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Activist Social Capital and Destination Justice in Tribal Tourism: A Conceptual Framework from Chhattisgarh, India

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ABSTRACT

Tourism destinations are increasingly shaped by conflicts over participation, cultural representation, ecological responsibility and uneven benefit-sharing. In tribal tourism contexts, these conflicts become more complex because tourism often depends on community culture, forest landscapes, sacred sites, rivers, waterfalls, animals and other socio-ecological resources. This paper develops the concept of activist social capital to explain how tourism-related marginalisation can be transformed into collective capacity for destination justice. Drawing on tourism activism, destination social capital and marginalisation scholarship, the paper proposes the Activist Social Capital Framework for Destination Justice in Tribal Tourism. Using Chhattisgarh, India, as a contextual lens, the framework explains how tourism-led marginalisation may generate proximity-based concern, how such concern becomes organised through bonding, bridging and linking forms of activist social capital, and how collective action may contribute to more just tourism governance. The paper argues that tourism activism should not be understood only as protest, boycott or confrontation. In tribal tourism, it may also appear through community claims for cultural consent, local participation, ecological safeguards, benefit-sharing and institutional accountability. The study contributes conceptually by reframing social capital as a justice-oriented resource and by extending destination justice to include both human and non-human actors.

Keywords- Activist social capital; tribal tourism; tourism activism; destination justice; social capital; marginalisation; Chhattisgarh; more-than-human tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations are increasingly contested social, cultural and ecological spaces rather than neutral sites of leisure and consumption. Conflicts over residents' rights, cultural representation, labour insecurity, environmental degradation, animal welfare and uneven benefit distribution have produced diverse forms of tourism-related activism, including destination boycotts, digital campaigns, anti-overtourism protests and place-based resistance (Luo & Zhai, 2017; Gössling et al., 2020; Garay et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2025). In social movement theory, activism refers to collective efforts to promote, resist or redirect social change (Tarrow, 1998). In tourism, such collective action becomes distinctive because it intersects with mobility, cultural encounter, livelihood, ecological resources and destination governance.

Tourism scholarship has long recognised that tourism development can generate ethical, social and environmental tensions. Early studies connected tourism with development ethics, environmental conflict and social movement activity

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(Botterill, 1991; Kousis, 2000). Recent work has extended this debate through overtourism, touristification, digital protest, destination boycotts and resident resistance (Luo & Zhai, 2017; Gössling et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020). These studies explain why tourism activism emerges, but they do not fully explain how tourism-related grievances become organised, sustained and translated into collective capacity for destination transformation.

This paper addresses that gap by developing the concept of activist social capital in tribal tourism destinations. The concept explains how affected communities and their allies mobilise networks, trust, shared norms, emotional solidarity and collective action to contest marginalisation and reshape destination governance. Social capital theory is useful because destinations are not unified entities but dynamic collectives of residents, entrepreneurs, visitors, community institutions, state agencies and external market actors (Haugland et al., 2011). Social capital refers to resources embedded in relationships and networks that enable actors to pursue shared goals (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1995; Lin, 2001). In tourism, such capital matters because coordination, trust and collective action are required to mobilise economic, cultural, political, human and ecological resources (Macbeth et al., 2004; McGehee et al., 2010; Okazaki, 2008).

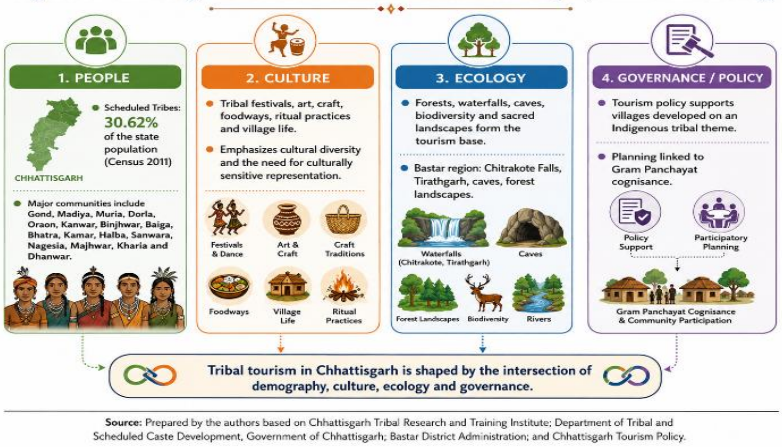
Destination social capital scholarship identifies networks, norms and trust, collective action, and bonding, bridging and linking ties as core forms of relational capacity (Grootaert et al., 2004; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; McGehee et al., 2010; Okazaki, 2008). These ideas matter for tribal tourism because community participation, cultural consent and ecological protection require collective negotiation, not promotional planning alone. Since social ties may also reproduce elite capture and exclusion (Portes, 2000; Levien, 2015), this paper treats activist social capital as a justice-oriented capacity mobilised against unequal tourism power relations.

