

Development of Local Community-Based Ecotourism in Minahasa Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the potential, challenges, and formulate a model for the development of community-based ecotourism (CBET) in Minahasa Regency. Minahasa has natural and cultural wealth that has great potential to be used as an ecotourism destination, such as Lake Tondano, Bukit Kasih, as well as traditional cultural and craft sites. However, the utilization of this potential is still not optimal due to various structural challenges such as low human resource (HR) capacity, weak local institutions, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of community participation. Through a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, field observations, and document studies, this study reveals that the success of ecotourism development in Minahasa is highly dependent on the integration of three pillars of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental. The results of the study recommend the need for regional policy interventions that support inclusive governance, strengthening local institutions, and supervision strict environment. With a participatory and adaptive approach to local conditions, the CBET model is considered to be able to make ecotourism an instrument of environmental conservation as well as a driver of the people's economy in Minahasa Regency.

Keywords: Ecotourism; community empowerment; sustainable tourism; CBET; Minahasa; participatory development.

INTRODUCTION

The current development of global tourism shows an increase in demand for responsible and sustainable forms of tourism, especially ecotourism (Fennell, 2020). Minahasa Regency in North Sulawesi Province has enormous ecotourism potential with biodiversity, volcanic lakes such as Lake Tondano, and the unique cultural richness of the Minahasa people (Minahasa Tourism Office, 2023). However, the development of ecotourism in this region is not optimal due to several structural challenges.

However, the development of ecotourism in Minahasa Regency still faces various structural challenges that hinder the achievement of its maximum potential. One of the main challenges is the limited infrastructure supporting tourism, such as inadequate road access to ecotourism locations, lack of sanitation facilities, and lack of tourist-friendly information boards and directions. In addition,

the low capacity of local human resources in terms of tourism services and ecotourism destination management is an inhibiting factor in creating a quality and sustainable tourism experience.

Other challenges are related to institutional and regulatory aspects. Coordination between local government agencies in ecotourism planning and management is still not integrated, so there is often overlap of authority or lack of synergy in program implementation. In addition, the absence of regional regulations (Perda) that specifically regulate sustainable ecotourism management makes the direction of tourism development less focused and vulnerable to exploitation that damages the environment. This condition is also exacerbated by weak supervision of tourism activities that have the potential to damage nature and cultural conservation areas.

From the community's side, awareness and participation in the preservation of the local environment and culture still needs to be improved. Many local communities do not fully understand the strategic value of ecotourism as a means of preservation as well as a source of economic welfare. Sustainable education and training programs are needed so that the community is not only an object, but also a subject in ecotourism development. Collaboration between the government, the community, business actors, and academics is an important key to realizing the responsible, inclusive, and sustainable development of Minahasa ecotourism.

Recent studies show that Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) can be a solution for sustainable tourism development (Wondirad et al., 2021). However, its implementation in Minahasa faces several main obstacles. First, community participation in ecotourism management is still low due to limited human resource and institutional capacity (Pokdarwis of Rurukan Village, 2021). Second, there is no effective model of collaboration between the government, the private sector, and local communities (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2022). Third, pressure on the environment is increasing along with the uncontrolled development of tourism activities (Bappeda Minahasa, 2022).

Several previous studies have examined the potential of ecotourism in North Sulawesi (for example, Arida et al., 2020's research on Bali), but no one has specifically analyzed the community-based ecotourism development model in Minahasa Regency by considering social, economic, and environmental aspects in an integrated manner. In fact, according to Gössling (2023), the success of ecotourism is highly dependent on the balance of these three aspects.

A study by Stronza et al. (2019) confirms that the participation of local communities is the key to ecotourism sustainability, as it can increase social acceptance while ensuring an equitable distribution of economic benefits. Meanwhile, Kiper (2021) emphasized that good environmental management must be the foundation for ecotourism development so as not to cause degradation of natural resources. Furthermore, TIES (The International Ecotourism Society, 2022) states that the integration between conservation, local communities, and sustainable tourism is able to create a multiplier effect for the regional economy without sacrificing the ecosystem.

