

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH VILLAGE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL SOCIO-CULTURAL RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism development has been regulated and established by the central government through (Minister of Home Affairs Regulation) Number 33 of 2009 regarding Guidelines for Ecotourism Development in regions. These guidelines discuss the principles of ecotourism development in local areas. Ecotourism is a form of responsible nature tourism that emphasizes education, understanding, and support for conservation efforts, as well as the improvement of local community income Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 33 of 2009, Article 1. Ecotourism is a popular form of tourism among travelers (Sugiarti, 2015). Ecotourism development includes planning, utilization, and control activities. According to UNESCO (2009) and Wood (2002:14), there are five (5) fundamental principles of ecotourism development in Indonesia: conservation, education, tourism, economy, and community participation.

Keywords: Ecotourism, SWOT, Tourism, Socio-Cultural

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's natural wealth and cultural diversity offer vast potential and opportunities for developing its tourism industry. These resources not only provide the foundation for a thriving tourism sector but also present a unique opportunity to promote tourism that is deeply rooted in local wisdom and traditions. In recent years, the government has increasingly recognized its role in harnessing this potential, formulating policies that aim to promote sustainable tourism, while also empowering local communities to take active roles in the development of their villages.

According to Sofyan (2020), the government plays a key role in raising awareness among local communities about the untapped tourism potential in their regions. By fostering local engagement and ensuring that communities are active participants in tourism development, the government can help create tourism initiatives that not only attract visitors but also promote local culture and sustainable economic growth. One emerging model for achieving this is the concept of rural tourism, known as "desa wisata," which allows tourists to experience the authentic cultural and natural aspects of rural areas.

The significance of the tourism sector to Indonesia's economy is clear, with tourism contributing substantially to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, beyond economic contributions, the sector holds immense social and cultural value. Tourism development, particularly in rural areas, can strengthen the social fabric of local communities and preserve traditional cultural practices. This paper aims to explore the role of community empowerment in the development of rural tourism, using Lumban Gaol Tourism Village as a case study. The study will assess how community involvement, challenges in the process, and the outcomes of empowerment efforts contribute to both economic growth and the social-cultural resilience of the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of rural tourism in Indonesia has been extensively discussed in the literature, with a strong focus on the role of community-based tourism (CBT). Damanik (2013) and Sunaryo (2013) both emphasize the importance of active local participation in tourism development. CBT revolves around the idea that tourism should be built from the ground up, with community members not only participating in decision-making but also benefiting from the economic outcomes. Sunaryo outlines three key principles for successful CBT: involving community members in decisions, ensuring local communities receive tangible benefits from tourism, and providing tourism education to locals.

Labetubun (2021) supports this view, stressing that location is a critical factor in promoting community welfare. Many rural areas in Indonesia possess rich cultural and natural resources that are well-suited for tourism. However, without proper engagement and empowerment of local communities, these resources remain underutilized. Gautama et al. (2020) further expand on this by highlighting the importance of instilling rural tourism literacy within the community, arguing that education and training are essential for local empowerment. Through non-formal education, communities can be equipped with the skills necessary to manage tourism effectively and sustainably.

In addition to literacy, capacity-building, and community empowerment, Wahyuni (2018) points out the need for continuous mentoring and support for rural tourism initiatives. This ensures that local communities not only develop tourism management skills but also understand the broader implications of tourism on their social and cultural identity. The National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas, 1993) defines social and cultural resilience as the ability of a nation to preserve its cultural values in the face of external influences. In the context of tourism, this means balancing the influx of visitors with the preservation of local traditions and social structures.

Thus, rural tourism not only contributes to economic growth but also plays a vital role in strengthening the cultural and social resilience of the local community. Rochman (2016) and Wicaksono & Kurniawan (2016) stress that community participation in planning, implementation, and evaluation is key to the long-term sustainability of rural tourism. This ensures that tourism does not only serve external interests but also empowers local communities to protect their cultural heritage while benefiting economically.

In conclusion, the literature highlights the intertwined relationship between tourism development, community empowerment, and cultural preservation. For rural tourism to succeed in Indonesia, it must be built on a foundation of local participation, education, and empowerment, ensuring that the benefits are shared equitably among the community members.

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative approach through field studies to explore the potential for ecotourism development in Lumban Gaol Tourism Village, Toba. The qualitative method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena such as natural tourism management from a detailed and holistic perspective.

Research Steps:

Preliminary Study:

The initial phase of the research began with a preliminary study. The researcher collected information on the Lumban Gaol Tourism Village, its environmental conditions, and previous tourism development efforts.

