

Books as Souvenirs and Itineraries: Grassroots Literary Tourism in Bandung, Indonesia

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Keywords:

Literary tourism,
Social capital,
Place branding,
Tourist souvenir,
Bandung.

Abstract.

This article examines how a form of literary tourism can instead be assembled from below, by a micro-scale bookshop entrepreneur, without state initiative and without inherited literary fame. Drawing on in-depth interviews with Deni Rachman, founder of Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung, and Gan Gan Jatnika, founder of Geowana Ecotourism, the study traces how a curated line of Bandung-themed books sold as souvenirs (Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng) and a programme of literary trips built directly from books and co-narrated by their authors both convert an ordinary book trade into a visitor attraction. Read through bonding, bridging and linking social capital and the place branding also tourist souvenir literature, the findings show that each pathway rests on a distinct but structurally similar relational infrastructure: long-standing ties with book and literary communities, bridging ties with visitors and influencers, and linking ties with tour guides, publishers and authors formalised through informal revenue-sharing. The retail pathway commodifies the book as an object to be carried home; the itinerary pathway commodifies the book as a route to be walked. The article theorises both as expressions of grassroots literary tourism for a place branding, a mode of city branding assembled as an adaptive response to small-business constraints rather than as a designed campaign, and situates the informants' shared emic notion of a 'book ecosystem' as a vernacular framework theory from the Global South for understanding the fragilities, permitting barriers and thin margins that threaten this alternative tourism pathway.

Kata Kunci:

Parwisata sastra,
Modal sosial,
Place Branding,
Cinderamata
wisatawan,
Bandung.

Abstrak.

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana pariwisata sastra dapat dibangun dari bawah (grassroots) melalui inisiatif pelaku usaha buku skala mikro, tanpa bergantung pada intervensi negara maupun warisan ketokohan sastra. Penelitian dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan Deni Rachman, pendiri Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung, dan Gan Gan Jatnika, pendiri Geowana Ecotourism. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan dua model pengembangan pariwisata sastra, yaitu penjualan buku-buku bertema Bandung sebagai suvenir melalui program Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng serta penyelenggaraan wisata literer yang menjadikan buku sebagai dasar penyusunan rute perjalanan dan melibatkan penulis sebagai narator. Kedua praktik tersebut mengubah aktivitas perdagangan buku menjadi pengalaman wisata yang bernilai budaya. Dengan menggunakan perspektif modal sosial (bonding, bridging, linking) serta konsep place branding dan literatur sebagai suvenir wisata, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kedua model tersebut ditopang oleh infrastruktur relasional yang serupa: ikatan erat dengan komunitas literasi dan perbukuan, jejaring dengan pengunjung dan aktor promosi, serta kemitraan dengan penulis, penerbit, dan pemandu wisata yang dibangun melalui mekanisme kolaborasi dan bagi hasil secara informal. Pada jalur ritel, buku dikomodifikasi sebagai cendera mata yang merepresentasikan kota, sedangkan pada jalur wisata, buku menjadi medium untuk menafsirkan dan menelusuri ruang kota. Artikel ini menawarkan konsep grassroots literary tourism untuk place branding yang menjelaskan bagaimana identitas kota dapat dibangun melalui inisiatif pelaku usaha kecil sebagai bentuk adaptasi terhadap keterbatasan sumber daya, bukan melalui kampanye resmi. Selain itu, penelitian ini menempatkan gagasan "ekosistem buku" yang digunakan para informan sebagai kerangka konseptual lokal yang menjelaskan pentingnya jejaring sosial sekaligus berbagai tantangan yang dihadapi, seperti perizinan, keberlanjutan usaha, dan margin ekonomi yang terbatas dalam pengembangan pariwisata sastra.

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1. Introduction

Literary tourism is conventionally defined in the academic literature as travel motivated by places and events associated with literary works and the lives of their authors, encompassing visits to writers' homes and graves, routes walked by fictional characters, sites named in poetry, and museums devoted to authors, works and literary genres (Topler et al., 2024). The field's intellectual centre of gravity has long been Anglophone and canonical, its emblematic cases being Stratford-upon-Avon as Shakespeare's birthplace and Hay-on-Wye in Wales, which acquired its reputation as a 'book town' after Richard Booth opened his first shop there in 1961 (Pulungan et al., 2025). Reviewing two decades of research in the field, Çevik (2020) identified eight typologies of literary tourism, one of which is bookshop tourism: travel oriented towards visiting the bookshops of a city rather than the shrines of famous authors. A closely related but rarely connected strand of tourism research examines trails and routes as applied tourism products, arguing that an itinerary can function much like a narrative text, ordering sites into a coherent sequence that visitors physically walk through (MacLeod et al., 2018). Within literary tourism specifically, MacLeod, Shelley and Morrison (2018) show that the reader-tourist's pleasure often lies in personally locating and inhabiting a book's settings, an experience that, in most documented cases, remains self-guided and individually assembled rather than curated and sold by a third party.

Recognising bookshop tourism and literary trails as categories, however, is not the same as explaining how they come into being, still less how a single micro-region can generate both categories at once. Existing typologies tell us that bookshops can function as attractions and that trails can function as narrative devices. Still, they say little about the mechanism through which an ordinary retail space or an ordinary guided walk, with no canonical author attached and no heritage listing behind it, becomes a destination product with a market. This silence matters most outside the Anglophone core, where literary tourism cannot borrow the ready-made aura of a Shakespeare or a Bronte; if it emerges at all, it has to be built, and the question of who builds it, with what resources and through what relationships, becomes the central analytical problem. Studies about literary tourism in Indonesia have so far approached the field mainly through texts, asking how novels and poetry narrate destinations (Arini & Raditya, 2023; Simanihuruk et al., 2023; Pulungan et al., 2025). What they have not yet examined is the reverse movement: how the everyday spaces and practices of the book trade themselves become objects of travel, whether as a shop to browse or a walk to take.

A parallel gap exists in the place branding literature, which is overwhelmingly studied as a top-down practice initiated by municipal governments, destination marketing organisations or consultants who design logos, slogans and campaigns on behalf of a city (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006). Far less is known about branding that emerges from below, as the cumulative by-product of small business survival strategies rather than as a designed intervention, even though such vernacular branding arguably carries a form of authenticity that commissioned campaigns struggle to manufacture, precisely because it is produced by actors embedded in the identity being sold. Place branding studies hold that a destination's image is rarely a neutral reflection of everything a place contains; it is a curated selection, typically shaped by whichever narrative proves most marketable, most repeatable across media, and most aligned with existing tourism infrastructure (Pedeliento & Kavaratzis, 2019). Once a particular narrative becomes dominant, it tends to be self-reinforcing: media coverage, government promotion, and visitor expectation all converge on the same image, making alternative identities within the same city progressively harder to see, let alone market (Ashworth, 2011). Bandung is a clear case of this dynamic.

For at least two decades, Bandung's dominant tourism image has been built around lifestyle and culinary consumption: factory outlets, boutique cafés, fashion distros, and a steady stream of "hidden gem café" and "must-try kuliner Bandung" content circulating on social media (Turgarini et al., 2018;

Himaayaturrehman et al., 2025). This dominance is not merely a matter of perception; it is reflected on a measurable scale. According to the Bandung City Culture and Tourism Office, Bandung's tourism sector has continued to expand, with visitor arrivals rising from approximately 7 million in 2023 to 8.5 million in 2024 (Tribun Jabar, 2025). This growth, however, has been concentrated in the sectors that already dominate the city's brand: of the 56,075 registered creative-economy actors across Bandung's sub-sectors as of October 2024, culinary businesses account for 1,500 units and fashion for 1,140, compared with only 107 in publishing (Diskominfo Kota Bandung, 2024). Literary tourism, in other words, sits at the margins of a tourism economy that is itself growing quickly, a niche within a niche, occupying a fraction of a creative-economy landscape it might otherwise be expected to share more evenly with the city's historically dense book culture.

