

COMMUNITY-BASED AGROTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SAMPE RAYA VILLAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

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Abstract

Sampe Raya Village, located in Bahorok District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra, possesses significant potential for community-based agrotourism development. Its primary agricultural products, snake fruit (salak) and pineapples, combined with a rich cultural heritage, provide a foundation for sustainable tourism. However, the village faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, weak marketing strategies, and limited community skills in tourism management, which hinder its full potential. This study employs the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, actively engaging the local community in empowerment initiatives. Capacity-building programs and sustainable resource management training were implemented to tackle these challenges. The findings indicate that targeted training has significantly enhanced local knowledge and skills in tourism management and agripreneurship. Improved marketing efforts, particularly through digital platforms, have increased tourist interest and visibility, while infrastructure developments, including better road access and amenities, have enhanced visitor experiences and extended stays. The study concludes that collaborative efforts involving the community, government agencies, and private sector stakeholders are essential to overcoming existing challenges. Practical recommendations include the establishment of a local tourism management board, the creation of tailored tour packages, and the integration of environmental conservation with cultural preservation initiatives. These measures are anticipated to boost economic welfare, safeguard cultural heritage, and support environmental sustainability. Ultimately, this study advocates for a multi-stakeholder approach to transform Sampe Raya into a sustainable agritourism destination and a model for rural tourism development in similar regions.

Keywords : Agrotourism, Community Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Tourist Village, Rural Development.

A. INTRODUCTION

Sampe Raya Village, located in the Bahorok District of North Sumatra, is a rural community that holds significant potential for agrotourism due to its rich agricultural resources, particularly snake fruit (salak) and pineapple production. Agrotourism has gained recognition as a sustainable development strategy for rural areas, offering economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits. Globally, successful community-based agrotourism initiatives have demonstrated the importance of stakeholder collaboration, capacity-building programs, and strategic marketing (Barbieri, 2013). Studies from Southeast Asia, including Thailand and Indonesia, emphasize that local participation and government support are key to improving community welfare and preserving cultural heritage (Natsuda et al., 2012; Pérez-Olmos, 2021). Studies emphasize that sustainable agrotourism requires robust infrastructure, accessible training, and digital marketing to reach a wider audience, all of which are crucial for the long-term viability of such initiatives (Rahmat, 2020). While extensive research has

been conducted on community-based tourism, several gaps remain. First, the integration of agripreneurship within agrotourism development is often overlooked. Research in Latin America highlights the potential for value-added agricultural products to enhance economic outcomes (Khairabadi et al., 2020). However, similar models in Southeast Asia, particularly focusing on integrating agriculture with tourism, are underexplored.

Despite its potential, Sampe Raya Village faces several challenges that impede the development of sustainable agrotourism. Key issues include underdeveloped infrastructure, inadequate marketing strategies, and limited skills among community members in managing tourism activities. These factors contribute to the underutilization of the village's resources and limit the economic benefits that could be derived from tourism (Zhu, 2022). Additionally, the community's unfamiliarity with sustainable resource management and agripreneurship further hinders progress toward becoming a thriving agrotourism destination (Khairabadi et al., 2020; Natsuda et al., 2012). Additionally, the application of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method in rural tourism remains limited. PAR, with its emphasis on community-driven solutions, offers a unique approach to addressing challenges in tourism management, infrastructure development, and marketing strategies (Rahmat, 2020). This study seeks to fill this gap by demonstrating how the PAR approach can empower communities and ensure sustainable development (Cavalleri, 2022).

The purpose of this study is to develop a sustainable community-based agrotourism model for Sampe Raya Village by addressing these challenges through Participatory Action Research (PAR). This approach emphasizes active community involvement in identifying needs and implementing solutions that foster long-term economic and environmental sustainability. Through targeted training programs, infrastructure improvements, and strategic marketing, the study aims to empower the community and establish Sampe Raya as a model for rural tourism that integrates environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic development. By doing so, and through the application of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, it seeks to establish Sampe Raya as a model for rural tourism development in Southeast Asia, demonstrating the potential of a multi-stakeholder approach to achieving long-term sustainability and community empowerment.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

This study employs the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which emphasizes collaboration between researchers and local community members to address real-world challenges through active participation and co-creation of solutions. The PAR model was selected to ensure that the proposed agrotourism development aligns with the specific needs and values of Sampe Raya Village, empowering the community by involving them directly in the research and decision-making processes (Rahmat, 2020). This approach is particularly effective for sustainable community-based initiatives, as it fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders and supports the development of solutions that are both practical and contextually appropriate (Chiodo et al., 2021).

Subjects of the Study

The subjects of this research include local farmers, artisans, community leaders, and representatives from local government agencies involved in agriculture and tourism development. The selection of participants was based on their role in the community and their potential impact on agrotourism activities. Participants were chosen to ensure a diverse range of perspectives, including different age groups, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds, to provide a comprehensive understanding of community needs and priorities. The study included over 30 respondents to capture a wide variety of insights and experiences. These stakeholders provided valuable insights into the resources available, the challenges faced by the community, and their aspirations for the development of Sampe Raya as an agrotourism destination.

