

The Role of Local Communities in Managing Ecotourism in Pacitan Regency: A Participatory Approach

Khanan Yusuf

National Research and Innovation Agency, BRIN

khananyusuf@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of local communities in ecotourism management in Pacitan Regency through a participatory approach. Pacitan district, known for its natural resources such as beaches and caves, has great potential for sustainable ecotourism development. This study used a qualitative method with data collection through in-depth interviews, observation, and literature study. This study found that local communities play an active role in the management of tourist facilities, environmental preservation, and tourist education. The forms of participation identified include homestay management, rental of tourist equipment, beach cleaning programs, and environmental education for tourists.

The results show that the involvement of local communities has a positive impact on environmental sustainability and improving the economic welfare of the community. Environmental conservation programs, such as mangrove tree planting and monitoring of illegal activities, have succeeded in reducing the level of environmental damage in several tourist sites. On the other hand, income from the tourism sector, especially homestays and tour guide services, has increased by 30-50% in some areas, contributing significantly to the economic welfare of local communities.

However, local communities still face several challenges, such as limited financial resources, lack of training, and inadequate infrastructure. To overcome these challenges, the proposed strategies include improving access to finance, continuous training, development of tourism infrastructure, as well as collaboration between the government, communities, the private sector, and NGOs.

This research concludes that the active participation of local communities in ecotourism management is essential for the sustainability of tourism and the economic welfare of communities in Pacitan District. With adequate support, ecotourism in Pacitan can continue to develop sustainably.

Keywords: ecotourism, community participation, tourism management, sustainability, Pacitan Regency

A. INTRODUCTION

Pacitan Regency, located at the southwestern tip of East Java Province, is known as an area with extraordinary natural wealth, ranging from exotic beaches to caves scattered in various locations. The natural tourism potential in Pacitan not only offers natural beauty, but has also become an important economic resource for the local community. Some of the famous tourist destinations in Pacitan include Klayar Beach, Watu Karung Beach, Srau Beach, and Gong Cave, which attract thousands of domestic and international tourists every year. Pacitan is also known as the City of 1001 Caves, making it an attractive destination for tourists looking for an authentic nature experience.

In recent decades, tourism has become one of the main economic sectors for the people of Pacitan. However, along with the increasing number of tourist arrivals comes significant challenges related to environmental sustainability. The negative impacts of poorly managed tourism include damage to coastal ecosystems, environmental pollution and degradation of natural resources.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to manage tourism with a sustainable approach, which focuses not only on economic benefits but also on environmental conservation.

One strategy that has proven effective in addressing these challenges is the community-based ecotourism approach. Ecotourism, which combines tourism with environmental conservation and local community involvement, offers a solution that allows the utilization of nature's tourism potential without damaging the ecosystem. This approach places local communities as the main actors in the management of tourist destinations, ensuring that they are not only beneficiaries but also managers and protectors of their natural resources. In Pacitan, the role of local communities is becoming increasingly important as they are the ones who best understand the condition of the surrounding environment and are most affected by changes in land use and natural resources due to tourism activities.

This study aims to analyze the role of local communities in ecotourism management in Pacitan Regency using a participatory approach. This approach is expected to provide an overview of the extent to which local communities are involved in tourism management activities, as well as the impact of this involvement on environmental sustainability and community economic welfare. This research also aims to identify challenges faced by local communities in ecotourism management efforts and provide policy recommendations that can support community participation more effectively.

Specifically, this research focuses on the following objectives:

- Analyzing the forms of local community participation in ecotourism management in Pacitan Regency.
- Assessing the impact of participatory approaches on environmental sustainability and the economic welfare of local communities.
- Identify the challenges faced by local communities in managing ecotourism sustainably.
- Provide policy recommendations that can support community-based ecotourism management in Pacitan.