This image is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete, and its dominance has crowded out a much older and arguably richer identity: Bandung as a city of books. Bandung's book trade dates back to the early twentieth century, when the city was already home to printing houses, bookshops, and newspapers serving the Dutch East Indies' colonial intelligentsia (Rachman, 2018; Komunitas Aleut, 2013; Muharam, 2025). Bandung's literary output is not merely historical volume; it also includes a substantial body of literature explicitly about the city itself such as memoirs, local histories, poetry, and fiction set in and narrating Bandung, produced by generations of local writers, small publishers, and literary communities (Soemardi & Radjawali, 2015). This is compounded by a visibly active grassroots book culture: independent bookshops, community reading groups, book fairs, and literacy collectives that have sustained continuous public activity around books for decades, largely without institutional or governmental promotion (Fauziyah, 2025; Rachman, 2018).

This grassroots literary infrastructure is not a merely theoretical possibility waiting to be activated; it has already produced at least one entrepreneur whose career embodies both silences identified above. This article addresses gap that sits at their intersection, examining two independent Bandung entrepreneurs who have each, separately and without state initiative, converted the book trade into a visitor attraction through different products. The first is Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung, an independent bookshop managed by Deni Rachman, who has worked in the city's book world since 2001 and who created *Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng* ('Bandung book souvenirs'), a curatorial strategy of publishing, collecting and distributing books about Bandung so that they can be consumed by visitors as a literary souvenir of the city. Deni Rachman has worked in Bandung's book world since 2001, long enough to have watched the city's branding fully consolidate around lifestyle and culinary consumption while its book culture remained locally sustained but publicly invisible (Leba, 2021). The second is Geowana Ecotourism, a tour operator founded by Gan Gan Jatnika in 2021, whose most itineraries are curated from books, and who has begun inviting authors to narrate their own settings in person and sell their books directly to participants mid-trip. Read together, the two cases show that a single regional book culture can generate two structurally similar but materially distinct grassroots literary tourism products: a souvenir that visitors carry home, and an itinerary that visitors walk through.

Against this background, the study pursues three specific objectives. The first objective is to identify how mutually beneficial relations are formed and maintained among book entrepreneurs, tour operators, authors, publishers, literacy communities and tour guides in Bandung, and to determine what kinds of social capital these relations embody. The second objective is to explain how these relational infrastructures sustain the book-as-souvenir and the book-as-itinerary as parallel strategies of place branding and commodification of city identity. The third objective is to articulate, from the informants' own accounts, a grounded conceptualisation of the 'book ecosystem' that can specify the vulnerabilities threatening this grassroots pathway.

In pursuing these objectives, the article makes three contributions. It supplies the mechanism that typological work on literary tourism and literary trails has left largely unexplained, by showing that

both a bookshop and a tour operator become destinations through deliberate, long-term relational work rather than inherited literary fame. It introduces the concept of grassroots literary place branding to name a mode of city branding that originates in the adaptive problem-solving of micro-enterprises. It brings into the scholarly conversation an emic concept, the 'book ecosystem' with its symbiotic relations and its 'pests', articulated independently by both informants, which offers a shared vernacular theorisation of the fragilities that threaten this alternative tourism pathway.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Literary Tourism Research and Unexplained Rise of Bookshop Tourism*

The phenomenon's material form of literary tourism spread beyond its Anglophone origins: the book town model that began in Hay-on-Wye, Wales in 1961 had, by the 1990s, already spread to Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Finland (Seaton, 1999), underscoring literary tourism's demonstrated capacity to travel across very different national and economic contexts. Academic interest in literary tourism, though still a comparatively young field, has grown markedly in recent years: bibliometric reviews of the field report a marked acceleration in the number of academic publications since 2016 (Çevik, 2020; Saniuta et al., 2022; Arcos-Pumarola et al., 2020) alongside a geographically concentrated body of research still dominated by the United Kingdom, the United States and a handful of European countries.

Indonesia, and Southeast Asia more broadly, sit largely outside this concentration of research attention: neither the countries producing the studies nor the destinations they examine have meaningfully included the region, despite its own dense and continuous literary traditions. Studies about literary tourism in Indonesia have so far approached the field mainly through texts, asking how novels and poetry narrate destinations (Arini & Raditya, 2023; Simanihuruk et al., 2023; Pulungan et al., (2025). What it has not yet examined is the reverse movement: how the everyday spaces and practices of the book trade themselves become objects of travel, whether as a shop to browse or a walk to take.

The dominant mode in literary tourism research in Indonesia treats a literary text as the starting point and asks how it can be, or has been, projected onto a real place. Putra & Pidada (2023) analyze host-guest interaction patterns in a Balinese short story anthology, Mekel Paris, using Valene Smith's host-guest framework; the "tourism" contribution is interpretive (showing how fiction encodes cultural anxieties about assimilation) rather than an account of any actual visitor product. Paryatna et al. (2025) do something structurally similar with the Ni Diah Tantri narrative painted on the Kerta Gosa ceiling in Klungkung: they read the visual-narrative structure for its moral content, then recommend how it *could* be turned into a tourism product (QR codes, a themed "Jelajah Fabel" tour, pocket-books, merchandise). Kuswarini et al. (2022) extend the same logic to oral folklore in South Sulawesi, using Butler's four forms of literary tourism (homage to real locations, fictional-site settings, appeal of literary figures, and works that make a place famous in its own right) to classify three folk tales and recommend how local government could develop each into a destination.

Hidayah et al. (2025) and Sudardi (2024) sit one level up in abstraction. Rahman et al. survey Southeast Asian literary tourism through six typologies inherited from Busby (2022) and from Hoppen et al. (2014) (real-location homage, fictional-site reverence, author/work association, destination-driven promotion, travel writing, film-induced tourism), illustrated with regional cases (Maya Bay/ *The Beach*, Belitung/ *Laskar Pelangi*). Sudardi likewise works from the same Western typological base (Herbert, Hoppen, Watson) and adds a critical dimension largely missing elsewhere: he reads W.S. Rendra's 1977 poem "Sajak Pulau Bali" as a literary indictment of tourism's commodification of Balinese culture, arguing literary tourism studies should hold both a promotional and a critical register.

Darmadali and Mawaddah (2022) occupy similar territory, an exploratory qualitative review restating Watson's and Busby/Klug's definitions, citing the same canonical examples (*Laskar Pelangi*, *Eat Pray Love*), and gesturing toward host-guest theory as an analytic option without applying it to primary data of their own. Adilla et al. (2025) study the Borobudur Writers and Cultural Festival across 2017–2024 using festival theory (Getz) and Baleiro and Quinteiro's concept of "literary place." Their contribution is the "moving festival" finding: BWCF shifted from a single destination-centered format anchored at Borobudur to a networked format spanning Malang and Muarajambi. This is the most institutionally developed piece in the set: it is university-run, government-adjacent, backed by a funded research scheme, and analyzes eight years of documented festival programming.