Marginalisation is central to this argument. It refers to the process through which actors are pushed away from central systems of participation, benefit and decision-making (Arnold, 2015). In tourism, marginalisation may affect local communities, informal workers, ethnic minorities, women and other less powerful groups; it may also affect non-human actors such as animals, forests, rivers, biodiversity and landscapes that support tourism but are rarely treated as stakeholders in governance (Carr & Broom, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2022). Tribal tourism makes these concerns especially visible because it often depends on forests, waterfalls, sacred landscapes, Indigenous knowledge, rituals, craft and community-based cultural expressions. These resources may become sites of commodification, ecological pressure and unequal benefit-sharing if communities remain outside planning and control (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Becken & Kaur, 2022).

Chhattisgarh, India, provides a useful contextual lens for developing this argument. Scheduled Tribes constitute 30.62% of the state population according to Census 2011, as cited by the Chhattisgarh Tribal Research and Training Institute (Chhattisgarh Tribal Research and Training Institute, n.d.). The state includes communities such as Gond, Madiya, Muria, Dorla, Oraon, Kanwar, Binjhwar, Baiga, Bhatra, Kamar, Halba, Sanwara, Nagesia, Majhwar, Kharia and Dhanwar (Department of Tribal and Scheduled Caste Development, Government of Chhattisgarh, 2024). Its tourism geography is shaped by forests, waterfalls, caves, biodiversity, sacred landscapes and tribal cultural heritage, with Bastar represented through attractions such as Chitrakote Falls, Tirathgarh Waterfall and Kanger Valley National Park (Bastar District Administration, n.d.). The Chhattisgarh Tourism Policy further proposes the development of villages on an Indigenous tribal theme with Gram Panchayat cognisance (Government of Chhattisgarh, 2020).

As shown in Figure 1, Chhattisgarh's tribal tourism context is shaped by the intersection of people, culture, ecology and governance. The figure summarises how the state's substantial Scheduled Tribe population, diverse tribal communities, forest-waterfall landscapes, cultural practices and Gram Panchayat-linked tourism policy together create a distinctive setting for examining activist social capital. It also highlights why tribal tourism in Chhattisgarh must be approached not only as a development opportunity, but also as a question of cultural consent, ecological accountability and destination justice.

Figure 1. Chhattisgarh as a Tribal Tourism Context: People, Culture and Ecology



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Chhattisgarh Tribal Research and Training Institute; Department of Tribal and Scheduled Caste Development, Government of Chhattisgarh; Bastar District Administration; and Chhattisgarh Tourism Policy.

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This paper argues that tourism activism in tribal destinations should not be understood only as opposition to tourism. It may also demand better tourism: one that respects community consent, strengthens local participation, protects ecological systems, recognises cultural dignity and distributes benefits fairly. When tribal communities build internal solidarity, connect with civil society actors and engage policy institutions, activism becomes activist social capital capable of moving marginalised actors toward meaningful participation.

II. TOURISM ACTIVISM AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Tourism activism can be understood as collective action that emerges when tourism becomes linked with wider social, political, cultural, ethical or environmental concerns. It is not merely opposition to tourism; it is a mode of intervention through which actors attempt to influence how tourism is developed, represented, consumed and regulated (Tarrow, 1998; Yu et al., 2025). Early tourism scholarship connected tourism with development ethics, environmental conflict and social movement activity, showing that tourism can become a site of justice claims and resistance (Botterill, 1991; Kousis, 2000).

Contemporary tourism activism appears through destination boycotts, anti-overtourism protests, digital campaigns, ethical consumption, resistance to tourism projects and animal welfare campaigns (Luo & Zhai, 2017; Gössling et al., 2020; Garay et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020). Digital platforms expand such activism by enabling grievances to circulate beyond the immediate destination (Garay et al., 2020; Wegerer & Nadegger, 2023).

