

Visual Discourse Analysis of the Sade Village Landscape: The Construction of Sasak Ethnic Identity Behind Tourism Power Relations

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to examine how power operates through visual and spatial arrangements, and how processes of cultural representation and commodification shape Sasak cultural identity in Dusun Sade. Using a qualitative approach grounded in visual discourse analysis, this research draws on visual observation, photographic documentation, and reflexive field notes. The analysis focuses on how space, cultural objects, and social practices are curated and regulated as part of the tourist experience. The findings demonstrate that Sasak cultural identity in Dusun Sade is not naturally or neutrally expressed, but is actively produced through spatial organization, visual framing, movement pathways, and the presentation of cultural practices, such as weaving and traditional performances as tourist attractions. While cultural practices are simplified for tourism purposes, local communities retain significant agency in shaping cultural representation through controlled access, selective storytelling, and the regulation of the form and timing of performances. This study concludes that Sasak cultural identity in Dusun Sade is dynamic and continuously negotiated, with tourism functioning as a social space in which local communities actively manage and sustain their cultural identity.

Keywords:

Visual Discourse Analysis, Cultural Tourism, Power Relation, Sasak Cultural Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism has increasingly positioned traditional villages as sites where cultural identity is displayed, curated, and consumed (Tang et al., 2023). In many heritage tourism contexts, local culture is not only experienced through practices and rituals but also through carefully arranged visual and spatial settings that shape visitors' perceptions of authenticity (Uslu et al., 2023; Yi et al., 2022, 2024). As tourism continues to expand, questions arise regarding how cultural identities are produced, represented, and negotiated within these spaces.

From a theoretical perspective, representation, visibility, and power are central to understanding how cultural meanings are produced. As Michel Foucault (1995) argues, power operates not only through coercion but also through subtle forms of regulation that structure visibility, movement, and knowledge. Power operates not only through overt control but also through subtle processes of misrecognition and symbolic violence, influencing how cultural meanings are constructed and perceived (Negura et al., 2020).

In tourism contexts, spatial arrangements and visual displays function as techniques that organize what we can be seen, by whom, and under what conditions, thereby producing particular versions of cultural reality. Visual representations, such as images and heritage symbols, often act as territorial-synecdoche, where specific icons or landmarks come to represent entire destinations, potentially simplifying and reducing the complexity of the place for tourists and policymakers (Alvarado-Sizzo, 2023).

In line with Rose's (2016) framework, the tourism village operates as an institutional apparatus that produces particular representations of Sasak cultural identity. Visual and spatial arrangements function as institutional technologies that subtly regulate movement, visibility, and interpretation, allowing power relations to operate in ways that appear natural and unremarkable to visitors.

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In tourism settings, cultural practices often undergo processes of commodification, where traditions are selectively framed and simplified to meet touristic expectations (Bai & Weng, 2023; Erwen et al., 2025; Hafidhoh, 2025). The commodification process is dynamic and can be viewed as part of intangible cultural heritage making, where performers negotiate between less- and more-commercialized forms to meet both cultural and economic needs (Su, 2019). However, such processes do not necessarily eliminate local agency; instead, they often involve ongoing negotiations between external demands and local strategies of cultural management.

Existing studies on cultural tourism have extensively examined issues of authenticity and commodification (Irene Astuti Dwiningrum, 2021; Kurniawan et al., 2022; Kusumowidagdo et al., 2023; Mayasari et al., 2020; Subiyantoro et al., 2019; Widisono, 2019; Wiharno et al., 2023). Nevertheless, fewer studies have focused on how visual order and spatial organization function as instruments of power in shaping cultural identity within tourism villages. In particular, limited attention has been given to how everyday spaces, objects, and bodily practices are visually regulated and experienced by tourists, and how local communities actively negotiate these representations.

To address the gap, this study employs a qualitative approach using visual discourse analysis. Visual observation, photographic documentation, and reflective field notes are used to examine how space, cultural objects, and social practices are arranged and displayed within the tourism experience. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of how visibility and spatiality operate together in producing cultural meanings and power relations.