Indonesian literary tourism research to date has been almost entirely textual or institutional (reading literature for its tourism potential, or documenting festivals as branded tourism practice) while the entrepreneurial mechanism by which an ordinary bookshop or tour operator manufactures a literary tourism product from the ground up, and the relational (social-capital) infrastructure that sustains it, remains unexamined. Çevik (2020), reviewing the field between 1997 and 2016, distinguished eight forms of literary tourism, among them bookshop tourism, defined as visits to the bookshops of a city. Bookshop tourism is acknowledged as a category, yet the relational and economic labour through which bookshops come to be perceived, promoted and routed as attractions has rarely been opened up for analysis. These studies illuminate how literature represents a destination; they say comparatively little about how a literary or book-related space becomes a destination in its own right.

2.2. *Literary Trails, Guided Storytelling, and the Tour As a Book-Based Product*

A second, largely separate literature treats trails and routes as applied tourism products in their own right. Lekić (2019) argues that trails function as a means of ordering visitor experience much like a narrative, translating a place into a themed, interpretable sequence of stops, though she cautions that such theming can flatten local identity into a single consumable storyline if it is designed for the unquestioning visitor rather than co-produced with the community whose space is being toured. Within literary tourism specifically, MacLeod, Shelley and Morrison (2018) find that literary trail experiences are usually self-guided: readers who plan and undertake their own literary-inspired trips derive pleasure from personally locating fictional settings, which makes this kind of literary tourist difficult for the industry to reach and monetise directly. Complementing this, research on tour guiding treats storytelling less as a self-guided practice and more as an interactional one: Bassano et al. (2019) describe storytelling about places as a value co-creation process central to digital-age destination marketing, while Leong et al. (2024) show, in a cultural heritage tourism setting, that a guide's historical storytelling shapes tourists' sense of an authentic place and, through that authenticity, their educational, entertainment, experiential and emotional evaluation of the trip.

Read together, these two strands leave an evident space uncovered. Trail research treats the itinerary as a designed or self-guided artefact rather than as a live, adaptive product that a small operator improvises directly from a specific book's setting; and tour-guiding research treats storytelling as an interpretive skill exercised by the guide, rather than as a relational arrangement in which the book's author is invited onto the trip to narrate their own setting and sell their own book to participants on the spot. Neither literature, in other words, has yet examined the tour itself as a literary product co-produced with, and monetised on behalf of, the writer and publisher rather than merely about them.

2.3. *Place Branding and Tourist Souvenir*

Place branding is overwhelmingly studied as a top-down practice, initiated by municipal governments, destination marketing organisations or consultants who design logos, slogans and campaigns on behalf of a city (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006). Far less is known about branding that emerges from below, as the cumulative by-product of small business survival strategies rather than as a designed

intervention. Tourist souvenirs can be one vehicle through which such bottom-up branding travels: souvenirs function as reminders of the travel experience, as representations of cultural identity, as a promotional medium for the destination and as a source of income for local producers, with authenticity as the central factor shaping purchase decisions (Atmadiredja et al., 2025). Balermipas & Manola (2020) classify souvenir purchase motivations into three categories: souvenirs as gifts, as memorabilia, and as a form of self-extension through which travellers assert an identity connected to the place visited. Independent bookshops and tour operators that curate book-based products sit precisely at this intersection of souvenir, memorabilia and destination narrative, yet neither of the literatures reviewed above has connected these threads to the small-business relational work required to sustain them.

2.4. Social Capital as the Relational Infrastructure of Grassroots Tourism Products

Whether the product being sold is a book placed on a shelf or a route walked with a guide, its sustainability depends on relational infrastructure that social capital theory helps to specify. Claridge (2018) distinguishes bonding social capital, the strong ties within a relatively homogeneous group; bridging social capital, the weaker ties that connect across heterogeneous groups; and linking social capital, the vertical ties that connect actors across differences in power or institutional position. In tourism destinations, Guo et al. (2018) show that these three forms of capital interact to shape residents' perceived resilience, with bonding capital sometimes coexisting uneasily with contested bridging ties between different community factions. This article uses the bonding-bridging-linking framework, together with the tourist souvenir literature, to trace how two structurally different literary tourism products, a bookshop's curated souvenir line and a tour operator's book-based itinerary, are each held together by community ties, visitor-facing ties and institutional or commercial ties that are built and maintained by the entrepreneurs themselves rather than supplied by policy.

3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative comparative case study design to investigate how two independent grassroots initiatives transformed books into literary tourism products in Bandung. Comparative case studies are appropriate when researchers seek to understand similarities and differences between multiple bounded cases through in-depth contextual analysis rather than statistical generalisation (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018). Following the framework proposed by Ebneyamini & Moghadam (2018), the research began by defining the research problem and questions, selecting theoretically relevant cases, collecting evidence from multiple qualitative sources, conducting within-case analysis for each case, and finally undertaking cross-case comparison to identify recurring relational patterns across the two enterprises. This design allows analytic rather than statistical generalisation by explaining how similar social mechanisms operate in different organisational contexts.

Following purposive case selection recommended in comparative case study research, two information-rich cases were selected because both independently developed literary tourism products from Bandung's book ecosystem while representing different commercial pathways. The two cases are Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung, an independent bookshop, and Geowana Ecotourism, a tour operator, both based in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, and both independently engaged in commodifying books about Bandung for visitors or tourists. Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung represents the retail pathway in which books become tourist souvenirs, whereas Geowana Ecotourism represents the itinerary pathway in which books become travel routes.

The data were collected through multiple qualitative sources to enhance contextual understanding. The primary source consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with the founders of each enterprise: Deni Rachman of Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung, interviewed on 1 May 2026, and Gan Gan Jatnika of Geowana Ecotourism, interviewed on 21 May 2026. Both informants were

selected purposively as the principal decision-makers behind each product and as long-standing, first-hand participants in Bandung's book and tourism economies; Deni Rachman has worked in the city's book world since 2001, and Gan Gan Jatnika has operated Geowana since 2021 while participating in Bandung's tour-guiding community for considerably longer. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed in full. Then, it was complemented by documentary materials, social media content, published books, and archival materials relating to both organisations.

Data analysis followed two stages commonly recommended in comparative case study research (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018). First, a within-case analysis was conducted separately for each case to identify the distinctive development of literary tourism products and their associated relational practices. Interview transcripts were coded inductively to identify recurring themes such as community collaboration, revenue-sharing arrangements, promotional networks, and institutional constraints. Second, a cross-case analysis compared both cases to identify common and contrasting patterns. Emerging themes were subsequently interpreted through the theoretical lenses of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital together with literature on tourist souvenirs and place branding. Throughout the analysis, attention was also given to concepts emerging inductively from participants themselves, particularly the notion of the "book ecosystem," allowing empirical findings to extend existing theoretical explanations (Figure 1).

To enhance trustworthiness, findings were interpreted through triangulation between interview narratives, documentary evidence, published materials, and observations of each enterprise's publicly available activities. Precisely because this is a case study of two purposively selected entrepreneurs rather than a representative sample, its principal contribution is not a statistical generalisation but a relational pattern: two structurally similar forms of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) organised around a shared emic 'book ecosystem' concept, materialised differently as a retail souvenir line and as a book-based itinerary. This pattern is offered as a heuristic rather than a final result, precise enough for other researchers to test, refine, or contradict in other settings. It points toward at least three concrete directions for future research: whether the same bonding-bridging-linking sequence and the same 'book ecosystem' framing recur among other small-scale cultural or creative entrepreneurs in Bandung or in other Indonesian cities; whether the retail and itinerary pathways identified here generalise to place-based cultural commodities beyond books; and whether the friction between bonding and bridging capital observed in both cases is a structural feature of grassroots place branding more broadly, rather than an idiosyncrasy of these two informants.