Through this research, it is hoped that it can analyze the potential of natural and cultural resources as the basis for community-based ecotourism development in Minahasa Regency. Identify challenges for community and local institutional participation in sustainable ecotourism management. Formulate an integrative community-based ecotourism development model, taking into account social, economic, and environmental aspects for long-term sustainability.

METHODS

Research Approach

The method used in this study is a qualitative research method, which emphasizes the process of searching for meaning, revealing meaning, behind the phenomenon that emerges related to the development of ecotourism based on local communities in Minahasa. This qualitative research method aims to explore a deep understanding of the local community-based ecotourism development strategy in Minasaga district. In this study, data was collected through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, such as local governments, tourism industry players, local communities, and tourism experts. In addition, direct observation at tourism locations that are the focus of development is also carried out to obtain more comprehensive data on real conditions in the field.

Research Location

The location of the research is the Minahasa Regency Tourism Office.

Research Instruments and Data Sources

In this study, the main research instrument is the researcher himself. The author himself conducts observations, interviews, data collection and data analysis. This research can be assisted by tools to facilitate the research process, such as Digital Cameras, Mobile Phones, Tape recorders, and other tools. In accordance with the problem that is the focus of this research, the sources of research data are:

1. Observation of employee performance in providing services to the community
2. Semi-structured interview data to informants are:
 - a. Head of Service
 - b. Chief Executive
 - c. Head of Department
 - d. Owners of tourist destinations
 - e. Community

Data Analysis Techniques

a. Data Reduction

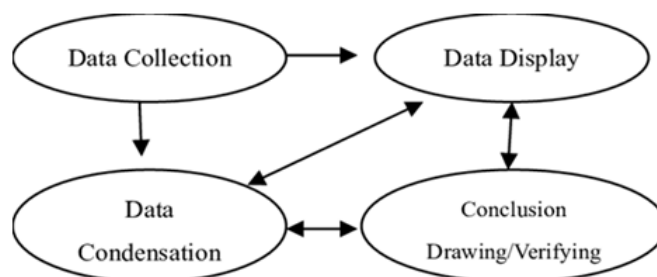
Reduce data obtained through observations, documents and interviews. Reducing data obtained through observation, documents, and interviews is an important step in the qualitative data analysis process. This process aims to filter out relevant and essential information, as well as reduce data that is too broad or irrelevant. In observation, the researcher must select significant events or behaviors and provide a clear picture of the phenomenon being studied. Whereas in interviews, relevant data should be focused on answers that lead to a deeper understanding of the topic raised, ignoring information that is irrelevant or too general. The same is true of documents, where only information that supports the analysis is retained. This reduction process allows researchers to organize and organize the data in a more structured form, which makes it easier to identify key themes. Once the data has been filtered, the next step is to categorize and connect it with relevant theories or concepts. This data reduction not only involves sorting information, but also interpreting the meaning contained in it, so that the results of the research can provide sharper and deeper insights. Thus, data reduction is an important foundation in ensuring the clarity and validity of the qualitative analysis carried out.

b. Data Display

Data presentation is data that has gone through a data reduction process. Data presentation is the next stage after the data reduction process, where data that has been filtered and systematically compiled is presented to facilitate further understanding and analysis. At this stage, the researcher compiles the results of the reduction in a clear, structured, and easy-to-understand form, such as a narrative, table, diagram, or graph. The purpose of presenting data is to effectively convey the key findings of the research to the audience, whether it is in the form of reports, articles, or presentations. Good data presentation can help readers or listeners to see patterns, relationships, and findings that emerge from the data that has been analyzed. In addition, in the presentation of data, it is important to maintain a connection between the data presented and the research objectives and the underlying theory. Researchers must ensure that the data presented is not only in the form of numbers or raw information, but also equipped with interpretations that provide context and meaning. Effective data presentation will make it easier for researchers or audiences to draw conclusions, find new findings, and formulate recommendations based on existing information. Thus, data presentation is an important process in the communication of research results that allows the recipient of the data to understand and use the information more easily and clearly.

c. Verification/Conclusion Drawing

Drawing conclusions through data obtained through observation, documenting relevant theories and previous research results. Drawing conclusions is the final stage in the data analysis process, where researchers interpret the information that has been collected through observations, interviews, and documents. In this stage, the researcher relates the findings obtained to relevant theories and the results of previous research to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The data that has been analyzed, whether it is in the form of patterns that appear in observations, interviews, or documents, is combined with theoretical references to produce conclusions that are based on strong evidence.