Based on this background, the problem formulation in this study is as follows:

- What is the form of local community participation in ecotourism management in Pacitan Regency? This research will explore the extent of local community involvement in various aspects of nature tourism management, such as environmental conservation, destination management, and provision of tourist services.
- What is the impact of local community involvement on environmental sustainability and the economic welfare of communities in Pacitan? This research will analyze how the involvement of local communities impacts aspects of natural resource conservation and increased economic income of local communities.
- What are the main challenges faced by local communities in managing ecotourism in Pacitan? The research also aims to identify the barriers that prevent full community participation in ecotourism management, including institutional constraints, lack of access to training, and limited financial resources.
- What strategies can be adopted to support local community participation in ecotourism management? This research aims to provide recommendations that can be implemented by the local government and other stakeholders in strengthening the role of local communities in participatory-based ecotourism management in Pacitan District.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

Ecotourism Theory

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism that focuses on environmentally responsible travel experiences, by promoting conservation, local community welfare, and education for visitors. The most commonly used definition of ecotourism is from The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) which defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, support the welfare of local people, and involve an element of education” (TIES, 1990).

Ecotourism emphasizes on three main components:

- **Environmental conservation:** Ecotourism not only encourages nature tourism, but also mandates environmental conservation, reducing the negative impact of tourist activities on local ecosystems. Preservation of natural resources and biodiversity is one of the main objectives of ecotourism. For example, limiting the number of tourists in ecologically sensitive locations is one method to minimize the impact of environmental damage.
- **Economic benefits to local communities:** One of the important goals of ecotourism is to empower local communities to reap economic benefits from tourism activities. By doing so, communities living around tourist destinations can have sustainable income alternatives to traditional sectors such as agriculture or fisheries. It also creates incentives for local communities to support conservation as they see first-hand the economic benefits of nature conservation.
- **Education for tourists:** In addition to enjoying the beauty of nature, tourists involved in ecotourism are also encouraged to learn about the importance of conservation and local culture. This education can be done through activities such as tours guided by local communities or environmental information centers at tourist sites.

The application of ecotourism theory in Pacitan Regency can be seen in the management of tourist destinations such as Klayar Beach and Gua Gong Cave, where the local government seeks to maintain a balance between tourism activities and environmental conservation. In some areas, such as Watu Karung Beach, regulations have also been enacted to limit the number of tourists and implement environmental conservation policies. Local communities act as tour guides, eco-friendly accommodation providers, and local transportation managers. They are also trained to act as “guardians” of the environment by preventing activities that damage the environment such as illegal logging or pollution.

Ecotourism in Pacitan also highlights the important role of tourist education. For example, tourists are often given explanations about the importance of keeping beaches clean, preserving coral reefs, and protecting endangered species of flora and fauna. This is in line with the principles of ecotourism, which emphasize that tourism should have a positive impact on the environment and not just serve as a source of economic income.

Community Participation Theory

Community participation in the context of development, including tourism, refers to the involvement of local people in decision-making and implementation of programs that directly affect their lives. The theory of community participation stems from the idea that the involvement of local communities in a project will increase the sustainability and effectiveness of the project.

According to Pretty (1995), community participation can be categorized in several levels, from passive participation to active and interactive participation.

- **Passive participation:** The community is only informed about what will be done by outsiders (government or external organizations) without providing an opportunity to provide input.

- **Consultative participation:** Communities are consulted, usually through surveys or interviews, but they play no role in the final decision-making.

- **Functional participation:** Communities begin to be involved in project implementation, but this involvement is usually only symbolic or for the benefit of outside organizations.

- **Interactive participation:** Communities are fully involved in decision-making, planning, and project implementation. They have the same rights and responsibilities as outsiders in managing the project.

- **Community-led participation:** The initiative comes entirely from local communities, and they have full control over the process of managing the project or program.

In the context of ecotourism, optimal community participation is interactive participation, where local people are not only beneficiaries, but also play a role in the decision-making process and management of tourist destinations. This approach allows the creation of tourism programs that suit local needs and conditions and ensures that the community has ownership of tourism activities carried out in their area.

In Pacitan, local community participation in ecotourism management has begun to develop in a more interactive direction. Local communities are involved in various aspects of tourism management, ranging from the provision of tourism services, such as local guides, to the implementation of environmental conservation programs. In addition, they are also involved in various consultation forums conducted by the local government related to tourism development, although the level of involvement in decision-making still varies among tourist villages.

The Role of Local Communities in Ecotourism Management

Local communities have a very important role in ecotourism management, especially in areas rich in natural resources such as Pacitan. This role can be divided into several categories:

- **Tourism Destination Management:** Local communities act as the main managers in nature-based tourism destinations. They are responsible for the management of tourist facilities, such as local inns, restaurants and information centers. In some tourist villages in Pacitan, the community is also involved in determining the rules of tourist visits, such as limiting the number of tourists in ecologically sensitive areas.