There's a limitation from this study. The data rest on the perspectives of two entrepreneurs, and other parties who appear in their narratives, tour guides, authors, publishers, government officials and visitors, were not independently interviewed for this article. Where the findings below describe the actions or statements of third parties, they should be read as the informants' own account of those interactions rather than as independently verified fact.

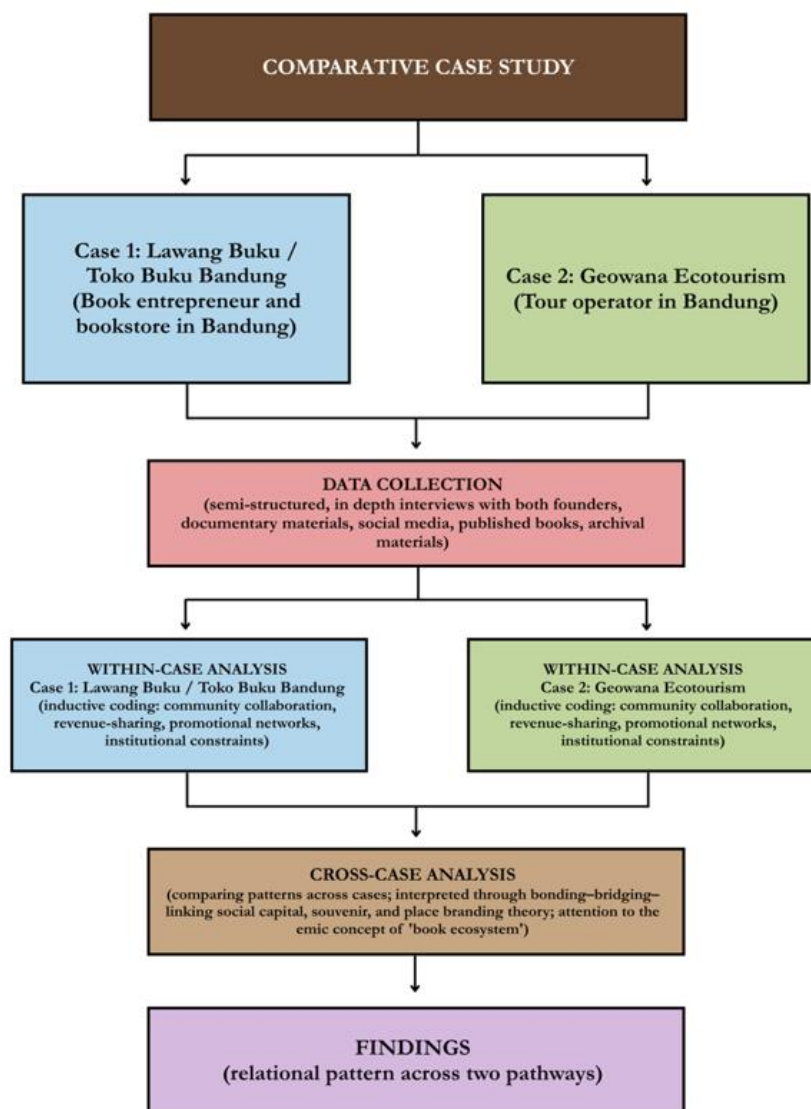


Figure 1. Research design and analytical procedure of the comparative case study

Source: Developed by the authors based on Ebneyamini & Moghadam (2018)

4. Findings

Before turning to the two enterprises, it is useful to situate them within the documented scale of Bandung's book economy, which both informants invoked as the resource base their products draw upon. Table 1 assembles the contextual indicators referenced across the interviews and the supporting literature. These figures matter analytically because they establish that the grassroots literary tourism described below is not conjured from nothing: it activates a dense, historically deep, but publicly under-promoted book culture.

Table 1. Contextual indicators of Bandung's book economy referenced by the informants.

Indicator	Description	Source
Bookshops, publishers and presses, 1950-2000.	Approximately 70 documented in Bandung across the period.	Rachman (2018); interview
Publishers registered with IKAPI West Java.	More than 100 in the city of Bandung.	Interview (Rachman, 2026)
Community book map (Peta Buku Bandung).	40 bookshops and community locations mapped in 2005.	Interview: Komunitas Aleut (2013)
Colonial-era origins.	Bookshops, printing houses and newspapers from the early 1900s.	Rachman (2018); Muharam (2025)
Geowana itineraries curated from books.	Approximately 60-70 per cent of trips.	Interview (Jatnika, 2026)
Participants purchasing the featured book on a trip.	Approximately 50 per cent (e.g. ~12 of ~25 on one trip).	Interview (Jatnika, 2026)
Guide referral commission at Toko Buku Bandung.	10 per cent of purchase value, arranged informally.	Interview (Rachman, 2026)
Typical gross margin on book sales.	At most about 20 per cent, before rent and staff.	Interview (Rachman, 2026)

Source: Developed by the Authors, compiled from interviews and cited literature (2026)

4.1. *Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung: the book as souvenir*

The interview with Deni Rachman was conducted on the afternoon of May 1, 2026, at Toko Buku Bandung located at Jalan Garut Number 2, Bandung City. The shop, in the courtyard of the Ajip Rosidi Library, was filled with rows of older books tightly arranged on wooden shelves, most of them themed around Bandung, from history and architecture to literature and local travel guides (Figure 2). The quiet afternoon created the right context for a long conversation about the literacy and tourism ecosystem, a space that was simultaneously the subject, the medium, and the tangible evidence of the phenomenon under study.

Deni Rachman's bookshop has changed names repeatedly since 2001, from Wacana, to Kios Buku Lawang, to Distributor Buku Lawang, before settling as Lawang Buku; a further label, Toko Buku Bandung, was added in December 2022 to mark a collaboration with the publisher Pustaka Jaya, which operates the Ajip Rosidi Library building on the same premises at Garut Street, Bandung (Rachman, personal communication, May 1, 2026). Rachman explained that each collaboration has historically produced a new name, a pattern that itself signals how central relational partnership is to the enterprise's identity.



Figure 2. Interview with Deni Rachman at Toko Buku Bandung, Garut 2, Bandung City
Source: Authors' Field Documentation (2026)

For its first decade, the shop's customer base grew mainly through bonding social capital: participation in community book fairs at campuses, Landmark Braga, and community-run markets, and sustained involvement in Bandung's reading and literary communities from 2001 onward. Rachman maintains this bonding capital deliberately through a layered calendar of activities in Ajip Rosidi Library area: a weekly book club (Klub Buku Laswi), a monthly gathering (Bukan Jumaahan), an annual larger festival (Bukan Jumaahan Akbar), and residential collaborations with larger events, library programmes, and Sunday markets. In roughly the past two years, however, bridging social capital, heterogeneous ties to visitors and content creators discovered through TikTok and Instagram Reels, has become the shop's primary economic support:

“For about the past two years... the first two years were still within our friendship circle, old customers and community friends. After that, I didn't expect it, but we went viral on TikTok and Reels. Eventually most visitors were new people... many from outside the city, outside the island, even abroad, several from the Netherlands, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Australia.” (Rachman, interview, 1 May 2026).

