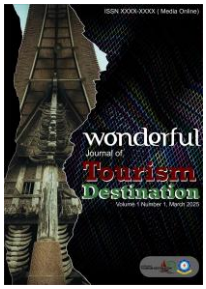
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Community Empowerment in the Management of Pine Forest Ecotourism in Rombeng: Implications for Local Economic Sustainability

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Abstract
This study seeks to develop a community-based ecotourism strategy for Rombeng Pine Forest, located in Bonto Lojong Village, Bantaeng Regency, by employing a qualitative research design supported by SWOT analysis. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with site managers, local residents, and visitors, complemented by direct field observations. The findings reveal that the current performance of ecotourism in the area remains suboptimal, particularly in terms of infrastructure availability and supporting amenities. To address these challenges, the study proposes an amenity enhancement framework that prioritizes community empowerment through capacity-building programs and the provision of environmentally responsible tourism facilities. The implementation of this framework is expected to enhance visitor satisfaction while simultaneously generating more reliable and sustainable income opportunities for local communities. Furthermore, the study underscores the necessity of integrated and sustainable ecotourism governance, emphasizing collaborative involvement among key stakeholders throughout the planning and implementation processes. The findings offer important policy implications, highlighting the need for institutional support for community-based ecotourism initiatives and increased awareness of environmental conservation. This research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable ecotourism development and provides practical recommendations for managers of nature-based tourism destinations with similar characteristics.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Rombeng Pine Forest; Community Empowerment; Sustainable Tourism Management; SWOT Analysis; Nature-Based Tourism; Tourism Facilities Development

Abstrak
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan strategi pengembangan ekowisata berbasis masyarakat di Hutan Pinus Rombeng yang terletak di Desa Bonto Lojong, Kabupaten Bantaeng, dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode analisis SWOT. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pengelola, masyarakat setempat, dan wisatawan, yang didukung oleh observasi langsung di lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kualitas pengelolaan ekowisata di kawasan tersebut masih belum optimal, terutama terkait ketersediaan infrastruktur dan fasilitas penunjang wisata. Untuk menjawab permasalahan tersebut, penelitian ini mengusulkan model pengembangan amenitas yang menitikberatkan pada pemberdayaan masyarakat melalui peningkatan kapasitas dan keterampilan, serta penyediaan fasilitas pariwisata yang berorientasi pada prinsip keberlanjutan. Penerapan model ini diharapkan mampu meningkatkan kualitas pengalaman wisatawan sekaligus menciptakan sumber pendapatan yang lebih stabil dan berkelanjutan bagi masyarakat lokal. Selain itu, penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pengelolaan ekowisata yang berkelanjutan dan kolaboratif dengan melibatkan berbagai pemangku kepentingan dalam proses perencanaan dan implementasi. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan perlunya dukungan kebijakan yang mendorong pengembangan ekowisata berbasis masyarakat serta peningkatan kesadaran terhadap upaya pelestarian lingkungan. Secara akademik, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan kajian ekowisata dan menjadi rujukan praktis bagi pengelola destinasi wisata alam dengan karakteristik serupa.

Kata kunci: Ekowisata; Hutan Pinus Rombeng; Pemberdayaan Masyarakat; Pengelolaan Berkelanjutan; Analisis SWOT; Destinasi Wisata Alam; Pengembangan Fasilitas

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1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based ecotourism management has become a central concern in the pursuit of sustainable tourism development across many developing countries, including Indonesia. Owing to its abundant natural resources, Indonesia possesses significant ecotourism potential that can generate economic benefits for local communities while simultaneously supporting environmental conservation. Forest areas rich in biodiversity, such as Rombeng Pine Forest located in Bonto Lojong Village, Bantaeng Regency, represent destinations that can be developed as community-driven ecotourism hubs. The natural landscape and ecological richness of this area serve as key attractions for visitors seeking authentic nature-based experiences. When managed effectively, ecotourism can function as a catalyst for local economic development while ensuring the long-term preservation of natural resources (Sya & Said, 2020). However, despite its potential, ecotourism development in this area has not yet been fully optimized, and several management challenges persist, particularly in terms of community participation and sustainability practices.