A key feature of tourism activism is the interaction of proximity, interest and moral concern. People are more likely to participate when they feel physically, socially or psychologically close to an affected place, community or issue (Ghorbani et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2025). Physical proximity may involve residents affected by pollution or loss of access. Social proximity may involve actors who identify with communities facing exclusion. Psychological proximity may involve moral concern for people, animals, heritage or ecological systems. Activism therefore does not arise only from direct material loss; it may also emerge from emotional solidarity and ethical responsibility.

Tourism activism is also shaped by unequal power relations. Destinations involve residents, tourists, businesses, governments, NGOs, investors and cultural intermediaries, but these actors do not have equal authority or resources. Activism often emerges when less powerful actors challenge tourism models that privilege external investors, state agencies or market actors (Duignan et al., 2019). Yet these relations are dialectical: tourists may be targets of protest, but they may also become ethical activists through boycotts, volunteer tourism or solidarity campaigns (McGehee & Santos, 2005; Yu et al., 2020).

Tourism activism may be confrontational or constructive. Confrontational activism includes boycotts, protests, public criticism and civil disobedience, while constructive activism includes petitions, negotiation, co-management, ethical travel and alternative tourism practices (Friedman, 1991; McGehee & Santos, 2005). Both forms may be legitimate depending on institutional responsiveness and issue severity. This distinction is crucial for tribal tourism, where activism may appear not as formal protest but as Gram Sabha resolutions, community demands for cultural consent, youth claims for guide training, women's groups negotiating craft access or resistance to ecologically damaging infrastructure. Such actions are activist in substance because they seek to reshape tourism governance, protect cultural dignity and defend socio-ecological relationships.

III. DESTINATION SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COLLECTIVE CAPACITY

Tourism destinations are not homogeneous entities. They are dynamic assemblages of residents, entrepreneurs, firms, guides, visitors, community institutions, state agencies, destination managers and external investors who interact across multiple spatial and institutional scales (Haugland et al., 2011). Although destinations are often promoted as unified tourism products, their internal functioning is shaped by heterogeneous interests, unequal resources and uneven access to decision-making (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Collective capacity is therefore central to destination governance: inclusive and sustainable tourism requires actors to negotiate shared goals, coordinate resources and act beyond narrow individual interests (Macbeth et al., 2004; Okazaki, 2008).

Social capital provides a useful lens for understanding this capacity. In sociological theory, social capital refers to resources embedded in relationships and networks that can be mobilised for action (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001). Putnam (1995) associates social capital with networks, norms and trust that enable people to act together more effectively. In tourism, this is significant because destinations depend on the coordination of actors who control different forms of capital, including cultural knowledge, ecological access, labour, political authority, infrastructure and market linkages (Macbeth et al., 2004; McGehee et al., 2010).

Destination social capital is particularly important because tourism development often involves a gap between formal participation and actual collective action. Policies may claim to support local involvement, but implementation depends on communication, trust and commitment to shared initiatives (Okazaki, 2008). The core dimensions of destination social capital may be understood through networks, norms and trust, and collective action (Grootaert et al., 2004; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018). Networks represent the relationships and institutional connections through which actors interact;

norms and trust refer to shared values, reciprocity and confidence; and collective action is the point at which relationships are converted into joint planning, conservation, co-management or community-based tourism.

Destination social capital also operates through bonding, bridging and linking ties. Bonding social capital refers to internal ties within a group, such as village residents, tribal elders, women's collectives, youth groups, artisans or local guides. Bridging social capital connects communities with NGOs, universities, responsible tourism operators, media actors or neighbouring villages. Linking social capital connects local actors with institutions that hold formal authority, such as Gram Panchayats, tourism departments, forest departments and district administration (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Okazaki, 2008). These ties are crucial because many tourism decisions are made beyond the immediate control of local communities.

However, social capital is politically ambivalent. It can support inclusive governance, but it can also reproduce elite capture and exclusion (Portes, 2000; Levien, 2015). Its justice potential depends on who controls networks, whose trust matters and what forms of collective action are produced. This paper extends destination social capital theory by foregrounding its activist function. In tribal tourism, communities may need social capital not only to cooperate with tourism institutions, but also to challenge, negotiate with and hold them accountable. Social capital becomes activist when bonding, bridging and linking ties are mobilised to contest marginalisation, protect cultural dignity and demand more just destination governance.