- **Environmental Preservation:** As custodians of the surrounding environment, local communities have a great responsibility in preserving nature. They usually have traditional knowledge that is very important for maintaining the balance of the local ecosystem. Communities in the tourist areas of Klayar Beach and Watu Karung Beach, for example, are active in conducting beach cleanup activities and helping to monitor the destruction of nature by visitors.

- **Local Economic Improvement:** Ecotourism development that involves local communities directly has a positive impact on the community's economy. Local communities can earn additional income from the provision of tourism services, such as homestays, rental of tourist equipment, and tour guide services. In addition, ecotourism also encourages communities to produce and sell local products, such as handicrafts, specialty foods, and other locally processed products.

- **Education and Environmental Awareness:** Local communities also play a role in educating tourists about the importance of nature conservation and local culture. They provide tourists with an understanding of conservation values and how responsible behavior can help maintain the sustainability of tourist destinations. This role is very important in ecotourism, where tourists are expected to not only enjoy the beauty of nature, but also learn to play an active role in preserving it.

- **Decision-making in Tourism Development:** By using a participatory approach, local communities have an active role in decision-making regarding tourism development in their area. This participation ensures that policies are in line with the interests and needs of local communities, so that there is no conflict between the government and the community.

In Pacitan, the role of local communities in ecotourism can be seen from community-based initiatives, such as the formation of tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis) that manage tourist destinations independently with the support of local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Thus, ecotourism management in Pacitan is a clear example of how a participatory approach can strengthen the role of local communities in maintaining the sustainability of the tourism ecosystem and at the same time improve the economic welfare of the local community.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Pacitan Regency

Pacitan Regency is located in East Java Province, Indonesia, with an area of approximately 1,389.87 km². The district borders the Indian Ocean to the south, which makes the area rich in beach and sea tourism potential. Some of the famous tourist destinations in Pacitan include Klayar Beach, Watu Karung Beach, Srau Beach, and Gua Gong. In addition, Pacitan is also nicknamed the City of 1001 Caves due to the many natural caves scattered in the region.

The population of Pacitan Regency in 2023 reached 547,829 people, with the majority of the population working in the agriculture, tourism and fisheries sectors (BPS Pacitan, 2023). Along with the increase in tourism activities in Pacitan, the number of tourists visiting the area has also increased, with around 1.2 million tourist visits in 2022 (BPS Pacitan, 2023). Ecotourism-based nature tourism is one of the main attractions for tourists who want to enjoy the beauty of nature while participating in environmental conservation efforts.

Forms of Local Community Participation in Ecotourism Management

Based on interviews with local communities, tourism managers and local government representatives, local community participation in ecotourism management in Pacitan can be categorized into several main forms:

- **Tourism Facility Management:** Local communities are involved in the provision of tourist services such as accommodation (homestays), diving and snorkeling equipment rental, and tour guide

services. At Watu Karung Beach, some households have modified their houses into eco-friendly homestays.

- **Environmental Conservation Activities:** Local communities often conduct conservation activities such as beach clean-ups, mangrove tree planting, and monitoring of illegal activities such as sand mining and illegal deforestation. Tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis) also lead these local initiatives, with support from NGOs and the government.
- **Environmental Education:** In addition, some community members act as tour guides who provide environmental education to tourists. They provide knowledge about local ecosystems, protected flora and fauna, and the importance of maintaining cleanliness in tourist areas.

Form of Participation	Community Activities	Location	Source
Management of Tourist Facilities	Homestay, equipment rental for diving/snorkeling, guide services	Watu Karung Beach	Interview with Local Community
Environmental Conservation Activities	Beach clean-up, mangrove planting, monitoring of illegal activities	Klayar Beach	Interview with Pokdarwis
Environmental Education	Education on local ecosystems, flora, fauna, and cleanliness	Srau Beach	Interview with Tour Guides

Table 1. Forms of Local Community Participation in Ecotourism Management in Pacitan

The Impact of Local Community Involvement on Environmental Sustainability and Economic Prosperity

From the results of this study, the positive impact of local community engagement on environmental sustainability is evident. Activities led by local communities, such as beach cleaning programs and mangrove tree planting, have successfully reduced the level of environmental degradation in several key tourist sites. At Klayar Beach, for example, the amount of waste collected in the beach cleanup program has decreased by 40% in the last two years (Pokdarwis Klayar, 2023).

