

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY IN DEVELOPING THE HARANGAN GIRSANG PARADISE ECOTOURISM, GIRSANG SIPANGAN BOLON DISTRICT, SIMALUNGUN REGENCY

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Abstract

Ecotourism has become a tourism trend that has the potential to be popular with tourists, which of course is an important sector in the development of sustainable tourism. One area that has great potential to be developed as an Ecotourism Destination is Girsang Sipanganbolon. Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism offers natural riches that include biodiversity and panoramic beauty that has not been widely explored. Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism is a tourist village that was founded in 2018 and is currently in the pioneering category. This ecotourism is located in Girsang I Village, Sipangan Bolon District, Simalungun Regency. Making a destination into sustainable tourism, local communities have an important role in developing ecotourism by maintaining environmental preservation and supporting ecotourism development. This article discusses the role of the community in developing Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism. This study uses qualitative methods with interviews and direct observation as data collection techniques. The results of this research will refer to community participation in various aspects such as ecotourism management, including as tour guides, homestay managers and MSME actors, but also cultural preservation, tourism promotion and the challenges that communities face in developing ecotourism, which is the key to success in development. ecotourism. For this reason, collaboration is needed between the community, government and the private sector to support sustainable ecotourism development.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Harangan Girsang Paradise, Sustainable Tourism Development, Community role

A. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an industrial sector that has the potential to be developed for the economy of a region. The tourism sector can bring benefits to regions that have assets in the form of tourist attractions that are in demand by the community and tourists. Tourist attractions bring benefits and profits to areas that receive tourists (Sukirman, 2017).

Based on the results of the Inventure-Alvara research in December 2021, as many as 28.8% of respondents chose adventure tourism as their priority choice in traveling. Where the results of this survey, adventure tourism is in second place after tourist villages. Ecotourism is a model of responsible nature tourism in natural areas or areas that are naturally managed which aims to enjoy the beauty of nature by involving elements of education and support for conservation efforts and increasing local economic income (Suprayitno, 2008).

In Indonesia, one of the areas that has great potential to be developed as an Ecotourism Destination is Girsang, Sipanganbolon Village, Simalungun Regency, North Sumatera Province. This

area offers natural wealth including biodiversity and panoramic beauty that has not been widely explored. Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism is one of the pioneering category tourist villages that was established in 2018 with a sub-district area of around 129.89 km² (Simalungun, 2022) and the area of Girsang Village is 36.00 km².

Harangan Girsang Ecotourism is a natural forest rich in biodiversity, beautiful natural scenery and local culture is still preserved. This tourist destination was built based on the concerns of local residents due to the rampant illegal burning or illegal logging of pine forests. Finally, the Harangan Nauli Pokdarwis group together with the Forest Farmer Group (KTH) worked together to realize Girsang as a tourist village and obtained permission to preserve and utilize non-timber forest products and environmental services from the Ministry of Forestry and Environment through the Pematang Siantar II forest management unit. The natural beauty, the friendliness of the community, the unique beauty that is still traditional and rich in local wisdom are still widely found in Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism, but this potential has not been fully utilized, especially in the context of empowering local communities as the main actors in ecotourism development. Local communities have an important role in maintaining environmental sustainability and managing tourism activities. Active community participation will not only improve economic welfare but also encourage the preservation of the local cultural environment.

In accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 33 of 2009 concerning Guidelines for the Development of Ecotourism in Regions which states that "ecotourism development must empower local communities" which in this case is in accordance with the principles of ecotourism, namely the active role of the surrounding community in planning, utilization, and control of ecotourism by respecting the socio-cultural and religious values of the community around the tourist area. With the development of ecotourism, the community is empowered through tourism activities. Through ecotourism, the community can act as a guide, provider of household-based accommodation, to managers of cultural and nature-based tourist attractions. Studies of the role of the community in managing ecotourism have so far involved more people who are involved in local organizational groups such as the Harangan Nauli Pokdarwis together with the Forest Farmer Group (KTH). Communities around the forest with a farming background have characteristics that are resistant to change, less innovative, less able to anticipate the future, and consumptive (Purba, 2005) These conditions can be obstacles in the development of ecotourism in forest areas managed by forest farming communities.

However, the development of ecotourism in Harangan Girsang is not free from several challenges, such as limited infrastructure, lack of education related to environmentally friendly tourism and minimal collaboration between the community and the government and private sector so that the development of ecotourism in this area is slow. The existence of ecotourism development efforts is motivated by the government's desire to empower and improve rural communities. Therefore, it is important to identify the role of community strategy in ecotourism development, so that Harangan Girsang ecotourism can grow sustainably and provide optimal benefits for the environment and community welfare.