IV. MARGINALISATION AND DESTINATION JUSTICE IN TRIBAL TOURISM

Marginalisation is central to understanding why tourism development cannot be evaluated only through visitor arrivals, destination branding or revenue. It refers to the process through which persons or positions are separated from central operations of society, resulting in reduced power and exclusion from decision-making (Arnold, 2015). In tourism, marginalisation is complex because destinations are formed through interactions among human and non-human actors, including communities, workers, tourists, businesses, forests, rivers, animals, landscapes and cultural resources (Carr & Broom, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2022). Tourism marginalisation should therefore be understood as exclusion from planning, benefits, representation and governance.

Marginalisation in tourism is primarily produced through power differentials. Actors with greater economic, institutional or symbolic power are better positioned to define tourism priorities, cultural representation, landscape use and benefit distribution (Arnold, 2015). When state institutions, private investors, destination managers or dominant local groups control tourism resources, less powerful groups may experience limited participation, informal labour, cultural displacement, loss of access and exclusion from tourism-linked opportunities (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Tourism marginalisation is not reducible to poverty. It includes economic, spatial, cultural, political and ecological exclusion. Economic marginalisation appears when local actors remain low-paid workers or peripheral service providers. Spatial marginalisation occurs when communities lose access to beaches, forests, sacred sites or public spaces. Cultural marginalisation occurs when rituals, food, dance, craft or Indigenous knowledge are displayed without community control or fair remuneration. Political marginalisation occurs when communities are consulted symbolically but remain outside real decision-making structures (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Okazaki, 2008; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Recent marginalisation scholarship also insists that non-human actors must be included in tourism justice debates. Tourism depends on animals, forests, rivers, waterfalls, caves, land, water and biodiversity, yet these are often treated as resources or backdrops rather than entities with governance relevance (Carr & Broom, 2018; Tully & Carr, 2020). When forests are degraded, rivers polluted, animals exploited or sacred landscapes commodified, marginalisation extends to the ecological worlds that sustain destination life. This more-than-human perspective is particularly relevant in tribal tourism, where forests, waterfalls, sacred groves, ritual landscapes and community knowledge are part of lived cultural-ecological systems (Becken & Kaur, 2022).

Inclusive tourism offers one response because it emphasises the participation of marginalised groups in the ethical production and sharing of tourism benefits (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). However, inclusion cannot be reduced to symbolic visibility. If tribal communities are included only as performers, guides or beneficiaries of pre-designed schemes, structural power relations remain unchanged. Regenerative tourism extends this argument by asking tourism not only to reduce harm but also to improve social and ecological systems (Becken & Kaur, 2022).

In this paper, destination justice refers to a tourism governance condition in which participation, recognition, redistribution and ecological accountability are brought together. Participation means meaningful roles in planning and monitoring; recognition means treating tribal identities and ecological knowledge with dignity; redistribution means fairer sharing of tourism benefits; and ecological accountability means treating forests, rivers, animals and biodiversity as central to tourism governance rather than expendable resources (Carr & Broom, 2018; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Becken & Kaur, 2022). Destination justice is therefore the normative outcome toward which activist social capital is directed.

As shown in **Table 1**, tourism-related marginalisation in tribal tourism can be mapped against four interrelated dimensions of destination justice. The table shows how exclusion from planning requires participation, cultural commodification requires recognition, unequal benefit distribution requires redistribution, and ecological degradation

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requires ecological accountability. It therefore clarifies how destination justice functions as a corrective framework for addressing both human and non-human marginalisation in tribal tourism.

Table 1. Marginalisation and Destination Justice in Tribal Tourism

Marginalisation in Tribal Tourism	Justice Dimension	Destination Justice Response
Exclusion from tourism planning, monitoring, decision-making and governance	P Participation	Meaningful community role in tourism planning, monitoring and governance
Cultural commodification, misrepresentation of tribal identity, and loss of dignity	R Recognition	Respect for tribal identity, cultural consent, sacred landscapes and Indigenous knowledge
Unequal distribution of tourism income, employment and enterprise opportunities	R Redistribution	Fair sharing of tourism benefits, livelihood opportunities and local enterprise support
Environmental degradation, spatial exclusion, resource pressure and neglect of non-human actors	E Ecological accountability	Protection of forests, rivers, animals, biodiversity and sacred ecological sites

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Arnold (2015), Carr and Broom (2018), Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018), Becken and Kaur (2022), and Abdullah et al. (2022).

Table 1. Marginalisation and destination justice in tribal tourism.