From an economic perspective, the involvement of local communities in ecotourism management has improved the welfare of local communities. Income from homestays, guide services and the provision of tourist services provides a significant source of additional income for families. In interviews with several homestay managers at Watu Karung Beach, it was noted that their monthly income has increased by 30-50% since they began to engage in community-based tourism activities (Interviews with Homestay Owners, 2023).

Impact	Indicator	Result	Source
Environmental Sustainability	Reduction in waste, mangrove tree planting	40% reduction in waste at Klayar Beach	Pokdarwis Klayar
Economic Welfare	Monthly income from homestays and tourism services	30-50% increase at Watu Karung Beach	Interview with Homestay Owners
Environmental Education	Number of tourists receiving conservation education	70% of tourists at Srau Beach participated in educational tours	Interview with Tour Guides

Table 2: Economic and Environmental Impacts of Local Community Participation

Challenges in Ecotourism Management

Although the involvement of local communities has had a positive impact, several challenges remain in managing ecotourism in Pacitan District. Based on interviews with tourism actors and local government, the main challenges faced are:

- **Lack of Financial Resources:** Many community groups have difficulty gaining access to funding for the development of environmentally friendly tourism infrastructure. For example, the construction of ecotourism-based homestays is often hampered by limited capital.
- **Lack of Training and Education:** Most local communities still lack adequate training in sustainable tourism management. This has an impact on the community's low capacity to manage tourism potential in a more professional and sustainable manner.
- **Limited Infrastructure Accessibility:** Some tourist destinations that have great potential are difficult to access by tourists due to inadequate road infrastructure. This limits the number of tourist visits and, ultimately, limits the economic benefits for local communities.

Challenge	Description	Source
Financial Resources	Limited capital for building tourism infrastructure	Interview with Tourism Operators
Training and Education	Lack of training on sustainable tourism management	Interview with Local Government
Limited Infrastructure	Poor road access to some tourist destinations	Field Observation

Table 3. Challenges Faced by Local Communities in Ecotourism Management in Pacitan

Based on the results of the above research, local community participation in ecotourism management in Pacitan Regency shows various forms of active involvement, both in the management of tourist facilities and environmental conservation. This is in line with the theory of community participation put forward by Pretty (1995), where community involvement at the interactive level has a significant positive impact on the success of ecotourism programs. With the active participation of the community, tourism activities not only generate economic benefits, but also contribute to environmental conservation.

However, this study also shows that challenges such as lack of financial resources and training are still major obstacles to sustainable ecotourism management. This is consistent with the findings of Tosun (2000), who stated that community participation in developing countries is often limited by access to resources and technical support.

To answer the proposed problem formulation, strategies that can be taken to support local community participation in ecotourism management include:

- **Provision of Funding and Training:** Local governments together with donor agencies should be more active in providing access to financing and training for local communities to increase their capacity in managing tourist destinations.
- **Tourism Infrastructure Development:** Improve accessibility to potential tourist destinations by building better roads and transportation infrastructure, so that tourist visits can increase, which in turn will provide greater economic benefits to local communities.

- **Collaboration with the Private Sector and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Collaboration between the government, local communities, the private sector and NGOs can help accelerate ecotourism development. The private sector can play a role in investing in infrastructure, while NGOs can assist in providing training and environmental awareness.
- **Increasing Public Awareness of Sustainable Tourism:** Environmental education to local communities needs to be continuously improved, so that they can fully understand the importance of preserving the environment as part of sustainable tourism. This will also encourage responsible behavior among tourists.
- **Establish a Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation System:** The implementation of a continuous monitoring and evaluation system for ecotourism activities can help ensure that management remains consistent with ecotourism principles. It is also important to monitor the environmental impacts of tourism activities and make policy adjustments where necessary.

CONCLUSION

Based on this research, local community participation in ecotourism management in Pacitan Regency is quite good but still faces various challenges. The involvement of local communities in the management of tourist facilities, environmental conservation, and tourist education shows a positive impact on economic welfare and environmental sustainability. However, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure and lack of training must be overcome to make ecotourism management more sustainable.