Out of this trajectory, Rachman created Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng in 2014 (Figure 3). The product began as an adaptive solution to a structural constraint of the secondhand book trade: a used book is a single, non-replicable unit, so a shop built entirely on secondhand stock cannot guarantee future supply of any given title.



Figure 3. Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng
Source: Lawang Buku Instagram (2025)

Rachman's response was to curate and eventually to publish new books that shared a Bandung theme, adding a deliberate editorial rule that the word 'Bandung' should appear in the title, since some customers would purchase a Bandung-themed book only if the city's name was explicit in the title itself. Over time, the shop moved from distributing others' Bandung-themed titles to publishing its own, commissioning writers to produce new work under the Toko Buku Bandung imprint, and eventually extending the same branding logic to non-book items, postcards, bookmarks and other keepsakes contributed by local artisans on consignment, all carrying Bandung motifs and sold under the same Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng label.

Rachman also formalised a linking tie with the city's tour guides: guides and drivers who bring visitors to the shop receive an informal ten per cent commission on the resulting sales, arranged directly with guides from the Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia (the national tour guide association) and passed on by word of mouth rather than through any managed contract. He described this arrangement as concrete evidence that the book ecosystem's chain is working, and drew an explicit analogy between the book trade and a biological ecosystem:

"If we take the concept of an ecosystem like in nature, mutual symbiosis, food chains... the actors start from the author, then the publisher, distributor, bookstore, reseller, reader. Readers usually interact directly with authors, and the cycle goes around like that... In the book world there are also pests, piracy, book banning, and disbanding discussions; those are disturbances in the ecosystem." (Rachman, interview, 1 May 2026).

Rachman was careful throughout the interview to attribute the shop's development to independent, community-level effort rather than to government policy. He recalled a past municipal slogan, *Bandung Kota Buku Sejagat* ('Bandung, World Book City'), which he characterised as a promotional gesture without follow-through, and contrasted it with the city's own book-trade history: citing historical records and his own published research, he noted that Bandung has supported a dense book economy since the early twentieth century, with roughly seventy documented bookshops and publishers active between 1950 and 2000, and more than one hundred publishers still registered with the West Java branch of the national publishers' association. A community-authored bookshop map was produced as early as 2005 in collaboration with local community organisations, documenting forty bookshop and community locations; a more recent, digital-only successor map was produced by a newer literacy collective. Rachman argued that Bandung's book culture is therefore already extensive and does not need to be invented, only connected: no shared promotional channel yet exists across bookshops, and he saw this absence, rather than any absence of underlying supply, as the main obstacle to a fuller literary tourism economy.

The enterprise's fragility, in Rachman's account, has two sources. Internally, he described persistent ego and unilateral claims of ownership between communities, which he attributed partly to the more individualistic, text-oriented disposition of many readers and writers, and partly to unresolved disputes over funding or credit for joint events; he noted that public disagreement has shifted from face-to-face confrontation, which he considered easier to resolve, toward social media conflict. Structurally, he pointed to the thin margins of the book trade itself, typically around twenty per cent gross, which must cover rent and staff before any profit is realised, and warned that shops mistaking high turnover for high margin sometimes spend consigned funds owed to publishers and authors, a practice that can quickly become unsustainable and push proprietors toward counterfeit stock. To address the sector's financial fragility, Rachman has proposed, but not yet realised, a book cooperative that would pool capital among booksellers and publishers, allowing members to borrow against collective funds for production or for stock, in the manner of a savings-and-loan cooperative rather than commercial credit. Table 2 below summarises the key characteristics of the selected case.

Table 2. Within-Case Analysis: Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung

Dimension	Evidence from the case
Founding & evolution	Operating since 2001; renamed from Wacana, Kios Buku Lawang, Distributor Buku Lawang to Lawang Buku; “Toko Buku Bandung” added in December 2022 to mark a collaboration with publisher Pustaka Jaya.
Bonding social capital	Built over its first decade through campus book fairs, Landmark Braga, and community markets; sustained through a weekly book club (Klub Buku Laswi), a monthly gathering (Bukan Jumaahan), and an annual festival (Bukan Jumaahan Akbar).
Bridging social capital	In roughly the past two years, TikTok- and Instagram Reels-driven virality has become the shop's primary economic support, drawing visitors from across Indonesia and from Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Australia and the Netherlands.
Linking social capital	An informal 10% referral commission to tour guides affiliated with Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia, arranged by word of mouth rather than by contract.
Commodification logic	Book as souvenir: Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng (launched 2014), curated and self-published under an editorial rule requiring “Bandung” in the title; later extended to non-book keepsakes (postcards, bookmarks) under the same label.
Principal fragility	Internal ego and unresolved ownership disputes among community members (increasingly played out on social media rather than face to face); thin margins vulnerable to misuse of funds consigned by publishers and authors.
Stance on government's role	Government as facilitator, not claimant; the past municipal slogan “Bandung Kota Buku Sejahtera” characterised as promotion without follow-through.

Source: Developed by the Authors (2026)

4.2. *Geowana Ecotourism: the book as itinerary*

Geowana Ecotourism, founded in 2021 by Gan Gan Jatnika, curates 60 to 70 per cent of its trips directly from books, in both print and digital form. Two practices distinguish Geowana's model from a conventional themed walking tour. The first is bringing the physical book onto the trip and showing participants the specific page describing the location they are standing in; Jatnika reported that when a book is visibly connected to a stop in this way, roughly half of participants become interested in buying it, framing the trip as a direct sales channel for an author or publisher rather than only abstract promotion. The second is inviting the book's author onto the trip in person. Jatnika described a Dago-area trip built around Bandoengsch Villa Park, a book by an author, Karguna Purnama Harya (Figure 4). The same principle extends to fiction: Jatnika suggested that novels by writers such as Pidi Baiq, whose *Dilan* series is set partly on Jalan Braga, could equally anchor a trip, since readers already treat their fictional settings as though they were real.



Figure 4. Gan Gan Jatnika and Karguna Purnama Harya in “Bandoengsch Villa Park” Walking Tour in Bandung City

Source: Geowana Ecotourism Documentation (2026)



Figure 5. Geowana Puncak Eurad Tour Poster on Instagram

Source: Geowana Ecotourism Instagram (2026)

The most fully worked example Jatnika gave was a trip built entirely from a 1920s Sundanese-language novel, *Moegiri*, whose author was, in Jatnika's description, a major literary figure known for precise topographic description. The novel's plot moves its protagonist through a specific sequence of real Bandung locations, from a lake at Cipaganti, to the Situ Saeur area, to Nyengseret, Kebon Kalapa, Lembang and finally Cikawari near Puncak Eurad, and Geowana translated this exact sequence into a single itinerary (Figure 5). Jatnika reported that every participant on that trip wanted a copy of the novel itself, but that the book was out of print at the time, leaving the demand unmet; he had considered, but not carried out, photocopying it to satisfy participants. This example illustrates in miniature the broader mechanism Jatnika described: a book's setting, however old or however difficult to obtain in the market, can be reactivated as a saleable, physically walkable product, even when the book itself remains scarce.