This research aims to explore how power relations are enacted through visual and spatial arrangements, and how cultural representation and commodification shape Sasak cultural identity in Dusun Sade. By focusing on the negotiated nature of tourism practices, this study highlights tourism as a social space where cultural identity is continuously managed, contested, and redefined.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using visual discourse analysis to examine how visual and spatial arrangements operate in shaping Sasak cultural identity in Dusun Sade. Visual materials were used actively as part of the research process, alongside other forms of evidence generated through field observation and reflective field notes. Rather than treating images as illustrative supplements, this research positioned photographs as analytical data produced as part of the research design.

Data collection was conducted through systematic photo-documentation during fieldwork in Dusun Sade. Photo-documentation involved the production of a carefully planned series of photographs intended to document and analyze specific visual and spatial phenomena related to tourism practices. Through photo-documentation, researchers intentionally generate a series of photographs as analytical material for examining particular visual phenomena (Rose, 2016). This method enabled the researcher to examine how visual order, spatial organization, and material culture structured social relations, identities, and tourist experiences within the village.

The photo-documentation process was guided by a shooting script that linked the research questions to the visual data collected. The shooting script focused on the following analytical questions:

- How are spaces in Dusun Sade visually and physically organized, particularly in relation to public and private areas?
- What forms of control or direction regulate visitors' movement and lines of sight within the village?
- How does spatial organization produce certain areas as appearing more "authentic" than others?
- Which visual elements—such as architecture, clothing, performances, and signage—are emphasized as symbols of "Sasak tradition"?
- How are cultural objects, including weaving, handicrafts, traditional houses, and rituals, displayed and commercialized within the tourism context?

- In what ways do visual and material representations transform cultural identity into a consumable tourist experience?

Photograph was accompanied by detailed field notes that included the date, time, location, and a reflective commentary responding to the shooting script questions. These notes supported the analytical process by contextualizing visual data and capturing situational observations that were not fully visible in the images themselves.

Data analysis followed the principles of visual discourse analysis. Photographs and field notes were examined to identify recurring visual patterns, spatial arrangements, and representational strategies. These elements were then interpreted in relation to power relations, cultural commodification, and identity negotiation within cultural tourism. Through this process, the study explored how visibility and spatiality functioned together as mechanisms for producing and managing Sasak cultural identity in Dusun Sade.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The visual and spatial organization of Dusun Sade structures visitors' experiences in a highly regulated yet subtle manner. The village layout distinguishes clearly between public and private spaces, with tourist circulation directed primarily through designated pathways. Optimizing these pathways enhances both the tourist experience and the sustainable development of the village by preventing overcrowding and maintaining social cohesion (Z. Li et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022). These pathways lead visitors toward areas that have been prepared for visual consumption, while access to residential and more intimate domestic spaces remains restricted. As a result, tourists encounter a carefully framed version of village life that emphasizes cultural display over everyday social practices. This framing is evident in the emphasis on traditional ceremonies, dances, crafts, and other cultural attractions designed specifically for tourism, which may differ from the residents' routine social interactions and daily life (Bulu & Listyorini, 2025; Nurlena et al., 2021).



Figure 1. the first meeting place for visitors and tour guides

The regulation of movement within the village also shapes visitors' lines of sight. The positioning of houses, open courtyards, and activity spaces encourages tourists to stop, observe, and photograph particular scenes. Informational cues, both verbal and non-verbal, guide visitors toward specific points of interest, creating a patterned flow of movement and attention. This spatial direction subtly controls how visitors see the village, what they consider important, and how long they engage with certain cultural elements. The visual quality of street spaces, including building structures and path orientation, correlates with tourists' willingness to stay longer, indicating that spatial design can enhance engagement with cultural heritage (Tu et al., 2025; Xing & Leng, 2024). Spatial direction acts as a subtle but powerful mechanism that organizes visitor perception, prioritizes cultural elements, and shapes the temporal and spatial patterns of tourist behavior in villages (Gao et al., 2023).



