square is provided with a ramp on the south side to accommodate four-wheeled vehicles. Another purpose of the ramp is to provide access for people with disabilities.

d. Street Furniture

Another element that shapes the area is street furniture, or more commonly known as street furnishings. Its function is to complement the area's facilities, allowing visitors to explore the area around the square. Street furniture, in the form of seating, is designed to be two-way and dynamic. To enhance the area's image, the pedestrian flooring can be accented with terracotta tiles that align with the square's theme. The choice of terracotta tiles follows the pattern and theme used by residents in constructing the Gegesik Arts Building. Furthermore, the use of brick is common in rural areas of Cirebon, as seen at the Bentar Temple. In terms of layout, the presence of a mosque to the north of the square enhances the area's charm. Therefore, a gate shaped like the Bentar Temple is placed as the entrance from the south. The mosque's location can also serve as a backdrop for community activities, particularly socio-religious ones. This aligns with existing activities in the Gegesik District. Furthermore, the addition of trees will create a shady atmosphere and demonstrate that the Gegesik town square is also a potential green open space.

Figure 5. 3D Bird's Eye View of Gegesik Square



Source: Researcher analysis design (2022)

Figure 6. Design concept of Gegesik Square from four sides



Source: Researcher analysis design (2022)

The selection of the central area in the Gegesik District square as a green open space for public use was motivated by several factors. As Roger Scurton stated, green open space (RTH) is a location with very little design. Meanwhile, RTH provides more access to the environment, community gatherings, and facilities for public activities. Saad (2017), explanation demonstrates that the basic conceptual structure of RTH is minimal buildings and a prioritization of natural elements such as parks, greenways, urban forests, and other green amenities.

Gegesik Cultural Tourism

Tourism development requires a communication policy that aligns with national programs (Cangara, 2013). One communication plan used in this study to differentiate the development of Gegesik cultural tourism is the ACADA (Assessment, Communication Analysis, Design & Action) model. The analysis is described as follows: An assessment is necessary to understand the situation and the problems faced. Gegesik faces issues beyond tourism amenities, including area planning. Another issue concerns human resources (HR), namely the community's readiness to become a tourism community. They emphasize hospitality and see tourism potential as a flagship program without leaving their primary jobs. Tourism management is crucial. Gegesik does not yet have an integrated marketing group comprising all the tourist villages in Gegesik.

This group acts as a manager, collaborating with tourism agents, actively coordinating with tourism groups (Pokdarwis) on presentations for tourist attractions, and serving as tour guides. Another aspect is the political will of the Cirebon Regency government, which still treats the tourism sector as an additional service and has not yet made it a flagship program. The designation of Gegesik as a cultural village and a tourist village is left to the community and cultural observers for its sustainability. The Culture and Tourism Office continues to serve as a community facilitator. Tourism development planning in Gegesik requires a master plan and support from all relevant agencies and stakeholders.

Communication Analysis: Communication issues are analyzed based on the elements of issues, behavior, participants, and communication media. Human resources in the marketing sector have not been trained to acquire the skills or certifications necessary for tourism marketing. Another issue is the lack of education for the Gegesik community as a tourism community by tourism stakeholders. The community still views the arts in Gegesik as merely a post-harvest entertainment for farmers.

Design: A strategy to develop Gegesik cultural tourism is to implement parallel activities: education, advocacy, and mobilization. Education involves providing basic tourism training to the community. Mobilization consists of designing and developing tourism packages. This aims to familiarize the community with the arrival of tourists. These tourists can come from local government activities held in Gegesik, such as the Cirebon Regency anniversary celebration, cultural festivals, meetings, and even the implementation of a village tourism program for elementary schools. This is exemplified by the Yogyakarta Special Region (DIY) Provincial Government, which mandates mandatory museum visits.

This concept can be implemented through education in cultural tourism villages. This concept provides an opportunity to transform cultural tourism villages into centers of learning, research, and tourism for students, while simultaneously training the local community to serve these local tourists. Action is implementation and evaluation. This implementation must be sustained for at least 3 to 5 years to familiarize the community and hone their skills. This pattern allows the community to learn directly. Each tourist visit provides an opportunity to learn about tourism services. This evaluation can be conducted monthly, in collaboration with relevant agencies and stakeholders. These regular meetings are to monitor the

quality of tourist services. In addition to school students, Cirebon Regency can also welcome visitors from other regions such as Bandung, Jakarta, and Semarang. These tourists are potentially attracted by the Trans-Java toll road, which can be reached in less than three hours.

CONCLUSION

Revitalizing the Gegesik town square is necessary to strengthen the area's image and make it a representative center for arts, culture, and social activities while still respecting local wisdom. The ACADA-based communication strategy emphasizes that key challenges include limited attractions, amenities, accessibility, and human resource capacity. Educational tourism programs, such as student visits to cultural villages, are recommended as a practical solution for community empowerment. Successful development depends heavily on consistent government policies and collaboration with all stakeholders. This research has limitations due to its focus on the Gegesik area and its limited number of participants, limiting the generalizability of the results. Future studies are recommended to expand the study to other cultural tourism villages in Cirebon or West Java and employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to better measure socio-economic impacts and strengthen academic and policy relevance.

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