Based on the description above, the author raises the title **"The Role of the Community in the Development of Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism, Girsang District, Simalungun Regency"**. The formulation of the problem in this study is How is the role of the local community in developing ecotourism in Harangan Girsang Paradise and What are the forms of community participation in the management and preservation of ecosystems and local culture in the Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism area. With this background, the purpose of this study is to analyze the

role of the community in the development of Harangan Girsang ecotourism and identify existing challenges. This study is expected to provide recommendations to encourage greater involvement of the local community, as well as strategies to optimize the potential in Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism sustainably.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative method. According to (Sugiyono, 2014) a qualitative method is a research method based on the philosophy of postpositivism, used to research natural object conditions where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are carried out by triangulation (combination), data analysis is inductive/qualitative, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the experiences, views, and involvement of the community directly in ecotourism activities, and understand the meaning of their role in the local social and cultural context. This research will be conducted at the Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism, located in Girsang Sipangan Bolon, Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra.

The qualitative sampling technique is the Purposive sampling technique where the data source is selected with certain considerations and objectives, namely those who know or understand about ecotourism management. Therefore, the informants are the Head of Ecotourism Management and Group, Head of Pokdarwis, Government, Group Advisors, and UMKM Actors who play an active role in managing the development of Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism.

Data Collection Techniques

The data analysis technique used by researchers is a Qualitative technique that is carried out starting from Interviews, Data Recording and Recording, and Documentation. Qualitative data collection techniques are data collection whose data is descriptive in nature, meaning data in the form of categorized symptoms or in other forms such as photos, documents, artifacts and field notes when the research is carried out, Jonatan Sarwono (Sarwono, 2006) The main data collection technique in this study is semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with ecotourism managers to gain in-depth information about their roles in ecotourism development, the challenges they face, and the benefits they gain. The interview guide will cover the following topics:

1. The role of the community in managing ecotourism
2. Forms of community involvement in preserving the environment in the Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism area.
3. Support provided by the government.

Each interview will be recorded (with the consent of the respondents) to ensure that all information can be analyzed more accurately. The results of the interviews will also be recorded in the form of field notes to document the atmosphere and other important details that may not be captured in the audio.

Data recording and recording were carried out by researchers using a voice recorder to document conversations, with full consent from respondents. Then the last data collection technique used was documentation carried out in the form of photos and videos to complete the

data obtained. The goal is to provide a clear visualization of ecotourism activities and how the community is involved in managing the destination.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participation in the Management of Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism

Local communities play an important role in the development of Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism, especially in maintaining environmental sustainability. Based on interviews with several community leaders and formal groups that manage this ecotourism, the community is less involved in managing the development of this ecotourism, where only the community that joins the group plays an active role in managing this ecotourism. Where the community plays several roles in managing Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism, including:

1. Nature tour guide
Some people who have knowledge about the uniqueness of nature and local culture are directly involved as tour guides who accompany visitors in exploring the forest and other places that are tourist attractions in Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism. They provide direction and explanation regarding the formation of Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism.
2. Community-based accommodation management (Homestay)
Harangan Girsang Ecotourism provides community-based accommodation facilities to tourists who staying longer and experience village life firsthand. This homestay is managed directly by local residents where the homeowner lives with tourists and this accommodation is supported by the Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism management group, this will be a means for tourists to get involved in experiencing the daily life of the local community, in line with the ecotourism concept. In the Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism area, there are no restaurants or food stalls specifically for tourists, in Girsang there are only stalls selling snacks and drinks and also cigarettes. If tourists stay at this ecotourism, tourists will eat at the house where they are staying. This is one of the efforts made by the community so that they can share with tourists. Thus, through the development of ecotourism, it can improve the community's economy, because in the development of tourism it has benefits to improve the Girsang economy by providing services.
3. UMKM Actors
The local community produces various local products from peanut plants, coffee and torch ginger which are processed better which can be sold to tourists as souvenirs typical of the ecotourism.
4. Destination Promotion
5. The community is involved in promoting ecotourism which is carried out through social media. The community will actively create digital content that displays the natural beauty, culture and UMKM in the Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism to be promoted to domestic or foreign tourists. This will help increase the number of tourists visiting and strengthen the branding of the Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism.

In order to develop and manage products, the community needs skills, expertise, management and knowledge about the behavior, needs and desires of tourists. The community needs to realize that they have the potential to help in addressing the market share in tourism. In

the Girsang area, there is still minimal cooperation between the community and the government in developing the Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism. The community is still focused on the natural resources they have as a source of income or earnings such as working in the fields.

Environmental and Cultural Conservation

The Harangan Girsang community has been involved in the development of Ecotourism with various activities that not only support tourism but also participate in preserving the environment such as natural environmental conservation, especially to maintain it from threats such as Illegal logging or wildlife hunters. The community is also involved in carrying out mutual cooperation which is carried out once a week around the Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism area so that the environment remains sustainable. Tourists who come to the Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism can be invited to participate in maintaining cleanliness and sustainability through conservation-based tourism programs.