Defining Objectives:

The study aimed to explore the potential for ecotourism development in Lumban Gaol Tourism

Village, Toba. The objectives also included evaluating the existing management and promotion efforts in the village.

Research Design:

The research was designed as a field study, which involved direct observations, interviews with relevant stakeholders, and a review of the literature to gather pertinent data.

Data Collection Techniques:

Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders such as local tourism managers, community members, and other related parties to gain a deeper understanding of the potential and challenges in developing tourism in the region.

Observation:

The researcher directly observed the physical conditions, facilities, and tourism activities in and around Lumban Gaol Tourism Village, Toba.

Literature Review:

Information was gathered from credible sources, including scientific journals, books, and reports, related to the development of nature-based tourism and ecotourism.

Data Analysis:

The collected data were analyzed descriptively to identify key findings on the potential for ecotourism development, the challenges faced, and recommendations for future development.

Report Preparation:

The results of the analysis were compiled into a research report, summarizing the findings, interpreting the data, and providing strategic recommendations for developing tourism in Lumban Gaol Tourism Village, Toba.

Integrated Analytical Approach:

To assess the tourism potential of Lumban Gaol Tourism Village, the research utilized an integrated approach combining several methods. These included the 4A descriptive analysis (Attraction, Amenity, Accessibility, Ancillary), SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), and the formulation of strategic development recommendations. This approach enabled the researcher to identify the internal and external factors affecting tourism development and to propose sustainable strategies for future growth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to analyze the tourism potential of Lumban Gaol Tourism Village using the 4A framework (Attraction, Amenity, Accessibility, Ancillary) and to provide recommendations for its development. The results of this research highlighted several areas of strength and opportunities as well as challenges that require attention.

Analysis:

1. Attraction :

Lumban Gaol Tourism Village possesses remarkable natural beauty. The area is enriched with natural attractions and cultural heritage, including local legends and myths that attract visitors interested in both nature and culture. This unique combination of natural and cultural elements serves as a significant draw for tourists.

2. Amenity :

Despite its natural attractions, the village suffers from limited amenities. Essential infrastructure such as walking trails, safe bridges, parking areas, waste disposal units, gazebos, and guided tour services are either underdeveloped or lacking. Enhancing these facilities is necessary to improve the overall visitor experience.

3. Accessibility:

Access to Lumban Gaol remains challenging. Roads leading to the village are unpaved, and the terrain is steep, making it difficult for visitors to reach the area. Improving road infrastructure and providing accessible public transportation are critical for increasing tourist accessibility.

4. Ancillary:

There is potential to develop supporting facilities such as tourism packages that integrate various activities. Empowering local communities to actively participate in tourism activities and promoting the village through various media platforms can significantly enhance the village's appeal.

SWOT Analysis:

Based on the data collected through interviews, observations, and literature reviews, the SWOT analysis of Lumban Gaol Tourism Village is summarized in the table below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stunning natural beauty ▪ Cultural and historical significance ▪ Strong community involvement in tourism management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited tourism management and promotion ▪ Fragmented land ownership ▪ Inadequate infrastructure ▪ Lack of skilled human resources
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing interest in nature-based tourism ▪ Potential for new job creation and income generation ▪ Economic opportunities in local products and tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low community awareness of tourism potential ▪ Lack of government support ▪ Insufficient funding for infrastructure improvements

Development Strategies Based on SWOT Analysis:

1. SO (Strengths-Opportunities)

A strategy of "Promoting natural beauty through social media and tourism influencers" can leverage the natural attractions of Lumban Gaol to capitalize on the growing interest in nature-based tourism. This will raise awareness of the village and attract a larger number of visitors.

2. WO (Weaknesses-Opportunities)

Involving the local community in tourism activities and providing training to improve their skills is a strategy that transforms weaknesses in management and promotion into opportunities. By empowering local people to actively engage in tourism and enhancing their service skills, the village can strengthen the relationship between the local community and tourism, thus boosting its overall appeal.

3. ST (Strengths-Threats)

A strategy of "Collaborating with travel agencies to increase promotion and sell tourism packages" aims to mitigate the threat of low community awareness of tourism potential. By working with tourism agencies, promotional efforts can be more targeted, helping to increase visitor numbers and enhance the local community's awareness of the village's tourism potential.