V. CHHATTISGARH AS A CONTEXTUAL LENS

Chhattisgarh provides a relevant contextual lens because it brings together a substantial tribal population, nature-culture tourism assets and a policy discourse that recognises Indigenous and village-based tourism. Scheduled Tribes constituted 30.62% of the state population according to Census 2011, as cited by the Chhattisgarh Tribal Research and Training Institute (Chhattisgarh Tribal Research and Training Institute, n.d.). The Department of Tribal and Scheduled Caste Development records 85 tribal development blocks out of 146 and identifies major communities such as Gond, Madiya, Muria, Dorla, Oraon, Kanwar, Binjhwar, Baiga, Bhatra, Kamar, Halba, Sanwara, Nagesia, Majhwar, Kharia and Dhanwar (Department of Tribal and Scheduled Caste Development, Government of Chhattisgarh, 2024). These demographic and administrative features make tribal communities central to tourism governance in the state.

The state's tourism geography is strongly connected with forests, waterfalls, caves, wildlife and cultural heritage. Bastar, one of Chhattisgarh's most visible tourism regions, is officially associated with Bastar Dussehra, Chitrakot Waterfall, Tirathgarh Waterfalls, Kutumsar and Kailash caves (Bastar District Administration, n.d.). These attractions are embedded in socio-ecological landscapes where tribal communities, rivers, forests, rituals, biodiversity and livelihoods are closely connected. Tourism in such contexts must therefore be understood as a governance process affecting land, culture, livelihood, identity and ecological relations, not merely as destination promotion (Macbeth et al., 2004; Okazaki, 2008).

Chhattisgarh's tourism policy further proposes identifying villages that can be developed on an Indigenous tribal theme and preparing investment plans with Gram Panchayat cognisance to showcase tribal life, art, culture and heritage (Government of Chhattisgarh, 2020). This creates a policy opening for participatory tourism, but policy recognition alone is insufficient. The key question is whether such planning produces community authority, cultural consent, fair benefit-sharing and ecological accountability (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

The Chhattisgarh context is useful because tribal tourism may generate opportunity and marginalisation simultaneously. Tourism may support livelihoods, youth employment, craft markets, heritage visibility and conservation incentives. It may also commodify culture, convert sacred landscapes into tourist spectacles, create low-paid informal work, concentrate benefits among external actors and intensify pressure on forests, waterfalls and wildlife (Arnold, 2015; Abdullah et al., 2022). Tribal dance, craft, food and ritual may be used for destination branding while communities retain limited control over representation or revenue. Women's knowledge of food, craft, forest produce and ritual practice may support tourism experiences yet remain invisible in formal planning.

The same concern applies to non-human actors. Waterfalls, forests, caves, animals, rivers and biodiversity form the attraction base of several destinations, but rarely appear as actors whose wellbeing must be represented in governance. In a forest-waterfall tourism context, destination justice must include waste management, carrying capacity, protection of sacred and ecologically sensitive areas, and recognition of rivers, forests and animals as central to tourism ethics (Carr & Broom, 2018; Becken & Kaur, 2022).

Chhattisgarh also provides a strong setting for examining activist social capital because tribal and rural tourism depends on collective institutions and local networks. Gram Panchayats, community elders, youth groups, women's self-help groups, artisans, forest-dependent households, NGOs, tourism officials and district administration may all become part of the governance network. Bonding ties may emerge through community solidarity; bridging ties through NGOs and responsible tourism actors; and linking ties through Panchayats, forest officials, tourism departments and district

administration (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018). In this paper, Chhattisgarh is used not as an empirical case but as a contextual lens for theorising how activist social capital may operate in tribal tourism settings.

VI. ACTIVIST SOCIAL CAPITAL: CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

The preceding sections established three foundations: tourism activism explains collective action around grievances; destination social capital explains how networks and trust enable collective capacity; and marginalisation theory explains how unequal power pushes human and non-human actors away from tourism benefits and governance. Yet these strands remain incomplete separately. This paper therefore develops activist social capital as a bridge between resistance, relational capacity and justice-seeking mobilisation.

Activist social capital refers to the networks, trust relations, shared norms, emotional solidarities and collective capacities through which marginalised tourism actors and their allies mobilise against unequal power relations and pursue destination justice. The concept draws from social capital theory, which views networks, norms and trust as resources enabling collective action (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1995; Lin, 2001). It differs from general destination social capital because its purpose is not merely cooperation or destination development. It is oriented toward contesting exclusion, correcting unequal power and negotiating more just tourism governance (Portes, 2000; Levien, 2015; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018).