Figure 6. Geowana trip to Bandung Zoo with Pustaka Jaya Publisher and Yudi Hamzah, writer of *Kado untuk Bandung: dari Taman menjadi Kebun Binatang*
 Source: Geowana Ecotourism Documentation (2026)

Author and publisher relationships also arise opportunistically through Geowana's links to Bandung's publishing world. Jatnika recounted that a launch event for a history of the city zoo, published by Pustaka Jaya and written by an author referred to as Yudi Hamzah, led directly to a trip: the author agreed to join without a formal guiding fee, on the understanding that he would narrate on-site and sell his own book to participants, and roughly half of the trip's twenty-five to thirty participants purchased a copy that day (Figure 6). A related but more established figure, referred to as Bahtiar, produced a folded poster-map called *Peta Bandung Purba* ('Map of Ancient Bandung'), which unfolds into a printed book; now around seventy years old, Bahtiar no longer organises his own trips but is invited onto others' itineraries, with his book bundled directly into the ticket price so that his participation is compensated through book sales rather than a guiding fee. Jatnika observed that his participants tend to be economically comfortable and reliably purchase featured books, sometimes buying the only copy on hand:

"The important thing is that I join. I'll explain things there, and I can also sell my books there... In one trip, if there are about 30 participants, about half of them buy the book. If I show a book, they'd say 'Kang, I want this', and suddenly my account gets topped up, and the books are gone." (Jatnika, interview, 21 May 2026)

Geowana also collaborates with the youth writers' community Forum Lingkar Pena Bandung, running trips after which participants are assigned a specific analytical angle, architecture, local myth, or economic history, and required to submit a piece of writing, subsequently compiled into a self-published zine. Jatnika sees this literacy-production side of the business as inseparable from the touristic side: the trip generates the data, and the writing afterward is what converts a one-off outing into a durable, publicly circulating text.

Two further aspects of Jatnika's account speak to the fragility and demographic complexity of this business model. First, permitting remains the single largest constraint on expanding urban literary trips: Geowana holds one general tourism business licence, which does not grant blanket access to privately owned heritage buildings or restricted sites, so each new site requires separate, often informal negotiation with property owners or security staff, and access can be revoked once an owner becomes aware that a group has been let in. Jatnika contrasted this with nature-based trips, where access is comparatively easy to negotiate informally with residents. Second, although Geowana initially targeted a youth market, its paying customer base has skewed steadily older, with an average participant age in the thirties to sixties and, on a recent trip, one participant aged eighty-six; Jatnika made a deliberate decision to retain this older base rather than chase a younger market already served by peer operators, while still running a small number of free, capped-enrolment trips restricted to participants aged thirty and under, both to sustain youth engagement and because paying participants

are, in Jatnika's account, considerably more reliable in showing up than free-trip participants, who tend to cancel without notice. Table 3 below summarises the key characteristics of the selected case.

Table 3. Within-Case Analysis: Geowana Ecotourism

Dimension	Evidence From the Case
Founding & evolution	Founded in 2021 by Gan Gan Jatnika.
Bonding social capital	Personal relationships with authors and publishers cultivated before trip design; collaboration with the youth writers' community Forum Lingkar Pena Bandung.
Bridging social capital	Participants become informal recruiters through word-of-mouth recommendations to prospective readers/travellers.
Linking social capital	Authors and publishers forgo a formal guiding fee in exchange for the right to sell their own books directly on-site during the trip.
Commodification logic	Book as itinerary: 60–70% of trips are curated directly from books (print and digital); the physical book is brought on-site and shown at the exact location it describes; in some cases the book's author joins the trip in person.
Principal fragility	Permitting: a single general tourism business licence does not grant blanket access to privately owned heritage sites, so access must be separately negotiated per site and can be revoked at the owner's discretion.
Stance on government's role	Confusion between the city's tourist information staff and its archive department over who should collect versus who should promote heritage data, reflecting an institutional gap rather than active obstruction.
<i>Source:</i> Developed by the Authors (2026)	

4.3. *The Two Pathways*

Positioned against existing typologies of literary tourism, both cases sit squarely within the phenomenon the term is meant to capture, while also stretching its boundaries in ways the literature reviewed above has not yet documented. Toko Buku Bandung's practice corresponds directly to what Çevik (2020) terms bookshop tourism, visits to the bookshops of a city; but where Çevik's category treats a bookshop's touristic appeal as largely given, through heritage, reputation, or aesthetic character, Rachman's case shows this appeal being manufactured over more than two decades through curation, republishing, and branding, turning an ordinary secondhand bookshop into a destination in its own right. Geowana's trips, meanwhile, correspond to more than one of Butler's four forms of literary tourism at once: homage to the real locations a novel describes, most explicitly in the Moegiri itinerary, and appeal built around the literary figure, by inviting an author or an established map-maker onto the trip in person, collapsing distinctions the typology treats as separate categories into a single, improvised product. Both cases also depart from MacLeod et al.'s (2018) finding that literary trail tourists are typically self-guided readers who locate fictional settings on their own initiative: Geowana's trips are curated and guided from the outset, and in several instances co-narrated live by the book's own author, folding Bassano et al.'s (2019) and Leong et al.'s (2024) account of storytelling as value co-creation directly into a paid, author-facing transaction rather than an independent guide's performance. Finally, in Balernmpas and Manola's (2020) terms, Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng draws on all three souvenir motivations at once: purchased as a gift, as memorabilia of a visit to the bookshop itself, and as a form of self-extension through which readers assert an identity as literate travellers, while Geowana extends this same self-extension motivation from an object carried home to an experience walked through. Read this way, the two pathways do not merely illustrate literary tourism in Bandung; they actively stretch its existing typologies to

accommodate a grassroots, entrepreneur-driven, hybrid form that the literature reviewed above has so far treated only in separate, unconnected pieces.

Both cases represent grassroots initiatives but differ in their pathways to literary tourism. Read together, Rachman's and Jatnika's practices reveal two outwardly different products built from the same underlying relational logic. Both entrepreneurs convert an ordinary book trade into a marketable expression of Bandung's identity to tourist, but each commodifies the book differently: Rachman turns it into an object to be carried home, while Jatnika turns it into a route to be walked through. Toko Buku Bandung and Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng make the book a souvenir, curated, published, and branded so that a visitor's act of purchase becomes an act of taking a piece of the city away with them. Geowana's book-based trips curate a novel's or a memoir's setting into a physical itinerary that visitors walk, so that the book becomes the destination's narration and the tourist can also buy it directly from the writer or publisher. Souvenir and itinerary are, in this sense, two branches of the same grassroots impulse to make Bandung's book culture visible and sellable, one extending outward from the shop, the other extending outward from the page onto the street.

Table 4. Cross-Case Analysis

Comparative Theme	Convergence (Shared Pattern)	Divergence (Case-Specific Variation)
Divergence (case-specific variation)	Both cases are built on the same sequence: bonding - bridging - linking capital.	Rachman's bonding capital rests on a decade of physical literary-community participation; Jatnika's rests on pre-existing personal ties with authors and publishers. Rachman's bridging capital is driven by social media virality; Jatnika's by participant word-of-mouth.
Emic concept of the "book ecosystem"	Both informants report tension between the founding community and the wider visitor market.	Rachman: ego and ownership disputes within the book community. Jatnika: a persistent mismatch between the younger market originally targeted and the older market actually retained.
Commodification logic	Both products emerged as adaptive solutions to ordinary small-business problems rather than as designed branding campaigns.	Rachman: the book becomes an object carried home (retail pathway). Jatnika: the book becomes a route walked through (itinerary pathway).
Contribution to the literature	Both cases supply the relational mechanism left largely implicit in Çevik's (2020) typology.	Rachman's case strengthens the "bookshop tourism" category; Jatnika's case extends MacLeod et al. (2018) and Bassano et al. (2019) by turning live author co-narration into an explicit economic transaction.
Policy implication	Both informants call for the government as facilitator rather than owner of these micro-ecosystems.	Rachman needs a shared promotional channel (addressing funding fragmentation); Jatnika needs a simplified permitting pathway (addressing site-access fragmentation).