Picture 1. Components of Data Analysis
Source: Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model (2014 : 112)

This process helps ensure that the conclusions drawn are not only valid, but also scientifically accountable. Drawing conclusions also involves reflecting on the original purpose of the research and the questions it wants to answer. By comparing the data found with previous findings, both in previous studies and existing theories, researchers can identify whether the results obtained support or contradict the existing literature. This provides an opportunity to add new insights, both to confirm

existing theories and to suggest modifications or developments in theory. Thus, drawing conclusions is not only about summarizing data, but also about contributing to the broader development of science.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Community-Based Ecotourism

Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) is a tourism development approach that places local communities as the main subject in planning, managing, and utilizing tourism activities (Suansri, 2022). This concept emerged as a response to the conventional tourism model that often ignores the rights and interests of the local community. According to Wearing & McDonald (2021), CBET not only focuses on environmental conservation aspects, but also on improving the economic well-being of the community through a fair benefit-sharing mechanism.

The development of the CBET concept is based on sustainability principles that include three main pillars: economic, social, and environmental (Elkington, 2020). In the economic context, local communities play the role of owners and managers of tourism businesses, so that they can enjoy financial benefits directly. Meanwhile, from the social aspect, CBET aims to strengthen cultural identity and local wisdom through participatory tourism activities (Goodwin, 2020). As for the environment, CBET emphasizes environmentally friendly practices and natural resource conservation.

Several studies have shown that the success of CBET is highly dependent on the level of community participation in the decision-making process (Wondirad et al., 2021). Active community participation is not only limited to the planning stage, but also includes program implementation and evaluation. For example, in Penglipuran Village, Bali, the success of community-based ecotourism development is supported by the full involvement of the community in managing homestays, cultural attractions, and environmental conservation (Arida et al., 2020).

However, the implementation of CBET also faces various challenges, such as limited human resource capacity, lack of access to capital, and lack of policy support from the government (Gössling, 2023). A study conducted by Higgins-Desbiolles (2022) revealed that the power imbalance between local communities and other stakeholders, such as investors and governments, is often a major obstacle to the development of CBET. Therefore, a collaborative approach that involves all parties is needed to create inclusive tourism governance.

In Minahasa Regency, the implementation of CBET has great potential considering its natural and cultural wealth. However, to make this happen, an adaptive development model with local characteristics is needed. Some of the strategic steps that can be taken include increasing community capacity through training, strengthening local institutions such as BUMDes or Pokdarwis, and drafting regulations that support community participation (Minahasa Tourism Office, 2023). Thus, CBET in Minahasa can not only be a tool for environmental conservation, but also as a driver of the people's economy.

Tourism Potential of Minahasa Regency

Minahasa has various kinds of tourism potential, including, Bukit Kasih, Fort Moraya, Lake Tondano, Timbukar Rafting, Pulutan Village, Pinawetengan Museum, Dien Foot Tower, Lihaga Island, Mahembang Beach and Mount Empung.

- Bukit Kasih

The first location that is suitable to be used as a tourist attraction is Bukit Kasih. This location is a place located about 55 km from Manado City. If we decide to travel to this one place, then we will also be able to feel the beauty of the sulfur hill area that is still natural. In addition, we will also be presented with a very good view when we are in this one place. Bukit Kasih is one of the hills in Minahasa and was built in 2002 as a symbol of tolerance. Not only that, this hill was also built with the purpose of being a center where all religious believers can gather. The reason is, in this one place there are also 5 places of worship, starting from mosques, temples, Catholic churches, Christian churches and also temples.