Figure 2. An area that are highlighted as representational spaces for tourism



Figure 3. Another area that are highlighted as representational spaces for tourism

Spatial organization further contributes to the production of authenticity within the tourism experience. Authenticity often emerges through the socio-spatial design of tourism settings, where the arrangement of spaces, such as front-stage areas for performance and back-stage zones for everyday life, creates a staged yet believable experience that tourists perceive as genuine (Q. Li et al., 2024a). Certain zones within Dusun Sade are visually emphasized as appearing more “traditional” than others through architectural uniformity, the use of natural materials, and the absence of modern objects. These areas are frequently used as backdrops for photography and guided explanations, reinforcing their status as authentic representations of Sasak culture. In contrast, spaces that do not align with this visual narrative remain less visible or entirely concealed from tourist routes. Tourist movement and route choices are shaped by spatial configuration, including physical and visual connectivity, which determines accessibility and the prominence of attractions within the tourist flow (Jamhawi et al., 2023; Yhee et al., 2023).

Visual elements play a central role in symbolizing “Sasak tradition” within the village. Architectural forms, traditional clothing worn during tourism activities, performance settings, and signage collectively construct a recognizable visual identity. Architectural identity is shaped by visual cues and symbols that reflect local traditions and cultural heritage, helping to create a sustainable and distinctive sense of place (Baper, 2024). These areas are frequently used as backdrops for photography and guided explanations, reinforcing their status as authentic representations of Sasak culture. In contrast, spaces that do not align with this visual narrative remain less visible or entirely concealed from tourist routes, leading to their marginalization in the tourism experience. This invisibility occurs because tourist itineraries and infrastructure tend to concentrate around iconic heritage sites or visually appealing areas that fit established narratives, while other spaces are excluded from visitor flows and public attention (Alvarado-Sizzo, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023).



Figure 4. Architectural construct as recognizable of visual identity of Sasak

These elements are consistently repeated across different areas of the village, creating a coherent visual language that is easily identifiable by visitors. The repetition of these symbols contributes to the normalization of a particular representation of Sasak culture as timeless and homogeneous.

Cultural practices such as weaving are prominently displayed within these curated spaces. Traditional tourism villages maintain practices like weaving alongside other cultural expressions, which serve as attractions that contribute to economic, social, and cultural benefits, though sustaining these practices faces challenges related to stakeholder commitment and modernization (Bulu & Listyorini, 2025).

Weaving activities are positioned in locations that are easily accessible to tourists, allowing observation and photographic documentation. These activities are presented in a consistent and repetitive manner, highlighting their visual qualities within the tourism setting. In Chinchero, Peru, households have transformed into weaving centers specifically for textile exhibitions aimed at tourists, although actual production is organized separately, highlighting a spatial separation between demonstration and production (Dewi & Putra, 2025). Similarly, weaving villages like Namicalung in Indonesia emphasize accessibility and infrastructure to support tourism, aiming to create integrated experiences that respect local traditions while attracting visitors (Larista et al., 2024).



Figure 5. weaving activities that have become tourist attractions

Cultural displays in tourism can also function as a means for local communities to assert identity and negotiate the impacts of tourism, sometimes inventing or adapting traditions to resonate with both locals and visitors. In some cases, communities adapt or even invent traditions to resonate with both locals and visitors, using folkloric performances and cultural spectacles not only to attract tourists but also to reinforce local identity and social cohesion (Syafri et al., 2020).

Weaving activities, in particular, are positioned in highly visible locations, allowing tourists to observe the process and engage through photography and purchase. These objects are presented not only as cultural artifacts but also as commodities integrated into the tourism economy. This integration can empower traditional cultures by providing recognition and economic benefits, but it also risks distorting cultural values, especially when competing with fake or luxury versions of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) products (Maags, 2021; Su, 2020).