The activist dimension is grounded in social movement and tourism activism scholarship. Activism involves organised efforts to promote, resist or redirect social change (Tarrow, 1998). In tourism, it may arise around overtourism, destination boycotts, cultural misrepresentation, environmental harm, animal welfare, labour exploitation or exclusionary governance (Kousis, 2000; Luo & Zhai, 2017; Yu et al., 2025). Yet activism requires more than grievance. It needs relational infrastructure: actors must recognise shared concerns, develop trust, frame demands, mobilise resources and connect with institutions (Jenkins, 1983; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Activist social capital captures this infrastructure.

The first component is bonding activist social capital, or internal solidarity through which affected actors recognise common grievances. In tribal tourism, this may emerge among village residents, customary leaders, women's groups, youth groups, artisans, forest-dependent households, guides or informal workers who experience exclusion, cultural commodification or ecological pressure. Bonding ties help convert individual problems into shared claims, but they must be assessed by the inclusiveness of internal voice because strong internal networks may also silence women, youth or poorer households (Putnam, 1995; Portes, 2000; Levien, 2015).

The second component is bridging activist social capital, or horizontal connections between marginalised communities and wider support networks such as NGOs, universities, journalists, responsible tourism operators, cultural organisations, environmental groups and ethical tourists. Bridging ties help local grievances travel beyond the immediate destination and become visible within wider public and policy discourse (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Garay et al., 2020). In tribal tourism, they may support documentation, advocacy, training, market alternatives and the translation of community concerns into governance language.

The third component is linking activist social capital, or vertical relations between local actors and institutions that hold authority and resources, including Gram Panchayats, district administration, tourism departments, forest departments and development agencies. Linking ties are crucial because activism that remains internal may not influence planning, regulation or resource allocation (Okazaki, 2008; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018). However, linking ties can become tokenistic if participation does not transfer decision-making power (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Activist social capital also has affective and strategic dimensions. It is often energised by anger, moral concern, empathy, solidarity or hope, especially when people feel connected to affected communities, places, animals or ecological systems (Jasper, 1998; Ghorbani et al., 2013). It may generate constructive action, such as Gram Sabha resolutions, participatory mapping, cultural consent protocols and ecological monitoring, or confrontational action, such as protest, boycott, refusal or public criticism (Friedman, 1991; Duignan et al., 2019). Its value should be judged not by whether it is cooperative or resistant, but by whether it advances destination justice.

The concept also expands tourism justice beyond human stakeholders. Marginalisation may affect animals, forests, rivers, land, water and biodiversity that sustain tourism experiences (Carr & Broom, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2022). Activist social capital therefore includes the capacity of human actors to advocate for non-human wellbeing through waste control, sacred grove protection, restrictions on damaging construction or ethical treatment of animals. In tribal tourism, where resources are collectively held, culturally embedded and ecologically sensitive, activist social capital can help move communities from being objects of tourism display to subjects of tourism governance.

As shown in **Figure 2**, activist social capital in tribal tourism is composed of bonding ties, bridging ties, linking ties, affective solidarity and justice-oriented action. The figure shows how internal community solidarity, external alliances, institutional engagement and shared moral concern work together to transform tourism-related marginalisation into collective capacity for destination justice. It clarifies that activist social capital is not merely cooperation within a destination, but a justice-oriented form of mobilisation directed toward participation, recognition, redistribution and ecological accountability.

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Figure 2. Activist social capital in tribal tourism: conceptual components.
Source: Prepared by the authors.

VII. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

This section presents the paper's main conceptual contribution: the Activist Social Capital Framework for Destination Justice in Tribal Tourism. The framework explains how tourism-related marginalisation generates collective concern, how such concern becomes organised through social capital, and how organised collective action may contribute to destination justice. It integrates tourism activism, destination social capital and marginalisation theory (Tarrow, 1998; Bourdieu, 1986; Arnold, 2015; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018; Yu et al., 2025; Abdullah et al., 2022).

The framework begins with tourism-led marginalisation. In tribal tourism destinations, marginalisation may occur when tourism uses community culture, forests, waterfalls, sacred landscapes, animals and local labour without ensuring participation, cultural consent, ecological protection or fair benefit-sharing. Such marginalisation may affect residents, informal workers, women, tribal communities, artisans and cultural performers, as well as non-human actors such as forests, rivers, animals and biodiversity (Carr & Broom, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2022).

