

Local Government Legal Policies in Mapping Geopark Areas (Case Study of Baubau City)

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Abstract

This study examines the legal policies implemented by the local government in mapping geopark areas in Baubau City. A geopark is a concept that integrates the protection of important geological sites, the preservation of local culture, and the development of sustainable tourism. As a region rich in geological potential and cultural diversity, Baubau City is the focus of efforts to identify and manage geopark areas. The legal policies related to geopark mapping in Baubau cover various aspects, including the designation of areas, environmental conservation, infrastructure development, and community empowerment. These regulations aim to protect natural and cultural heritage while ensuring that local communities benefit economically through sustainable tourism. The local government of Baubau City also involves multiple stakeholders, including academics, environmental practitioners, and central government agencies, to develop a comprehensive geopark area map. One of the main challenges faced is balancing environmental conservation with the need for economic development. This collaborative approach includes strategic measures such as identifying potential areas, strengthening protection regulations, and providing environmentally friendly supporting infrastructure. This study highlights the importance of integrated legal policy development, which not only emphasizes the legality of geopark area mapping but also facilitates regional economic growth through the tourism sector. Consequently, this research provides insights into how local legal policies can play a role in effectively mapping and managing geoparks while maintaining a balance between nature conservation and economic development in Baubau City. The findings from this case study are expected to contribute to the development of geopark policies in other regions of Indonesia.

Keywords: legal policies, geopark, Baubau, sustainable tourism, environmental conservation.

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country rich in both natural resources and human resources. These two resources need to be further developed to positively impact the nation. The abundance and diversity of resources in Indonesia are influenced by geographical factors. (Damiasih & Hardi, 2024). With these geographical factors, Indonesia is known as a global hotspot or a country with a long and complex geological history situated on continental boundaries, particularly convergent boundaries, and featuring areas of high relief and coastal regions. Indonesia is a developing country with potential across nearly every sector. Its rich biodiversity makes Indonesia well-known to other nations. Indonesia is also blessed with abundant natural resources, including minerals, coal, gold, nickel, and more, giving it vast natural wealth. Natural or cultural assets can be classified as cultural heritage if they hold significant value. This heritage encompasses intrinsic, educational, aesthetic, cultural, spiritual, ecological, and scientific values, each facing unique threats and vulnerabilities

that require protection. As the nation's next generation, it is essential to preserve, maintain, and protect these assets from various dangers that the country faces. Additionally, future generations will be able to enjoy the wealth of Indonesia's natural resources. (Damiasih & Hardi, 2024).

A geopark is defined as a region with specific geological heritage that possesses international appeal and has been developed accordingly. One of the most visited types of tourism destinations is geotourism. Geotourism is tourism based on natural earth features, such as mountains, rivers, valleys, beaches, waterfalls, lakes, rocks, and more. Indonesia has significant potential in this area, with geotourism sites located within geoparks spread across the country, though many remain underdeveloped. Currently, Indonesia has only one global geopark, the Batur Global Geopark. Indonesia lags behind countries like China, which by 2012 already had around 140 national geoparks, 28 of which are part of the UNESCO Global Geopark Network. China has linked its network of geoparks with scientific research in this field, whereas in Indonesia, only limited research has been conducted on its geoparks. Research in this field is one of the prerequisites for applying for international geopark status. (Krishna Yulawati et al., 2016).

The concept of geoparks (geodiversity, biodiversity, and cultural diversity) challenges the idea of economic progress, aiming to balance the economy and expand it in various fields. The development of geoparks is one initiative addressing the creation of locations with geodiversity, biodiversity, and cultural diversity. Geoparks strive to protect biodiversity, educate the public about natural history, and support long-term economic growth in geopark areas, particularly through geotourism. Geotourism is a type of creative tourism that is rapidly growing worldwide. The development of geoparks is one of the national priority programs currently being pursued by the Indonesian government at both the central and regional levels. (Reid, 2023). The formation of a geopark is based on three pillars: conservation, tourism economy, and education. These three pillars form the framework for long-term regional progress, with the ultimate goal of preserving biodiversity on the planet, conserving the environment, and expanding earth science education. (Muslim et al., 2022).