Source: Developed by the Authors (2026)

As shown in Table 4, both products, moreover, rest on the same three forms of social capital, even though each entrepreneur draws on them in different proportions. Bonding social capital, the dense, long-standing ties within Bandung's book and literary communities, underwrites both cases: Rachman's decade of participation in book fairs and reading communities gave him the community trust and supply of Bandung-themed titles the product depends on, while Jatnika's relationships with authors and publishers, cultivated before any single trip is designed, give Geowana the access it needs to bring a book's author onto the trip itself. Bridging social capital is what makes each product visible beyond its founding community: for Rachman this has recently meant influencer-driven virality on

TikTok and Instagram Reels, bringing in visitors with no prior knowledge of the shop's history; for Jatnika it froms participants who become informal recruiters simply by asking what to read next. Linking social capital, finally, is what connects each product to the wider tourism value chain in a form neither entrepreneur has ever formalised in writing: Rachman's ten per cent referral commission to tour guides, and Jatnika's arrangement in which authors and publishers forgo a formal guiding fee in exchange for the right to sell their own book on-site. In both cases, this linking tie is what turns a book culture that already existed into an actual tourism transaction.

It is precisely this reliance on accumulated, informal, personally-held trust, rather than on any commissioned campaign or municipal branding effort, that makes both cases legible as grassroots place branding in literary tourism. Oleh-Oleh Boekoe Bandoeng and Geowana's literary trips were not designed by a destination marketing organisation to sell an image of Bandung. Both emerged as adaptive solutions for ordinary small-business problems; Rachman's need to build a repeatable product out of a non-replicable secondhand book supply, Jatnika's need to differentiate a tour operation in a crowded market, and only afterward came to function as branding. This is what gives their branding its particular authenticity: it is produced by actors who are themselves embedded in the identity of Bandung's book culture, not by consultants describing that identity from the outside. At the same time, this authenticity is inseparable from a shared fragility. Because both products are held together by bonding, bridging, and linking ties that were built personally and remain undocumented, informal, and dependent on continued goodwill, each rests on relational infrastructure that could just as easily unravel as it was assembled, a vulnerability neither commissioned branding nor a top-down tourism campaign would have to contend with in the same way.

5. Discussion

The comparative findings suggest that grassroots literary tourism in Bandung is not a single, fixed formula, but a relational pattern that can take more than one commercial form. This study identifies two parallel versions of that pattern rather than one process unfolding in stages: a *retail* version, where the book itself is sold and carried away as a souvenir, and an *itinerary* version, where the book's setting is turned into a route that visitors walk through. Figure 7 consolidates the two pathways into a single model, showing how a shared book culture and a shared relational infrastructure branch, under different business constraints, into two products that reconverge as grassroots literary place branding and that carry a common fragility. The remainder of this section reads the model against prior work and draws out its academic, theoretical and practical implications.

5.1. Academic Implications: How the Cases Speak to Prior Studies

Read against the literature, the two cases validate, extend, and in one respect qualify previous work. They validate the claim, common to Indonesian literary tourism research, that literature and place are deeply entangled (Arini & Raditya, 2023; Simanihuruk et al., 2023; Putra & Pidada, 2023), but they extend it by reversing its direction. Where those studies read a text to reveal a destination, the present cases show entrepreneurs reading a city's book trade to manufacture a destination, thereby supplying the entrepreneurial mechanism that typological work, including Cevik's (2020) recognition of bookshop tourism, leaves largely implicit. Bookshop tourism of this micro kind is shown to grow from deliberate, continuously maintained relational work by a small entrepreneur rather than from literary fame or heritage given in advance.

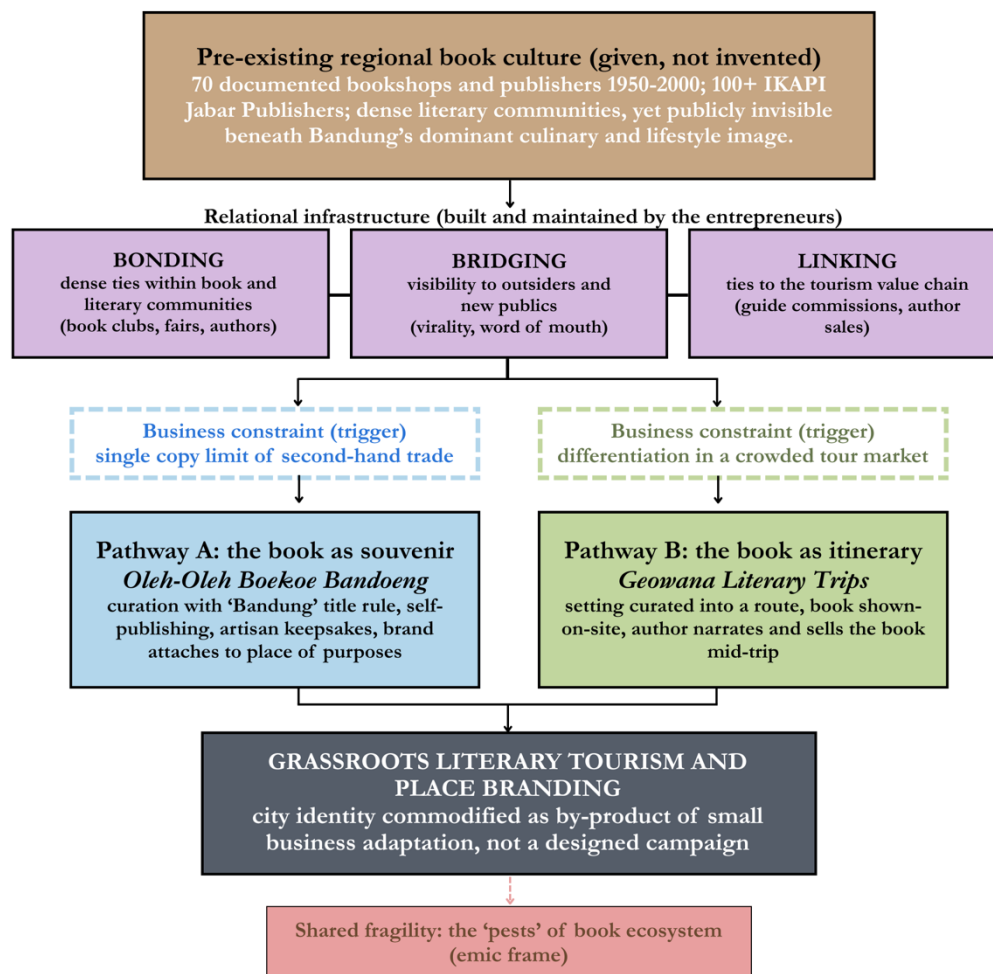


Figure 7. The two pathways model of grassroots literary tourism and place branding in Bandung
Source: Developed by the authors (2026)

To the literature on literary trails and guided storytelling, the Geowana case extends Macleod et al. (2018) in a specific direction. Where they find literary trail experiences to be predominantly self-guided and therefore difficult for the industry to monetise, Geowana demonstrates a curated, saleable counterpart in which the itinerary is improvised directly from a book's setting and, in some cases, co-narrated live by the book's own author. This folds the accounts of storytelling as value co-creation offered by Bassano et al. (2019) and Leong et al. (2024) into an explicitly economic transaction between tour operator, author and publisher, an arrangement not documented in the trail or storytelling literatures reviewed above. The cases also qualify Lekie's (2019) caution that themed trails may flatten local identity for the unquestioning visitor: because Geowana's routes are co-produced with the very authors who wrote the settings, the risk of an externally imposed storyline is at least partly offset, though the older, affluent skew of its paying market suggests that access to this co-produced experience is itself socially stratified.