Figure 6 transactions between sellers and buyers for woven products

Traditional performances are also organized through specific temporal and spatial arrangements. In Portuguese traditional music, performance configurations such as solo, duo, and ensemble sizes vary regionally and temporally, reflecting social and musical practices that maintain continuity while allowing contemporary adaptations (Khatri & Bernardes, 2025). Performances take place at predetermined times and in designated locations within the village. For example, traditional opera stages along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal show spatial clustering that aligns with historical and cultural developments, indicating that performance locations are closely tied to social and geographic factors (J. Yang et al., 2023). In Sade Village, the arrangements distinguish performative spaces from everyday living spaces and frame traditional practices as organized attractions within the tourism experience. This staging process involves a dynamic interplay between preserving cultural integrity and packaging tradition as consumable spectacle, where the performative framing enhances tourist satisfaction and economic benefits (Lijun & Jijiao, 2025; Syafii et al., 2025).



Figure 7. martial art (peresean) has been changed so that it can become a tourist attraction

Across these visual and spatial arrangements, power relations operate in ways that are largely taken for granted by visitors. The regulation of movement, visibility, and access creates an environment in which certain representations of culture appear natural and self-evident. Tourists experience the village as authentically traditional without necessarily recognizing the underlying structures that shape this perception. The visual order of Dusun Sade thus functions as an implicit mechanism of control, organizing cultural representation in ways that appear organic while being systematically produced through spatial and visual management.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that visual and spatial arrangements in Dusun Sade function as mechanisms of power that regulate cultural visibility in subtle yet systematic ways. The organization of space, circulation routes, and representational zones does not merely facilitate tourist movement but actively structures how culture is encountered, interpreted, and valued. In line with Foucauldian perspectives, power in this context operates not through overt coercion but through the normalization of particular ways of seeing and experiencing culture. Spatial order thus works as a discursive structure that produces meaning, hierarchy, and legitimacy within the tourism setting.

Spatial configuration influences tourist behavior by affecting accessibility, connectivity, and the distribution of attractions, which in turn guides tourist flow and experience quality, as shown in Madaba, Jordan, where spatial layout impacts sustainable tourism management (Jamhawi et al., 2023). In urban settings like Bilbao, tourists form mental maps influenced by spatial centrality and ease of navigation, which affect their consumption of cultural resources and overall experience (Aranburu et al., 2016). Trails and routes serve as interpretive tools that create themed spaces, shaping cultural narratives and visitor engagement, though they may also risk excluding local identities if overly

museumified (MacLeod, 2017). The spatial arrangement of historical and cultural blocks affects tourists' psychological and visual perceptions, highlighting the importance of architectural and landscape elements in structuring cultural experiences (Ding et al., 2023).

From this perspective, the village can be understood as an institutional apparatus, as conceptualized by Gillian Rose, in which cultural tourism functions as a framework of power/knowledge that shapes representations of Sasak cultural identity. Within this apparatus, visual and spatial arrangements operate as institutional technologies that translate abstract ideas of tradition and authenticity into concrete, observable forms. Traditional villages' cultural tourism spaces highlight authenticity through spatial theatricality and legitimacy, where design and planning enhance cultural expression and visitor experience while sustaining heritage (Q. Li et al., 2024b). Architectural layouts in traditional academies and residential buildings reveal how spatial hierarchy, circulation, and narrative imagery embody cultural values and social order, translating intangible cultural concepts into physical form (Y. Yang et al., 2025).

The regulation of movement, visibility, and access allows certain cultural elements to appear natural and self-evident, while others remain marginal or invisible. This process explains why visitors often perceive the village as authentically traditional without recognizing the underlying structures that organize this perception. Research shows that tourists' satisfaction and loyalty are strongly influenced by experiencing constructive and existential authenticity, which are shaped by tangible and intangible cultural elements made accessible through spatial design and cultural performance (Park et al., 2019). Authenticity perception is also mediated by aesthetic experience and social interactions, which help tourists emotionally connect with the place, reinforcing the sense of authenticity without necessarily understanding its constructed nature (Genc & Gulertekin Genc, 2023). Visitor initially focus on visual authenticity but deepen their engagement through embodied and interactive perceptions as they become more involved, which sustains the feeling of authenticity over time (Zheng et al., 2023).