One of the geoparks in Indonesia is Gua Lanto, located in the City of Baubau. This cave was discovered during the Sultanate of Buton. As a result, the Baubau City Government has designated Gua Lanto as a natural tourism area based on Article 50, paragraph (5) of the Baubau City Regional Regulation Number 4 of 2014 regarding the Spatial Planning of Baubau City for 2014-2034. The uniqueness of Gua Lanto lies in the fact that the cave contains seawater, making it a popular spot for diving among visitors. These visitors come from both domestic and international locations, making it a special attraction for tourists. The potential of Gua Lanto is very promising for development. Therefore, this article elaborates on the legal policies of the Baubau City Government in mapping the geopark area and how the Baubau City Government manages the potential of Gua Lanto. This discussion aims to address the challenges faced in managing the geopark in Baubau City.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The research in this article uses a socio-legal approach, with the research location in the City of Baubau. The analytical technique used is descriptive analysis, which is employed to analyze the legal policies and management of Gua Lanto. The approach used is qualitative, which is research based on human observation in their own environment. Primary data is collected through observation of the conditions of Gua Lanto and the available facilities at the site. Secondary data is collected through a literature review of books, journals, regulations, and other relevant references.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Condition of Gua Lanto as a Geopark in Baubau City

Gua Lanto, located in Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi, is a historical site with high cultural value and a rich past. Situated in the Kadolomoko Village, Wolio District, this cave is not only known as a natural tourist attraction but also as a witness to the history of the development of the Baubau community and the once-prosperous Buton Sultanate. The story of Gua Lanto is closely tied to the ancient civilization of the Butonese people, who have a unique tradition and culture that continues to this day. In local history, Gua Lanto is believed to have existed and been used by the indigenous people for centuries. During the peak of the Buton Sultanate, this cave played a vital role as a place of refuge from various threats, including enemy attacks. According to oral tradition, Gua Lanto was often used as a hiding place by the people during conflicts or wars, particularly when threats came from outside the island. The cave was considered a safe place because of its hidden location and complex interior structure, making it difficult for enemies to find or access.

In addition to serving as a refuge, Gua Lanto also had other roles in the community's activities at the time. Several sources mention that the cave was used as a secret meeting place by traditional leaders and officials of the Buton Sultanate. In the history of the Buton Sultanate, important meetings involving major decisions were often held in hidden locations to maintain secrecy and security. Gua Lanto was chosen for these meetings due to its strategic location and its atmosphere, which was conducive for confidential discussions and negotiations (Wrede & Mügge-Bartolović, 2012). Gua Lanto not only served as a place of refuge but also played an important role in the governance and decision-making processes of the past. The historical significance of Gua Lanto is further strengthened by the discovery of various relics related to the life of the ancient Butonese people. Inside the cave, archaeologists and researchers have found traces of life, such as pottery shards, traditional tools, and rock formations believed to have symbolic value. These findings suggest that Gua Lanto may have also served as a place for daily activities or even as a site for ceremonial rituals. The presence of these artifacts reinforces the notion that the cave was not just a place of refuge but also had social and spiritual dimensions for the Butonese people.

In the modern context, Gua Lanto continues to be respected and preserved by the local community. Awareness of the historical and cultural values contained within the cave has motivated both the local government and the community to protect and conserve its existence. Today, Gua Lanto has become one of the historical tourist destinations, attracting visitors who want to learn more about the history and culture of Baubau. The Baubau City Government has also made efforts to improve access to Gua Lanto so that more people can explore and appreciate the historical values it holds.