The second stage is proximity-based concern and moral activation. Marginalisation does not automatically produce activism. Actors become mobilised when they feel physically, socially or psychologically close to the affected place, community or ecological system. This proximity may arise through residence near tourism sites, shared identity or moral concern for cultural dignity, animal welfare and ecological damage (Ghorbani et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2025).

The third stage is activist social capital. Once concern is activated, it requires relational infrastructure. Bonding activist social capital creates internal solidarity among affected actors; bridging activist social capital connects them with NGOs, universities, media, civil society organisations and responsible tourism actors; and linking activist social capital connects them with institutions such as Gram Panchayats, tourism departments, forest departments and district administration (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Okazaki, 2008; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018). Together, these ties transform isolated grievance into organised capacity.

The fourth stage is collective action, which may be constructive, confrontational or hybrid. Constructive action includes petitions, participatory planning, co-management proposals, cultural consent protocols and benefit-sharing negotiations. Confrontational action includes protest, refusal, boycott, digital campaigns or resistance to harmful tourism projects (Friedman, 1991; Duignan et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2020). The final stage is destination justice, understood as meaningful participation, cultural recognition, fair redistribution and ecological accountability (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Becken & Kaur, 2022).

7.1 Theoretical Propositions

Proposition 1: Tourism-led marginalisation becomes a trigger for activism when affected actors or their allies recognise exclusion from tourism participation, benefit-sharing, cultural representation or ecological protection. This proposition follows from the view that marginalisation pushes actors away from central systems of power and benefit (Arnold, 2015; Abdullah et al., 2022).

Proposition 2: Proximity-based concern strengthens the likelihood of tourism activism when actors feel physically, socially or psychologically connected to the marginalised place, community or ecological system. Such closeness may emerge through residence, shared identity, emotional empathy or moral responsibility (Ghorbani et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2025).

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Proposition 3: Bonding activist social capital enables marginalised actors to convert individual grievances into shared community claims. However, bonding ties must remain internally inclusive to avoid hierarchy and elite capture (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Portes, 2000; Levien, 2015).
Proposition 4: Bridging activist social capital expands the visibility, legitimacy and resource base of tourism activism by connecting marginalised actors with wider support networks. Such ties help community concerns enter advocacy, policy and public discourse (Garay et al., 2020; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018).
Proposition 5: Linking activist social capital determines whether tourism activism can influence institutional decisions, policy processes and governance outcomes. Without linking ties, activism may remain symbolic; with accountable linking ties, it may become institutionally consequential (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Okazaki, 2008).
Proposition 6: Where institutional responsiveness is weak and power asymmetry is high, activist social capital is more likely to generate confrontational action; where responsiveness is stronger, it is more likely to generate constructive governance-oriented action (Friedman, 1991; Duignan et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2025).
Proposition 7: The destination justice potential of activist social capital depends on whether collective action improves participation, recognition, redistribution and ecological accountability for human and non-human actors (Carr & Broom, 2018; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Becken & Kaur, 2022).

7.2 Integrated Framework

The integrated framework brings together the five core stages developed in this section. It begins with tourism-led marginalisation, where exclusion from participation, benefit-sharing, cultural representation and ecological protection creates the conditions for grievance recognition. These grievances become politically and morally meaningful when affected actors or their allies experience proximity-based concern through physical closeness, shared identity or ethical responsibility. Activist social capital then provides the relational infrastructure through which this concern becomes organised. Bonding ties generate internal solidarity, bridging ties connect communities with wider support networks, and linking ties create access to institutions with policy and governance authority. Through these mechanisms, activist social capital may generate constructive, confrontational or hybrid forms of collective action. The framework ultimately positions destination justice as the desired outcome, expressed through participation, recognition, redistribution and ecological accountability.

As shown in **Figure 3**, the framework moves from tourism-led marginalisation to proximity-based moral activation, activist social capital, collective action and destination justice. It reframes tourism activism as a relational and governance-oriented capacity rather than an episodic act of protest. It also extends destination social capital theory by showing that social capital may become activist when mobilised to challenge exclusion. In tribal tourism, where cultural and ecological resources are collectively embedded, activist social capital helps explain how communities and allies may move from marginalisation toward more accountable and just destination governance.

Figure 3. Activist Social Capital Framework for Destination Justice in Tribal Tourism

Figure 3. Activist Social Capital Framework for Destination Justice in Tribal Tourism.
Source: Prepared by the authors.