The presentation of weaving as a visual attraction illustrates how cultural practices are selectively framed within this visual order. While weaving remains an important cultural activity for local women, its spatial positioning in accessible and highly visible locations transforms it into a touristic performance. The repetitive display of weaving emphasizes visual appeal, continuity, and accessibility, aligning the practice with tourist expectations of tradition. This process often transforms weaving from a domestic or utilitarian activity into a sought-after cultural product, as seen in Botswana's basket weaving, where tourism has shifted the practice toward market demands while challenging cultural preservation (Mochankana et al., 2024). The weaving tradition also serves as a cultural narrative that tourists can connect with, often through storytelling and participatory experiences, which deepen cultural immersion and reinforce perceptions of authenticity (Khater et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). Rather than eliminating cultural meaning, this process demonstrates how commodification operates through visual simplification and repetition. Cultural meaning is not lost but reorganized in ways that privilege certain interpretations over others.

A similar logic applies to the spatial and temporal regulation of traditional performances. By scheduling performances at predetermined times and locating them in designated spaces, cultural expressions are transformed into predictable and consumable events. This staging reinforces a separation between everyday cultural life and touristic representation, leading to the commodification of culture through the adaptation and simplification of traditional practices, which may weaken their original social and cultural meanings (Alamineh et al., 2023). Such arrangements reflect institutionalized forms of control over cultural visibility, ensuring that performances conform to dominant narratives of tradition and spectacle. However, following a Foucauldian understanding of power, this control should not be interpreted as absolute or unidirectional. Rather, it operates through complex power relations where individuals and groups can negotiate, resist, or maneuver within visibility regimes (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2020).

Importantly, the findings reveal that local communities are not passive subjects within these power relations. Residents of Dusun Sade actively negotiate cultural representation by determining which practices can be displayed, regulating access to certain rituals, and managing the boundaries between public and private spaces. These acts of negotiation indicate that power operates relationally rather than hierarchically. Local agency emerges through everyday decisions about visibility, timing, and narrative framing, allowing communities to maintain a degree of control over how their culture is represented

(Stihl, 2024). Overall, local actors play a crucial role in shaping cultural representation through ongoing negotiation and management of cultural visibility and meaning.

This negotiation highlights the dynamic and processual nature of Sasak cultural identity within the context of tourism. Rather than being fixed or essentialized, cultural identity is continuously produced through interactions between visual order, spatial regulation, and local agency. Tourism thus functions not only as an economic activity but also as a social space in which cultural identity is managed, contested, and redefined. This finding challenges simplistic views of cultural commodification as either destructive or purely exploitative, demonstrating instead that commodification can coexist with strategies of cultural preservation and negotiation.

By integrating visual discourse analysis with Foucauldian perspectives on power and Rose's conceptual framework of apparatus and technologies, this study contributes to existing scholarship on cultural tourism and visual studies. It shows that visual and spatial arrangements are central to understanding how cultural identities are produced and experienced in tourism settings. Moreover, it underscores the importance of examining visual order as an active force in shaping social relations, rather than treating it as a neutral backdrop for cultural display.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Sasak cultural identity in Dusun Sade is produced through visual and spatial arrangements embedded in cultural tourism practices. Identity is not presented as a fixed or neutral entity but is constructed through regulated spaces, curated visual displays, and staged cultural practices. While tourism introduces processes of simplification and commodification, local communities actively negotiate the boundaries of cultural representation. Tourism thus functions as a social space where cultural identity is continuously managed and redefined. Future research may further explore comparative cases of tourism villages to deepen understanding of visual power and cultural negotiation in different contexts.

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