- Moraya Fortress Another tourist destination in Minahasa that we must visit is Moraya Fortress. This fortress is one of the historical evidences of the Tondano War in ancient times. Here there are also 12 tonggal and facing the fort. Where it tells the story of the struggle of the Tondano residents 4 times against the colonizers. For this reason, when we are in Minahasa, we will also be able to take a historical tour and will be able to feel how the struggle of Indonesian citizens in fighting against the invaders. Not only does it contain historical tourism, this tourist destination will also provide a very good location for us to take selfies. We will also be able to climb the tower and see the surrounding scenery.

- Danau Tondano

It is the largest lake in North Sulawesi Province, so it would be a pity if we did not visit this one place. Here, later we will also be able to see a very amazing view because of its location flanked by various mountains. For those of us who want to travel to this one place, then we can also travel about 90 minutes from Manado City.

- Timbukar Rafting

This village is indeed one of the villages in Minahasa that we can use as a tourist location. This is due to the activities of rafting on the Nimanga River. When we are here, later we will also be presented with natural scenery around the river. In addition, the challenging river currents will also be a special attraction for tourists to visit this place.

- Pulutan Village

Visiting the Minahasa area, the situation is incomplete if we don't visit this village. This village is one of the villages in Minahasa, where most of the residents have businesses and depend on their livelihoods from their handicrafts made by themselves, namely ceramics. For this reason, for those of us who are looking for the right souvenirs to take home, then we can also visit this one and buy some beautiful ceramics made by the residents of this village. Having a distance of about 40 kilometers from the city of Manado, there is nothing wrong for those of us who want to leave the city of Manado and visit the city of origin to take the time to visit this one village for a moment. For a day, this village is also able to produce 10 to 15 ceramics. Where the price is around 2.5 million rupiah.

- Pinawetengan Museum

For those who are looking for cultural destinations in Minahasa, then we can also stop by to visit this one place. The museum, which was established in 2009 by the North Sulawesi Institute of

Cultural Arts Foundation, is one of the museums that aims to preserve the traditional culture of Minahasa. So that when we are here, we will also be presented with objects that have cultural and historical value for the Minahasa people. In addition, when we are at the Pinawetengan Museum, we will also be able to see and witness how the process of making Pinawetengan woven fabrics is.

- The Dien Foot Tower is located in Minahasa, so it is incomplete if you don't visit from the city of Manado which only has a distance of about 20 minutes. The Dian Foot Tower is one of the religious tourism in Minahasa that is never empty of visitors. To enter it, we will only be set a very affordable entrance ticket price.

- Lihaga Island

In addition, we can also visit this one island when we are in Minahasa. By having a travel time, which is about 2 to 3 hours drive from the city of Manado, we are fascinated by the beauty offered by this island. For those of us who want to spend time here, we should prepare everything. The reason is, because island access is quite complicated, we also need a careful plan.

- Mahembang Beach

The beach tour that we can visit when we are in Minahasa is Mahembang Beach. This beach has a natural charm that will cool your eyes. Along the way to Mahembang Beach, we will be presented with a view in the form of beautiful beaches and also natural villages. We will also encounter exotic nuances when we decide to vacation on this beach.

- Gunung Empung

For those of us who want to climb the mountain while traveling, then we can also visit Mount Empung tourism. For this reason, we can also climb this mountain located in Minahasa with your relatives. Along the way to this one mountain, we will also be entertained with a very enchanting view. Starting from the plantations of the local residents and also the beauty of palm trees will accompany us during the trip.

Challenges of Local Community-Based Ecotourism Development

Recent research reveals various crucial challenges in the development of community-based ecotourism. The main challenge most often identified is the limited capacity of local human resources and institutions. A study by Wondirad et al. (2021) shows that ecotourism management communities often lack understanding of sustainable tourism principles and are less skilled in digital management and marketing. Dolezal's (2022) research in Sulawesi strengthens this finding by showing that several management groups have difficulty developing competitive tour packages due to limited training and coaching.

The issue of access to capital and technology is also a significant obstacle. Gössling (2023) in his research in Southeast Asia found that 60% of people depend on external funding to develop ecotourism. In Minahasa itself, Bappeda data (2022) revealed that only 20% of homestays meet the standards due to capital limitations. The adoption of digital technology for marketing is also low, with only 30% of managers actively using social media (Jamal & Higham, 2023).