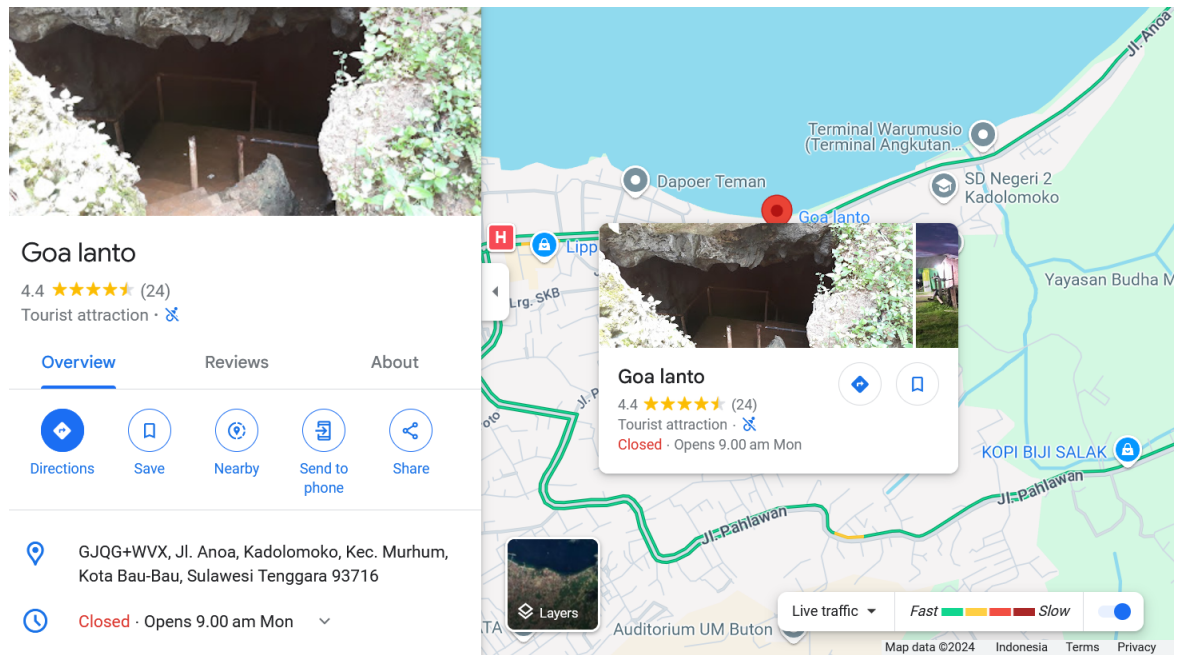


Figure 1. Location of Gua Lanto in Baubau City

Source: Data obtained from Google Maps, 2024.

Currently, the condition of Gua Lanto in Baubau City is beginning to show concerning signs, despite still being an attractive tourist destination. As one of the important historical and natural sites in Baubau, Gua Lanto faces various challenges that threaten its authenticity and sustainability. The main issue of concern is the impact of tourism activities and the lack of adequate maintenance. One of the signs of the cave's deteriorating condition is the damage to the stalactite and stalagmite formations inside the cave. These limestone formations, which have developed over thousands of years, are vulnerable to damage if frequently touched or if visitors do not adhere to conservation rules. Unfortunately, some visitors touch or even damage parts of these rock formations without realizing the long-term impact. This has led to the erosion of the cave's unique structure, causing it to lose its original shape and accelerating natural degradation (Wang & Zouros, 2021).

The surrounding environment of the cave has also undergone changes due to the lack of proper management. Plastic waste and food remnants are often seen around the cave area, reflecting issues of visitor awareness and a lack of cleanliness oversight. Although the local community and some parties have made efforts to maintain cleanliness, the increasing volume of visitors presents a unique challenge in managing hygiene and environmental sustainability. The natural beauty of the area is also somewhat disturbed by the waste and the indifference of some visitors. The lack of supporting facilities such as adequate lighting and informational signs inside the cave also makes the tourist experience less comfortable and, on the other hand, exacerbates the damage. Due to the minimal lighting, some visitors are forced to use personal flashlights, which are sometimes directed directly at the stalactites and stalagmites, potentially damaging the authenticity of their colors and accelerating weathering. Furthermore, the scarcity of information boards that educate

visitors about the rules and restrictions inside the cave means that some visitors are unaware of the importance of preserving the cave's condition (Vdovets et al., 2010).

The local government has made several efforts to improve and preserve the site, but limited budgets and resources pose challenges in implementing more intensive conservation measures. Gua Lanto, with its high historical and cultural value, truly requires more serious attention in order to be enjoyed as a heritage for future generations (Jeon et al., 2023). Conservation programs, routine maintenance, and awareness campaigns for visitors need to be promoted to address the existing issues. With the increasingly concerning condition, Gua Lanto requires the participation of various parties, including the government, local communities, and tourists, to preserve and maintain this site. Education on the importance of protecting historical and natural sites must be enhanced so that visitors can better appreciate the presence of this cave and actively contribute to conservation efforts. Given that Gua Lanto is an important asset for Baubau, long-term conservation efforts are essential to ensure that the beauty, uniqueness, and historical value of the cave are preserved and passed down to future generations.

2. Local Government Legal Policies in Mapping Geopark Areas (Case Study of Baubau City)

The mapping of geopark areas, including the case study of Gua Lanto in Baubau City, has become one of the strategic efforts by the local government to preserve and promote the natural wealth and cultural heritage they possess (Stoffelen et al., 2019). The Baubau City Government has developed legal policies aimed at managing, conserving, and utilizing Gua Lanto and its surroundings as part of the geopark area. Below are some aspects of the legal policies implemented by the Baubau City Government in mapping the geopark area with a case study of Gua Lanto: The Baubau City Government has developed various regional regulations (PERDA) that support the protection and preservation of the environment in areas with potential to be designated as a geopark, including Gua Lanto. These regulations aim to control and limit activities that could harm the natural ecosystem and geological formations in the area (Ruban, 2018). The regulations also govern the management and use of space around Gua Lanto to prevent exploitation that could damage the authenticity of the site (Krishna Yuliawati et al., 2016). The following are some regulations regarding the existence of Gua Lanto, from gubernatorial to mayoral regulations in Baubau.