To the place branding literature, both cases add a documented bottom-up pathway in which branding emerges as the by-product of adaptive problem-solving rather than as a designed campaign, complicating the top-down emphasis of Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006) and giving empirical

substance to Pedeliento and Kavaratzis's (2019) argument that place brands are constructed through situated identity work. The Bandung material also supports Ashworth's (2011) observation that a dominant destination image can crowd out alternatives: it is precisely because the city's culinary and lifestyle brand is so entrenched that its far older book identity had to be rebuilt from below rather than promoted from above.

5.2. *Theoretical Implications: the 'Book Ecosystem' as Vernacular Theory*

The study's principal theoretical contribution is to take seriously an emic concept that both informants articulated independently: an ecosystem of writers, publishers, distributors, sellers and readers bound by 'symbiotic mutualism' and threatened by 'pests'. In Rachman's account, the pests are piracy, book banning and the suppression of public discussion; in Jatnika's, they are the loss of access when a site owner withdraws informal permission and the loss of trust when free-trip participants fail to appear. That two entrepreneurs, interviewed separately and working in different segments, converged on the same organic metaphor suggests it is not idiosyncratic but a piece of vernacular theory: a locally generated conceptualisation of the structural vulnerability of grassroots cultural economies. Its analytical value is that it specifies what the social capital vocabulary leaves general. Bonding, bridging and linking describe the ties that hold the product together (Claridge, 2018); the ecosystem metaphor names what happens when those ties are attacked, and it does so in the actors' own terms. Read alongside Guo et al. (2018), who show that bonding and bridging capital can pull against one another, the emic frame extends the point: a grassroots tourism product resting on personal trust and informal arrangement rather than codified rights, licences or contracts remains exposed to any single actor's change of mind, whether that actor is a community member, a site owner or a participant. Theorising fragility from within the Global South, rather than importing a resilience framework from outside, is itself a modest decolonial move that the literature on Southeast Asian literary tourism has room to develop.

5.3. *Practical Implications: Facilitating Without Appropriating*

For practice and policy, the cases point to an infrastructural vacancy that could be filled without displacing community ownership. Rachman explicitly distinguished the role he wants government to play, as a facilitator rather than a claimant of these micro-ecosystems, echoing his frustration that the city's past 'Bandung Kota Buku Sejagat' campaign amounted to a slogan without follow-through. Jatnika's account of confusion between the city's tourist information staff and its archive staff over who should collect and who should promote heritage data illustrates the same vacancy from the itinerary side. Two concrete instruments follow directly from the informants' most-cited obstacles. A shared promotional channel uniting bookshops, libraries and literary communities would address the fragmentation Rachman identified, while a simplified permitting pathway for small operators seeking access to heritage-adjacent private property would address the permit fragmentation that most constrains Jatnika. Rachman's unrealised proposal for a book cooperative, capitalising shared production and consumption credit among small booksellers and publishers, and Jatnika's informal revenue-sharing arrangements with authors and guides, both point toward the same latent need: an institutional form, whether cooperative, licensing framework or shared platform, that could formalise trust relationships currently held together only by personal history, without government designing or owning the tourism product itself. For entrepreneurs, the comparison also carries a transferable lesson: the durability of a grassroots literary product depends less on any single viral moment than on the patient maintenance of bonding ties and the gradual formalisation of linking ties into arrangements that can survive a change of personnel.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to identify how mutually beneficial relations are formed among Bandung's book entrepreneurs, tour operators, authors, publishers and guides, to explain how these relations sustain literary tourism as a place branding strategy, and to articulate the informants' own conceptualisation of the vulnerabilities involved. Comparing the retail case of Lawang Buku/Toko Buku Bandung with the itinerary case of Geowana Ecotourism shows that Bandung's grassroots literary tourism rests on two structurally parallel but materially distinct pathways: a bookshop that commodifies the book as a portable souvenir through curation, thematic publishing and guide-referral commissions, and a tour operator that commodifies the book as a walkable route through direct author collaboration and on-site book sales. Both pathways are held together by the same three forms of social capital: bonding ties within literacy and book communities, bridging ties that make the enterprise visible to visitors, and linking ties that connect it to guides, authors and publishers, and both remain fragile precisely because those ties are personal and informal rather than institutionalised.

In relation to previous studies, the findings extend more than they contradict. They extend the textual tradition of Indonesian literary tourism research by documenting the entrepreneurial mechanism that turns a book culture into a visitor product; they extend the trail and storytelling literatures by showing an author-co-narrated, book-selling tour that those literatures had not described; and they extend place branding scholarship by evidencing an authentic bottom-up pathway that its dominant top-down models underplay. Where the study qualifies prior work, it does so gently, tempering the assumption that themed trails inevitably flatten local identity, since co-production with authors partly offsets that risk. The principal contribution is to show that grassroots literary place branding is not idiosyncratic to a single entrepreneur or product type; it is a repeatable relational logic that can generate different commercial forms within the same city, and the informants' shared emic 'book ecosystem' offers a vernacular framework, generated from the Global South, for understanding both the promise and the fragility of that logic.

The study's limitations should be acknowledged. The data rest on the perspectives of two entrepreneurs; other parties named in their narratives, including tour guides, authors, publishers, government officials and visitors, were not independently interviewed, and their statements and motivations are reported only as recounted by the informants. As a comparative case study, the findings support analytic generalisation of the two-pathway model of grassroots literary tourism, not statistical generalisation to all bookshops or tour operators in Bandung or elsewhere. These boundaries, characteristic of case study research, also define its most productive next steps. Future research should, first, engage directly with tourists and trip participants to understand how they interpret and value the literary souvenir or the literary itinerary they consume, and whether their motivations align with the gift, memorabilia and self-extension categories identified by Balermipas and Manola (2020). Second, it should extend the comparison to further entrepreneurs and operators in Bandung and to other Indonesian cities with deep book cultures, such as Yogyakarta, to test the consistency and the boundary conditions of the bonding-bridging-linking pattern identified here, and to establish whether the two-pathway model recurs or whether additional pathways exist. Third, it should test the emic 'book ecosystem' frame as a transferable analytical lens in other grassroots cultural economies, examining whether its language of symbiosis and pests travels beyond the book trade. Fourth, longitudinal work could track whether the informants' proposed institutional forms, the book cooperative and the shared promotional channel, are realised, and with what consequences for the fragility the model identifies. Finally, action-oriented or participatory research could examine concrete policy instruments, such as simplified heritage-site permitting for small tour operators or a shared promotional platform for independent bookshops, through which local government could facilitate, without appropriating, these micro-ecosystems of grassroots literary tourism.

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