VIII. DISCUSSION: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed Activist Social Capital Framework contributes by reframing tourism activism as a relational and governance-oriented capacity, not only protest, boycott or resistance. Existing research links activism with collective action, power, proximity, emotions and strategic tactics (Tarrow, 1998; Yu et al., 2025), often through visible disruption such as overtourism protests, boycotts and online campaigns (Luo & Zhai, 2017; Gössling et al., 2020; Garay et al., 2020). This paper extends that view by showing how grievances become organised through networks, trust, solidarities and institutional linkages.

The first theoretical implication concerns tourism activism theory. Activism is not only what occurs when residents protest or tourists boycott; it also includes the processes through which affected actors recognise shared grievances, form solidarities, connect with allies and negotiate with institutions. This is important in tribal tourism, where activism may appear as Gram Sabha resolutions, demands for cultural consent, guide-training claims, sacred-site protection or benefit-sharing negotiation. Such practices may be constructive rather than confrontational, yet they remain activist because they seek to alter tourism power relations (Botterill, 1991; McGehee & Santos, 2005).

The second implication concerns destination social capital theory. Existing scholarship has emphasised cooperation, networks, trust and self-determination (Macbeth et al., 2004; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018). This paper foregrounds the activist function of social capital. In marginalised tourism contexts, communities require social capital not only to cooperate with development projects, but also to question, correct and reshape them. Bonding ties help identify shared concerns, bridging ties connect communities with advocacy networks, and linking ties enable engagement with formal institutions.

The third implication concerns marginalisation and destination justice. The paper connects marginalisation with a mechanism of response by explaining how marginalised actors and allies may organise toward de-marginalisation. Destination justice is proposed as the normative outcome of activist social capital, combining participation, recognition, redistribution and ecological accountability. This matters because tourism marginalisation affects not only human actors but also animals, forests, rivers, land, water and biodiversity (Carr & Broom, 2018; Becken & Kaur, 2022).

The framework also has practical implications. Tourism departments and destination management organisations should move beyond consultation toward co-governance. Communities should participate in defining tourism priorities, cultural protocols, visitor limits, revenue-sharing mechanisms and ecological safeguards. Gram Panchayats can function as linking platforms between communities and higher-level tourism, forest and district authorities, but they must include women, youth, artisans, informal workers and other vulnerable groups to avoid elite capture (Portes, 2000; Levien, 2015). NGOs, universities and civil society actors can strengthen bridging activist social capital through documentation, legal literacy, participatory mapping and capacity building, but their role should support community voice rather than substitute it.

For tourism businesses, ethical tribal tourism requires more than cultural packaging. Tourism products should be developed through consent-based representation, fair remuneration, local employment, community benefit-sharing and ecological responsibility (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). Environmental and forest governance institutions should treat waterfalls, forests, caves, rivers, animals and biodiversity not as passive tourism assets but as central to tourism ethics. Tourism plans should include carrying-capacity assessment, waste management, visitor regulation, habitat protection and sacred landscape safeguards (Carr & Broom, 2018; Tully & Carr, 2020).

Overall, activist social capital helps tourism stakeholders move from promotional inclusion to accountable governance. In tribal tourism destinations, justice cannot be achieved only by attracting visitors or showcasing culture. It requires collective capacity to negotiate power, protect ecological systems, recognise cultural dignity and redistribute tourism benefits.

IX. CONCLUSION

This paper developed the concept of activist social capital to explain how tourism-related marginalisation can be transformed into collective capacity for destination justice in tribal tourism. The central argument is that tourism activism should not be understood only as protest, boycott or disruption. It can also be conceptualised as a relational and governance-oriented capacity through which affected communities and allies mobilise networks, trust, solidarity and institutional linkages to challenge unequal tourism development (Tarrow, 1998; Yu et al., 2025).

The paper integrated tourism activism, destination social capital and marginalisation scholarship to show how social capital becomes justice-oriented when mobilised against exclusion. Using Chhattisgarh as a contextual lens, it argued that tribal tourism must be approached as a socio-cultural and ecological governance question, not merely as a destination development opportunity. The proposed framework explains this process through five stages: tourism-led marginalisation, proximity-based concern, activist social capital, collective action and destination justice.

The contribution is conceptual and does not claim empirical fieldwork findings. Future research may test the framework through ethnography, participatory mapping, stakeholder interviews, social network analysis or mixed-method studies in Bastar, Jashpur, Surguja and other forest-cultural regions of Chhattisgarh. Overall, activist social capital provides a useful conceptual bridge for rethinking tribal tourism as a more democratic, inclusive and more-than-human form of destination governance.

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