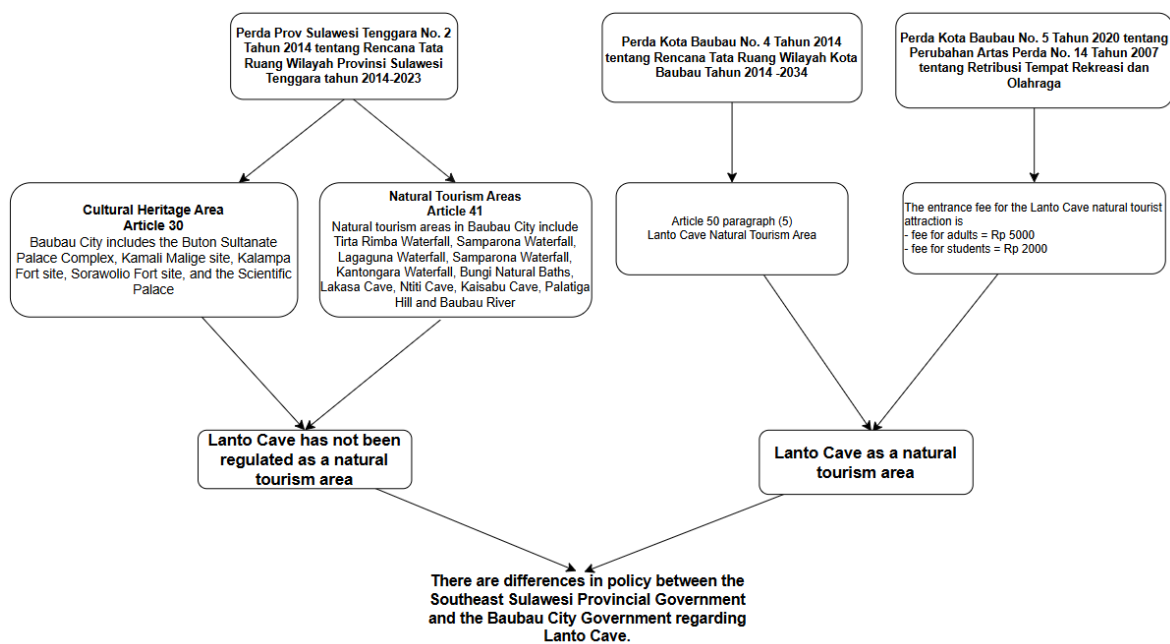


Figure 2. Design of Regulations Regarding Gua Lanto in Baubau City

Source: Data processed by the author. 2024

The legal policies of the government can be outlined from the regulations made by both the Provincial Government and the Baubau City Government. The Provincial Government of Southeast Sulawesi has regulated cultural heritage areas and tourism areas in Baubau City; however, Gua Lanto has not yet been included in the Regional Regulation (Perda) of the Spatial Planning of Southeast Sulawesi 2014-2034. Meanwhile, the Baubau City Government has regulated Gua Lanto as a natural tourism area, as outlined in Perda No. 4 of 2014 on the Spatial Planning of Baubau City. Additionally, Gua Lanto has been designated as a source of regional income with a retribution fee of IDR 5,000 for adults and IDR 2,000 for students and pupils. Therefore, the policy of the Provincial Government of Southeast Sulawesi differs from that of the Baubau City Government, which has declared Gua Lanto as a geopark tourism area. Juridically, the Baubau City Government has provided legal certainty regarding the existence of Gua Lanto. However, on the ground, there is still a lack of maintenance for Gua Lanto and the revenue source from the cave is not yet effective. Visitors, both local and international, have been visiting the cave. From an infrastructure perspective, the site does not meet the standards, such as the absence of a ticket counter for visitor fees and the discovery of scattered trash. In fact, by imposing a retribution fee for Gua Lanto, it implies the fulfillment of rights and obligations directly. For instance, visitors paying the ticket fee (Halim & Ishak, 2017) are entitled to the facilities and cleanliness of the cave area. On the other hand, the protection of Gua Lanto remains low. Although the regulations are good, their implementation has not yet been fully realized. This, of course, depends on the will of the Baubau City Government regarding its commitment to maintaining and managing Gua Lanto.

D. CONCLUSION

The legal policy of the Baubau City Government in mapping the Geopark area, including Gua Lanto as one of its objects, has received legal certainty through regional regulations. This demonstrates the government's commitment to preserving local natural and cultural heritage. However, in practice, it has not yet been fully implemented, as there are no infrastructure facilities such as a ticket counter, restrooms, and trash was found in the area around Gua Lanto. Furthermore, there are no staff members maintaining the cave. Gua Lanto is expected to retain its beauty and authenticity. The role of the government, community participation, and recognition within the geopark network also provides a greater impetus for the sustainability of this site, so it can be enjoyed by future generations as part of the historical and geological heritage of Baubau City.

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