In recent years, community-based ecotourism has gained increasing recognition for its capacity to balance environmental conservation with improvements in local livelihoods. In the Indonesian context, various community-oriented ecotourism initiatives have demonstrated positive outcomes, especially in enhancing environmental awareness and improving socio-economic conditions at the local level (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987). This approach emphasizes the active involvement of local communities in managing, conserving, and promoting nature-based tourism. Sustainable ecotourism development requires collaborative governance involving government institutions, local communities, and private sector stakeholders. In response to growing demand for environmentally responsible tourism destinations, Rombeng Pine Forest holds considerable potential to emerge as a competitive ecotourism destination for both domestic and international visitors. Nevertheless, the success of such development depends largely on effective attraction management and meaningful community engagement throughout all stages of planning and implementation.

One of the primary challenges in developing ecotourism at Rombeng Pine Forest is the limited availability of infrastructure that supports tourist accessibility, coupled with insufficient awareness among local residents regarding environmental conservation and the economic opportunities associated with ecotourism. Adequate infrastructure—such as reliable road access, visitor facilities, and public services—plays a critical role in shaping visitor satisfaction and overall destination quality. At the same time, suboptimal community involvement in tourism management remains a significant barrier. Without a clear understanding of long-term economic benefits and conservation values, local communities may be reluctant or unable to actively support sustainable ecotourism initiatives. Consequently, ecotourism development in this area requires a comprehensive approach that integrates strategic planning, awareness-building, and community empowerment.

Addressing these challenges necessitates development strategies that extend beyond physical improvements to include capacity-building initiatives that enable communities to manage tourism resources sustainably. This study focuses on the development of community-based ecotourism in Rombeng Pine Forest through the application of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis as a strategic planning tool. SWOT analysis has been widely applied in ecotourism research due to its effectiveness in assessing internal and external factors that influence destination performance. According to Rangkuti (2016), this analytical framework facilitates the identification of strategic advantages and constraints, thereby supporting the formulation of strategies that leverage strengths and opportunities while mitigating weaknesses and external threats.

Previous studies suggest that effective community-based ecotourism development relies on empowering local communities through skills training, environmentally responsible management practices, and supportive infrastructure development. For instance, Sya and Said (2020) emphasize the role of environmental education for both visitors and local residents in strengthening conservation awareness and ensuring long-term sustainability. Furthermore, ecotourism development requires strong collaboration among government agencies, private sector actors, and community groups. This perspective aligns with the findings of Peltoma (2015), who argues that successful ecotourism is not

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solely dependent on natural attractions but also on integrated management systems and active stakeholder participation.

Although numerous studies have examined community-based ecotourism development, many focus on general tourism management contexts and offer limited insights into destinations characterized by infrastructure constraints, such as Rombeng Pine Forest. This study seeks to address this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of development strategies suitable for ecotourism areas facing similar challenges. In doing so, the research offers practical solutions for improving infrastructure, enhancing community awareness, and maximizing the local economic benefits derived from ecotourism activities. The primary objective of this study is to identify community-based ecotourism development strategies that can enhance visitor experiences, strengthen local community involvement, and ensure long-term sustainability at Rombeng Pine Forest. By employing SWOT analysis, this research formulates strategic recommendations tailored to the specific characteristics and potential of the study area. In a broader context, the findings aim to contribute to the advancement of sustainable tourism policies in Indonesia, particularly in relation to environmentally responsible and community-oriented ecotourism management. Thus, this study not only examines internal and external factors influencing ecotourism development but also provides actionable recommendations to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of nature-based tourism destinations.