4. WT (Weaknesses-Threats)

A strategy of "Mediating land ownership for collective management and providing local training programs" addresses the fragmented land ownership and infrastructure challenges. By mediating between landowners and offering collective management solutions, as well as improving infrastructure and providing training to local residents, this strategy will support sustainable tourism growth.

Community Empowerment and Cultural Preservation

The development of Lumban Gaol as a tourism village has had several positive impacts on the local community. First, it has enhanced promotional capabilities. The village has created a website for online promotion and participates in tourism fairs and cultural seminars. Local businesses have also expanded to accommodate tourists, with food stalls, souvenir shops, and homestays being established.

Economic benefits are both direct and indirect. Directly, the community has seen an increase in income from homestay rentals, food sales, and local crafts. Indirectly, revenue from entrance fees contributes to village development projects, such as religious site improvements and community events.

In addition to economic improvements, there have been shifts in local livelihoods, with many residents transitioning into roles such as traditional craftsmen, food vendors, and tourism service providers. This shift has helped create new job opportunities, promoting a more sustainable and diversified economy for the village.

Cultural Sustainability

Tourism development has also contributed to the preservation of local culture and traditions. As tourism increases, the community has made efforts to safeguard their cultural heritage, ensuring that traditional practices remain integral to the village's identity. Participation in social activities has also increased, as tourism has provided a platform for cultural exchange.

The objective of this research was to evaluate the tourism potential of Lumban Gaol Tourism Village using the 4A framework (Attraction, Amenity, Accessibility, Ancillary) and propose strategic recommendations for its development. The findings from the study revealed significant strengths and opportunities, as well as areas requiring development, particularly in infrastructure, accessibility, and local community engagement.

Analysis:

1. Attraction

The natural beauty of Lumban Gaol Tourism Village is the village's most valuable asset. With its scenic landscapes, pristine environment, and rich cultural heritage, the area offers a blend of natural and cultural attractions. Tourists are drawn to local legends and myths, which add cultural depth to the natural sightseeing experience. This unique mixture provides a diverse range of experiences, catering to both nature lovers and cultural enthusiasts. However, more structured efforts are needed to integrate these attractions into a cohesive tourism package that emphasizes both aspects to create a more comprehensive visitor experience.

2. Amenity

The research revealed a significant gap between the village's natural potential and the available amenities. Basic infrastructure such as well-maintained roads, safety features like bridges, adequate parking spaces, and visitor-friendly facilities are either minimal or underdeveloped. Moreover, services such as guided tours, rest areas, and waste management systems are lacking. For Lumban Gaol to fully capitalize on its potential, investments in both physical infrastructure and tourism services are essential. Building eco-friendly facilities can not only enhance the visitor experience but also align with the principles of sustainable tourism.

3. Accessibility

Accessibility remains one of the most pressing issues for Lumban Gaol. Roads leading to the village are poorly maintained, with steep and rugged terrain creating significant barriers for potential tourists. The lack of reliable transportation options further exacerbates the challenge. Developing a well-paved road network and introducing public transport services to the village would not only make the destination more accessible but also attract a larger number of tourists. Moreover, creating green transportation options, such as bike paths or electric vehicle services, could enhance the village's appeal to environmentally-conscious

travelers.

4. Ancillary

Supporting tourism services, such as packaged tours, local guides, and promotional activities, are crucial for building the village's tourism industry. Currently, these services are underutilized, and there is a lack of structured programs that connect tourists with the local community. A well-thought-out marketing strategy that leverages social media, partnerships with travel agencies, and collaborations with influencers could greatly improve the village's visibility. Developing sustainable tourism packages that combine natural exploration with cultural experiences would provide tourists with a more immersive and fulfilling experience.

CONCLUSION

Lumban Gaol Tourism Village is one of the tourism villages located in Toba, within the Balige tourism area, offering attractions such as the village's unique spatial layout and traditional architecture, distinctive customs, and natural wealth in the form of bamboo forests. The government, as one of the tourism stakeholders, is expected to play a greater role, especially in improving the quality of human resources through community empowerment programs such as training and technical guidance on tourism management, as well as support for local handicraft businesses.

The local community is encouraged to maintain cleanliness, orderliness, greenery, comfort, and safety in the environment. Efforts that can be made include preserving traditional buildings by ensuring they are kept clean and well-maintained. In terms of promotion, village managers are advised to provide more detailed information about the available tourist attractions through online platforms and brochures, while increasing promotional activities. This could include placing brochures in strategic locations such as airports, hotels, shopping centers, and restaurants, and strengthening partnerships with travel agencies, both domestic and international.

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