Based on Law Number 41 of 1999 concerning Forestry, the implementation of forest protection and nature conservation aims to protect forests, forest areas and their environment, so that the protection function, conservation function and production function are achieved optimally and sustainably.

Environmental conservation through local community involvement shows a very good impact. By providing environmental education to tourists, the community will not only protect their own area but also helping spread awareness of the importance of protecting nature. However, without adequate supervision, tourism activities that are not managed properly will have negative impacts such as environmental pollution or habitat destruction. Therefore, training in environmental management and the development of a stricter monitoring system are needed to maintain a balance between tourism and conservation activities.

Another interesting things in Girsang Village that can be offered by the local community to tourists who come to visiting Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism is the strong Batak culture, such as the traditions of music, dance and traditional houses. Introducing culture through ecotourism can enable the community to strengthen their identity and achieve good economic benefits. Interaction between local residents and tourists will help promote cultural values and increase appreciation for the uniqueness of Batak culture. Currently, the community is active in training Dance Art groups, where they will always show their appearance as greeters at ecotourism and also become one of the tourist attractions that can be witnessed at Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism. Through ecotourism activities, the community can introduce their culture to tourists not only dance, but can also be added with educational tours about culture, as well as selling souvenirs related to local traditions.

However, in socializing it will be risky if not managed properly and wisely, where traditions and traditional rituals are changed to suit tourist preferences. This has the potential to reduce the meaning and spiritual value of the culture. Therefore, an ethical approach is needed in promoting and integrating culture into tourism activities.

Challenges Faced

The active role of the community in the management and development of Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism shows the importance of local community involvement in maintaining the sustainability of tourism. The community not only plays a role as a beneficiary but also as an actor who helps manage and preserve the environment. The challenges faced by the community in developing this ecotourism are as follows:

1. Lack of skills and training in managing good tourism. Some people are still not aware and do not have sufficient knowledge about tourism management. The community has not received adequate training so that it is difficult to manage the tourist destination and does not know where to start.
2. Infrastructure that is still inadequate, this limits tourists from coming to visit. Access to the destination is still minimal for transportation that goes directly to the main location. Currently, Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism is in the construction stage of basic facilities such as parking lots, public toilets and roads to the top of Sirikki Hill.
3. Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism is still need more in promotion, most visitors come through word of mouth recommendations and the community needs more support in promoting the area digitally. The community is less able to carry out creative promotions effectively so that this ecotourism is less known by tourists.
4. The existence of conflicts between managers, the government and the community regarding land ownership and the use of natural resources also needs special attention. The community must be actively involved in every decision concerning ecotourism management so that there is no inequality.
5. Collaboration between the government, community, and the private sector must be directed at sustainable tourism development, which not only pursues the economy but also maintains environmental sustainability and the social welfare of the local community.

To face these challenges, the community in Harangan Girsang Ecotourism needs to get full support and proper training from both the government and non-government, as well as the private sector to ensure that the development of this ecotourism runs well, which is of course sustainable and provides real benefits for the local community.

D. CONCLUSION

The Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism community participates in the construction and development of its tourism but is not fully involved. In developing Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism, the community needs special attention because the ecotourism concept is important for improving the quality of human resources and skills of local communities in the Girsang area. Forms of community involvement can be seen in managing tourism, environmental and cultural preservation, UMKM actors and tourism promotion that can make Harangan Girsang an example of sustainable ecotourism. Community involvement in the development of Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism will indirectly increase a stronger sense of solidarity in the environment, increase awareness of the importance of environmental preservation, especially marine forests in Girsang, and maintain cultural values that exist in the midst of the community which are their regional identity. For long-term success, government support is needed in the form of training, adequate infrastructure facilities, and effective promotion so that the community can continue to maximize their role in the tourism industry.

Communities that have played an active role and have long been involved in tourism activities in Girsang may have begun to feel the benefits, but communities that are still unaware or have only just realized the importance of tourism in the economic or other fields have yet to feel the results of the development of Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism.

Suggestions

1. The local community need training to improving their competence about how to manage the Girsang Ecotourism regarding sustainability ecotourism.
2. Improve ease of access to Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism, especially to Sirikki Hill and Simumbang Hill which are also part of Harangan Girsang Paradise ecotourism.
3. Improve promotion and communication to the market related to tourism trends to find out the desires of the tourist market to develop tourist attractions.
4. It is important to develop a clear mutual agreement on the limits of natural resource use and land ownership rights. The process of resolving land ownership disputes needs to be carried out by involving a neutral mediator who understands the interests of all parties, so that a fair solution is achieved. This could be in the form of granting certain rights or access to the community, or perhaps providing adequate compensation for the use of land involving ecotourism areas. The attractions provided at tourist attractions are expected to be more directed at the quality of experience and comfort of tourists who come while at the Harangan Girsang Paradise Ecotourism attraction as well as the availability of souvenir sellers or souvenirs as souvenirs that tourists get and give a positive impression.
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