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2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to identify and formulate development strategies for community-based ecotourism at Rombeng Pine Forest, located in Bonto Lojong Village, Bantaeng Regency. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design was employed. The qualitative approach was selected due to its capacity to explore social phenomena in depth, capture diverse perspectives from key informants, and examine community views regarding their roles in ecotourism management and environmental conservation. The descriptive method enables a detailed portrayal of existing conditions and facilitates a clearer understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with ecotourism development in the Rombeng Pine Forest area. As an analytical framework, this study applies SWOT analysis to assess internal and external factors influencing ecotourism development (Rangkuti, 2016).

2.1. Research Approach and Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural dynamics related to community involvement in ecotourism management. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for this study because they allow flexibility in data exploration and enable the collection of rich information from respondents who possess direct knowledge or experience of ecotourism practices. As noted by Suherlan (2022), qualitative research is effective in generating comprehensive insights into social phenomena by incorporating the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. A descriptive research design was used to systematically describe the characteristics, conditions, and management challenges of ecotourism at Rombeng Pine Forest. Through this approach, the study seeks to depict the current situation while identifying strategic actions required to enhance the quality of community-based ecotourism. This method also supports the examination of perceptions held by local communities and managers regarding environmental sustainability and development opportunities within the ecotourism context.

In addition, the study adopts a community-based perspective that emphasizes the empowerment and active participation of local residents in managing and promoting ecotourism. By prioritizing community involvement, the research aims to formulate development strategies that extend beyond improving tourism facilities to include local economic sustainability and environmental protection. As emphasized by Peltoma (2015), the success of community-based ecotourism relies on integrated management that balances ecological conservation with local economic empowerment.

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2.2. Research Procedures

The research process was conducted through several interrelated stages to support the formulation of ecotourism development strategies for Rombeng Pine Forest. The first stage involved collecting data on the current conditions of ecotourism in the study area. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants, including members of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), local residents, and tourists who had previously visited the site. Semi-structured interviews were employed to allow respondents to express their views freely while ensuring that the discussion remained aligned with the research objectives. This technique facilitated the exploration of informants' experiences, perceptions, and assessments of the potential, challenges, and opportunities associated with ecotourism management. Following data collection, the next stage involved data analysis using SWOT analysis. Information obtained from interviews and field observations was examined to identify internal factors—such as strengths and weaknesses—and external factors, including opportunities and threats, that influence ecotourism management at Rombeng Pine Forest. The results of the SWOT analysis were then used to formulate development strategies aimed at optimizing the area's potential in terms of environmental conservation, tourism facility improvement, and community empowerment. This analysis also highlights key strengths, such as natural attractiveness and community support, alongside existing limitations, including infrastructure constraints and limited environmental awareness.

2.3. Data Sources and Collection Techniques

This study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, direct field observations, and documentation of activities related to ecotourism management at Rombeng Pine Forest. Secondary data consist of relevant literature and documents, including government reports, previous research findings, and scientific publications related to ecotourism development in Indonesia and other developing regions. Data collection techniques applied in this study include observation, interviews, and documentation. Field observations were conducted to assess the actual conditions of the study area and to observe interactions between visitors and local communities. Interviews were carried out with Pokdarwis members, community representatives, and tourists to capture their perspectives on ecotourism development and environmental conservation. Documentation was used to compile supporting materials, such as ecotourism management reports, visitor statistics, and records of tourism-related activities conducted in the area.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SWOT analysis, which consists of identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with ecotourism management at Rombeng Pine Forest. The outcomes of this analysis serve as the basis for formulating development strategies tailored to the characteristics and potential of the study area. This analytical technique provides a comprehensive understanding of the internal and external conditions affecting ecotourism development and supports the formulation of practical recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of community-based ecotourism.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to identify and formulate development strategies for community-based ecotourism at Rombeng Pine Forest, Bonto Lojong Village, Bantaeng Regency. The research process involved several key stages, including data collection through interviews, field observations, and documentation. The findings reveal a set of significant internal and external factors—namely strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats—that influence ecotourism management in the study area. In addition, the proposed amenity development model demonstrates strong potential to

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enhance the overall quality of ecotourism while generating positive economic impacts for local communities.