Through strategies of increased financial support, training and better infrastructure development, local communities are expected to be more empowered in managing ecotourism, ensuring sustainable benefits for both the environment and their own economic well-being. Close collaboration between the government, local communities and the private sector is also needed to realize the ideal ecotourism management in Pacitan.

This research has explored the role of local communities in ecotourism management in Pacitan Regency using a participatory approach. Based on the findings from the literature study, interviews with stakeholders, and secondary data obtained, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- **Forms of Local Community Participation in Ecotourism Management :** The participation of local communities in Pacitan has proven to be very diverse and involves the management of tourist facilities, environmental conservation, and tourist education. Local communities play an active role as providers of tourist services (such as homestays and tour guides), implementers of conservation activities, and actors of environmental education. This reflects the high level of interactive participation that has a direct impact on sustainable ecotourism management.
- **Impact of Local Community Involvement,** The involvement of local communities in ecotourism management has a significant positive impact on environmental sustainability and community economic welfare. Environmental conservation activities carried out by the community, such as mangrove tree planting and beach cleaning programs, have helped maintain the balance of ecosystems in tourist areas. From an economic perspective, active participation in homestay management and tour guide services has increased local household income, so that ecotourism in Pacitan has succeeded in providing tangible economic benefits to the community.
- **Challenges in Ecotourism Management,** Despite many successes, local communities in Pacitan still face challenges such as limited financial resources, lack of training and education related

to sustainable tourism management, and inadequate infrastructure in some potential tourist sites. These challenges hinder the ability of local communities to optimize the sustainable management of their tourist destinations.

- Strategies to Support Community Participation To increase the participation of local communities in ecotourism management, strategies that can be implemented include providing access to financing and training, building better tourism infrastructure, and collaborating with the private sector and NGOs. With these strategies, the role of communities in managing ecotourism can be further strengthened, and the positive impact on economic welfare and environmental sustainability can be further enhanced.

Through the implementation of the above suggestions, it is hoped that ecotourism in Pacitan Regency can continue to develop sustainably, with a greater impact on community welfare and environmental sustainability. Collaboration between the government, local communities, the private sector and NGOs is key to ensuring the long-term success of participatory-based ecotourism management in Pacitan.

REFERENCES

- The International Ecotourism Society (TIES). (1990). What is Ecotourism? Retrieved from <https://www.ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism>
- Weaver, D., & Lawton, L. (2007). Ecotourism. Wiley.
- Pretty, J. (1995). Participatory Learning for Sustainable Agriculture. *World Development*, 23(8), 1247–1263.
- Scheyvens, R. (2002). *Tourism for Development: Empowering Communities*. Pearson Education.
- Tosun, C. (2006). Expected nature of community participation in tourism development. *Tourism Management*, 27(3), 493–504.
- Murphy, P. E. (1985). *Tourism: A Community Approach*. Routledge.
- Timothy, D. J. (2002). Tourism and community development issues. *Tourism Management*, 23(3), 453–465.
- Mowforth, M., & Munt, I. (2015). *Tourism and Sustainability: Development, Globalisation, and New Tourism in the Third World*. Routledge.
- Blackstock, K. (2005). A critical look at community based tourism. *Community Development Journal*, 40(1), 39–49.
- Wearing, S., & McDonald, M. (2002). *Community-Based Ecotourism: Sustainability in Practice*. Wiley.
- Hall, C. M., & Page, S. J. (2006). *The Geography of Tourism and Recreation: Environment, Place and Space* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Honey, M. (2008). *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?* Island Press.

- Moscardo, G. (2014). Interpretation and sustainable tourism: Functions, examples, and principles. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 22(5), 679–697.
- Jamal, T. B., & Getz, D. (1995). Collaboration theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), 186–204.
- Stone, M. T. (2015). Community-based ecotourism: A collaborative partnerships perspective. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 14(2–3), 166–184.
- Beeton, S. (2006). *Community Development through Tourism*. Landlink Press.
- Scheyvens, R. (2011). *Tourism and Poverty*. Routledge.
- Tosun, C. (2000). Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries. *Tourism Management*, 21(6), 613–633.
- Buckley, R. (2010). *Conservation Tourism*. CAB International.
- Stronza, A., & Gordillo, J. (2008). Community views of ecotourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(2), 448–468.