Conflicts of interest between stakeholders also hinder development. Higgins-Desbiolles (2022) identifies three main conflict patterns: between the community and investors due to the dominance of large investors, between the community and the government due to top-down policies, and generational

conflicts in the vision of development. Arida (2020) even noted that 40% of ecotourism projects in Bali failed due to this kind of internal conflict.

Environmental pressure and cultural commercialization are other challenges that emerge. Data from the Minahasa Environment Agency (2023) recorded a 25% increase in tourism waste in Lake Tondano in the last three years. Meanwhile, Su et al. (2021) warn about the erosion of cultural values due to inauthentic and over-commercialized performances.

Inadequate policy support has exacerbated the situation. Fennell's (2020) analysis of policies in 10 Indonesian districts revealed that only 30% have special ecotourism regulations, with less than 15% of the budget allocation for community empowerment. In Minahasa, although it already has the 2022-2027 RIPPDA, the regulation has not specifically regulated a fair profit-sharing mechanism (Bappeda Minahasa, 2022). These challenges demonstrate the need for a holistic approach that integrates aspects of empowerment, collaboration, and supporting regulations to realize sustainable community-based ecotourism.

CONCLUSION

1. The Potential of Ecotourism in Minahasa Regency

The results of the study show that Minahasa Regency has natural and cultural resources that strongly support the development of community-based ecotourism. Several leading destinations such as Lake Tondano, Bukit Kasih, Timbukar Rafting, and Pulutan Village display landscape diversity and local wisdom that have great potential as ecotourism attractions. In addition, the existence of cultural sites such as the Pinawetengan Museum and Moraya Fort shows the existence of a strong historical and cultural heritage. This diversity is an important basis in the development of tourism that is not only economically oriented, but also conservation and strengthening of local identity.

However, even though this potential is very large, its utilization is still not optimal. Some locations do not have adequate access and infrastructure, such as roads, sanitation, and other supporting facilities. This is a challenge for visitors, especially foreign tourists who need certain comfort standards. In addition, the low level of community involvement in destination management shows the need to strengthen local capacity and role in tourism development.

This inadequate infrastructure condition not only reduces the comfort of tourists, but also has a direct effect on their interest in visiting and the length of their stay at the destination. Damaged roads, the absence of adequate public transportation, and the lack of supporting facilities such as rest areas, information centers, and health services are the main obstacles to ecotourism development. This causes many potential destinations to not be able to develop optimally, and even tend to be neglected in regional tourism promotion. Improving basic infrastructure must be the top priority of the local government if it wants to make Minahasa a leading ecotourism destination.

On the other hand, community involvement in destination management is still passive and limited to small-scale economic activities such as trading or renting facilities. Lack of training, capital support, and technical guidance means that local communities do not have enough capacity to manage destinations independently. In fact, active community participation is the main requirement in the community-based ecotourism approach. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to strengthen local capacity through education, mentoring, and incentive schemes so that the community is not only a complement, but a key actor in the process of sustainable tourism development.

2. Challenges of Community-Based Ecotourism Development

This research also reveals several structural challenges that hinder the development of community-based ecotourism. The main challenge is the low capacity of human resources (HR) and local institutions. Based on interviews with tourism actors and related agencies, most people do not have a good understanding of the principles of ecotourism and professional destination management practices. In addition, limited access to training, capital, and information technology causes the tourism products offered to be less competitive.

This limited capacity also has an impact on the weak bargaining position of the community in decision-making related to tourism management in their area. Many community groups do not yet have strong institutions, such as active Pokdarwis or tourism cooperatives that are able to manage their businesses independently. As a result, in many cases, the community only acts as a manual labor force or a small service provider, not as the main manager of tourism activities. Dependence on external parties, both in terms of capital and management, makes it difficult for the community to develop and not enjoy the maximum economic benefits.

The problem of access to technology and information is also a major obstacle. The use of digital platforms, both for promotion, booking, and tourism management, is still very limited among local communities. Only a small percentage of ecotourism actors use social media or online sites to market their destinations. In fact, in this digital era, technology-based marketing is the key to reaching a wider market and increasing the competitiveness of destinations. The lack of training and assistance in the aspects of technology and digital marketing makes it difficult for local tourism products to be known nationally and internationally.