3.1 Ecotourism Quality in the Rombeng Pine Forest Area

Rombeng Pine Forest is a nature-based tourism attraction located in the mountainous region of Bonto Lojong Village, Bantaeng Regency. Its natural appeal, characterized by cool mountain air and expansive pine landscapes, serves as the primary attraction for visitors. Despite its considerable potential, however, the management of this area continues to face several challenges. One of the main issues identified in this study is the relatively low quality of ecotourism services, particularly with respect to infrastructure and supporting facilities. The results of interviews with members of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) and local residents indicate that existing facilities such as food stalls and parking areas remain limited and are insufficient to accommodate increasing visitor numbers, especially during peak holiday seasons. These constraints hinder the creation of a comfortable and satisfying visitor experience. In this context, the quality of tourism amenities plays a critical role in determining the competitiveness of Rombeng Pine Forest as an ecotourism destination. Consequently, this study highlights the need to improve existing facilities through the development of environmentally friendly infrastructure and enhanced service provision.

The quality of ecotourism services significantly influences the attractiveness of Rombeng Pine Forest as a nature-based destination. The findings show that inadequate infrastructure—such as poor road accessibility, limited sanitation facilities, and the absence of designated resting areas—restricts visitor mobility and reduces overall satisfaction. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that improvements in supporting facilities are essential for strengthening ecotourism appeal and visitor experiences (Sya & Said, 2020). Both Pokdarwis members and local communities recognize that without substantial infrastructure improvements, the quality of tourism experiences will remain constrained. Furthermore, the integration of environmentally responsible management principles is considered essential in guiding future development initiatives to ensure that tourism growth does not compromise ecological integrity.

3.2 Amenity Development Model to Enhance Ecotourism Quality

Based on the SWOT analysis, this study proposes an amenity development model aimed at improving the quality of ecotourism at Rombeng Pine Forest. The model emphasizes sustainable tourism facility development while actively involving local communities in resource management and utilization. A key component of this model is community empowerment through skills training and educational programs focused on environmentally friendly practices. One of the proposed initiatives involves training local residents to produce handicrafts derived from natural materials, such as pinecones, which can be transformed into souvenirs for visitors. This activity is intended to enhance community skills while creating additional income opportunities. Interview findings reveal strong community interest in participating in the production of ecotourism-based souvenirs, including necklaces and bracelets made from pinecones. These products not only serve as memorabilia for tourists but also symbolize conservation values embedded within ecotourism practices. As such, community-based handicraft development forms an integral element of the proposed amenity enhancement model.

In addition to handicraft training, the model includes improvements to public facilities that support tourist activities, such as resting areas, affordable food stalls, and adequate sanitation facilities. Enhancing these amenities is expected to improve visitor comfort and overall satisfaction. This approach aligns with recommendations from previous studies emphasizing that facility improvement is a crucial factor in strengthening community-based ecotourism (Sya & Said, 2020). Overall, the proposed amenity development model integrates community empowerment with sustainable environmental management. By involving local residents at every stage—from skills training to facility enhancement—the model seeks to strengthen both tourism quality and community livelihoods. As noted by Peltoma (2015), empowering communities within ecotourism frameworks

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not only improves economic outcomes but also reinforces long-term sustainability by fostering local stewardship of natural resources.

3.3 Positive Impacts on Local Community Income

One of the primary objectives of this study is to examine the economic effects of ecotourism development on local community income. Findings from interviews and field observations indicate that although ecotourism activities at Rombeng Pine Forest have generated economic benefits, these benefits remain limited and unevenly distributed. Local residents engaged in tourism-related activities—such as food vendors and service providers—report that their income is highly dependent on seasonal visitor flows. Peak tourist arrivals during holiday periods contrast sharply with low visitation during off-season months, resulting in income instability. The implementation of the proposed amenity development model is expected to promote more stable and sustainable income generation. Through skills training and the diversification of economic activities—particularly the production of handicrafts and improved tourism services—local communities can access additional revenue streams beyond seasonal tourism demand. The findings suggest that when ecotourism is managed inclusively and strategically, it can function as a long-term source of livelihood for local populations.

Moreover, the enhancement of ecotourism quality is likely to produce indirect benefits, such as increased environmental awareness among both visitors and residents. Tourists engaging with educational activities—such as forest clean-up programs and tree-planting initiatives—gain greater appreciation for conservation efforts, which may encourage environmentally responsible behavior. This aligns with Peltoma's (2015) assertion that ecotourism has the capacity to generate long-term socio-economic and environmental benefits when effectively managed. The study further confirms that community-based ecotourism development can reduce income vulnerability by enabling residents to generate year-round economic benefits through locally produced goods and services. As emphasized by Grant (2017), inclusive planning and stakeholder involvement are critical to ensuring that economic gains from ecotourism are distributed equitably across communities.

3.4 Implications of the Development Model for Sustainable Ecotourism Management

The findings of this study offer important implications for sustainable ecotourism management at Rombeng Pine Forest. The proposed amenity development model can serve as a strategic reference for destination managers and stakeholders seeking to improve ecotourism quality while maintaining environmental sustainability and community empowerment. Sustainable ecotourism management, as demonstrated in this study, rests on three interconnected pillars: responsible natural resource management, improvement of tourism facilities, and active community participation. The results underscore the importance of collaboration among key stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector actors, and local communities. Strong intersectoral cooperation is essential to ensure that ecotourism development adheres to sustainability principles across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. As highlighted by Ceballos-Lascurain (1987), effective ecotourism management requires comprehensive planning and inclusive participation to maximize positive outcomes for both communities and ecosystems.

A major challenge in the development of ecotourism at Rombeng Pine Forest lies in balancing tourism growth with environmental preservation. While the area holds significant tourism potential, long-term ecological impacts must be carefully considered. Sustainable ecotourism practices must incorporate conservation-oriented principles and enhance awareness among visitors and residents regarding environmental protection (Sya & Said, 2020). The study also emphasizes that the success of ecotourism development depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on environmental education initiatives. Programs such as conservation workshops, tree-planting activities, and collaborative forest clean-ups can strengthen environmental awareness and encourage responsible tourism behavior. Through these initiatives, visitors become active participants in conservation efforts rather than passive consumers of natural attractions.

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In conclusion, sustainable ecotourism management at Rombeng Pine Forest requires an integrated approach that combines natural resource conservation, facility enhancement, and community empowerment. Effective collaboration among all stakeholders is essential to ensure that ecotourism development delivers economic benefits to local communities while safeguarding environmental integrity for future generations.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has examined and formulated development strategies for community-based ecotourism at Rombeng Pine Forest, located in Bonto Lojong Village, Bantaeng Regency, by applying a qualitative research approach supported by SWOT analysis. The findings indicate that although the area possesses substantial potential as an ecotourism destination, current management practices remain limited, particularly with respect to infrastructure and visitor-supporting facilities. The proposed amenity development model, which emphasizes community empowerment, offers a strategic pathway to enhance ecotourism quality through capacity-building initiatives such as skills training in nature-based handicraft production, alongside improvements to existing tourism facilities. The anticipated outcomes of this approach extend beyond enhancing visitor satisfaction to include more stable and sustainable economic benefits for local communities. Achieving long-term sustainability in ecotourism management requires strong collaboration among government institutions, local communities, and private sector stakeholders to establish an environmentally responsible and economically inclusive tourism ecosystem. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on sustainable community-based ecotourism by providing practical insights and policy-oriented recommendations for ecotourism managers and decision-makers in designing strategies that balance environmental conservation with community empowerment. Future research is encouraged to further explore the long-term social and economic impacts of ecotourism development in destinations with similar characteristics, thereby enriching understanding of its role in fostering sustainable rural development.

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