In addition, the absence of regional regulations or policies that specifically support the development of community-based ecotourism has also worsened the situation. The existing Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA) does not contain a clear mechanism on budget support, local institutional development, or equitable distribution of benefits. Without a community-oriented policy framework, efforts to encourage active participation and local self-reliance will be difficult to achieve. Therefore, intervention from local governments is needed to develop policies that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community in the development of sustainable ecotourism.

Conflicts of interest between stakeholders—between the public, governments, and investors—are also serious obstacles. The development pattern that is still top-down makes people feel that they have no control over the management of their area. On the other hand, the pressure on the environment and local culture is increasing due to uncontrolled mass tourism. The increase in tourism waste, the commercialization of cultural attractions, and changes in land use are challenges that must be seriously addressed through a holistic and inclusive approach.

3. Community-Based Development Strategies and Models

Based on the results of interviews and field observations, the most suitable ecotourism development model for Minahasa Regency is the Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) model that is adaptive to local social, economic, and environmental conditions. The proposed strategy includes increasing community capacity through technical and managerial training, establishing tourism village institutions such as Pokdarwis and BUMDes, and strengthening collaboration between the government, the community, the private sector, and academia.

The success of the CBET model relies heavily on the integration of the three pillars of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental. Socially, the community must be actively involved from the planning stage. From the economic side, a fair profit-sharing mechanism must be implemented. And from the environmental side, conservation-based management must be the main foundation. Thus, ecotourism is not only a means of recreation, but also an instrument of sustainable development for Minahasa Regency.

To support the implementation of the Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) model in Minahasa Regency, a very important first step is to increase the capacity of local human resources. Training in hospitality, environmental conservation, tour guides, financial management, and digital marketing should be at the top of the agenda in community empowerment programs. This activity not only aims to improve technical skills, but also to form a collective awareness that the community is the main actor, not just an object in tourism activities. With adequate knowledge and skills, people will be more confident and able to make strategic decisions in ecotourism management.

In addition to capacity building, the formation and strengthening of local institutions such as Pokdarwis (Tourism Awareness Groups), BUMDes (Village-Owned Enterprises), or tourism cooperatives are very crucial. This institution will be a formal forum for the community to organize tourism activities in a structured and responsible manner. The existence of local institutions can also increase transparency and accountability in fund management, profit sharing, and relationships with external partners. Strong institutions will strengthen the bargaining position of the community in interacting with the government and business actors, while ensuring the sustainability of ecotourism programs in the long term.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is a strategic component in realizing sustainable ecotourism. Local governments have an important role as facilitators and policymakers that support the sustainability of ecotourism, including through the preparation of specific regulations, the provision of incentives for local managers, and the development of basic infrastructure. The private sector, such as travel agents or investors, can engage in the development of competitive tourism products while upholding sustainability principles. Meanwhile, the role of academics and NGOs can be focused on research, mentoring, and program evaluation to ensure that ecotourism development runs in accordance with social and environmental goals.

One of the challenges that needs to be anticipated is maintaining a balance between conservation and commercialization. The growth in the number of tourist visits must be controlled so as not to exceed the carrying capacity of the environment. Therefore, the determination of visit quotas, zoning arrangements for tourist areas, and environmentally friendly waste and energy management must be included in the long-term management plan. In the cultural context, the involvement of indigenous peoples and local figures in developing tourism narratives can prevent excessive cultural commodification and maintain indigenous values.

Finally, to ensure the sustainability of CBET in Minahasa, a continuous monitoring and evaluation system is needed. This system must involve all stakeholders, including the community, in assessing the success of the program from social, economic, and environmental aspects. Success indicators are not only seen from increasing the number of visits or income, but also from improving people's quality of life, preserving the environment, and strengthening local cultural identity. With this integrative and participatory approach, the CBET model will not only improve the competitiveness of Minahasa tourism, but also become an example of sustainable ecotourism best practices in Indonesia.

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