Research Procedure

The research procedure involved several stages, beginning with preliminary meetings to introduce the project to the community and gather initial input. This was followed by Focus Group Discussions (FGD), where structured discussions were facilitated among community members, local leaders, and government representatives. FGDs focused on identifying community needs, challenges, and feasible solutions for agrotourism. The sessions were guided by trigger questions posed by the moderator to promote active participation and a collaborative atmosphere. After each FGD, findings were compiled and shared with participants to ensure transparency and to validate the data collected.

Materials and Instruments

The materials used in this study included a discussion guide for FGDs, tailored to explore specific topics such as sustainable tourism practices, marketing strategies, and resource management. Additionally, audio-recording equipment was used to capture the discussions for accuracy in data collection. Consent forms were provided to all participants to ensure ethical research practices. The instruments used for analysis included coding frameworks for thematic analysis, which helped identify key themes and recurring issues in the discussions.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection involved qualitative methods to gather in-depth insights from the participants. FGDs served as the primary data collection tool, with sessions lasting approximately two hours each. The discussions were recorded and later transcribed to capture the nuanced perspectives of the community members. Observational data were also collected, where researchers noted non-verbal cues and interactions among participants that could provide additional context to the responses given. Additionally, secondary data were collected from local government reports and existing tourism studies in the region to complement the primary data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was conducted on the collected data, allowing researchers to identify patterns, key issues, and areas of opportunity for agrotourism development in Sampe Raya. Data were systematically coded and grouped into themes relevant to the study's objectives, such as infrastructure needs, marketing potential, and community training requirements. To contextualize these findings, case studies from similar community-based agrotourism initiatives

in other regions were reviewed, providing comparative insights that helped refine the proposed strategies for Sampe Raya (Khairabadi et al., 2020).

Specific Criteria

In collecting and analyzing data, specific criteria were used to ensure relevance and applicability. During FGDs, only responses that directly addressed the study's objectives were prioritized. Thematic coding was guided by clearly defined criteria, including the recurrence of themes in multiple FGDs, the actionable nature of the insights for agrotourism development, and the alignment of the themes with the community's long-term goals and values. Additionally, themes that emerged in multiple discussions were considered high-priority areas for action. The thematic coding framework applied in this study allowed for a systematic, objective approach to identifying patterns and relationships within the data, which informed the recommendations provided in the study.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Identification of Local Resources and Challenges

The study identified Sampe Raya's diverse agricultural and cultural assets, particularly snake fruit (salak), pineapples, and a vibrant cultural heritage, as the foundation for agrotourism. Unique offerings like stingless bee honey (Trigona) produced by local MSMEs further enhance the village's appeal. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, weak marketing strategies, and limited tourism management skills among residents remain significant barriers. These findings align with prior studies on rural tourism but emphasize the importance of addressing these issues through targeted interventions, particularly in infrastructure and capacity building. However, significant challenges were identified, such as limited infrastructure, including poorly maintained roads and a lack of adequate facilities for tourists, as well as insufficient marketing initiatives (Natsuda et al., 2012).

Beyond its agricultural potential, Sampe Raya Village exhibits a rich cultural diversity encompassing Karo, Malay, and Javanese traditions. This cultural richness enhances the village's appeal as a tourist destination. Additionally, the village is home to various Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) focused on natural-based products. Notably, stingless bee honey (Trigona) produced by local beekeepers serves as a unique souvenir for visitors.

The lack of tourism management skills among residents also emerged as a barrier. These findings underscore the need for structured training and development programs to build capacity within the community (Ivona, 2021). This aligns with studies from other rural areas, where similar challenges were effectively addressed through training in sustainable tourism practices and infrastructure development, enabling communities to leverage their unique resources (Khairabadi et al., 2020).

2. Community Empowerment and Capacity Building

One of the core aspects of this study was community empowerment through capacity-building programs. The PAR approach facilitated workshops focused on sustainable resource management, agritourism, and entrepreneurship, enabling community members to leverage local resources and develop value-added products, such as processed snake fruit and pineapple products. These workshops also covered essential skills in tourism management, such as hospitality, visitor

engagement, and basic marketing strategies. Participants expressed that the training equipped them with new skills and confidence to manage tourism activities independently.

The findings suggest that community members felt more empowered and capable of participating in tourism-related activities following the training sessions. This result is consistent with other studies on community-based tourism, which emphasize the importance of training to enable communities to take ownership of tourism initiatives (Pérez-Olmos, 2021). The results also highlight the role of empowerment in fostering a sustainable, community-driven approach to agrotourism.

3. Infrastructure Development and Marketing Strategies

The study's results indicate a strong need for infrastructure improvements to support tourism. Community feedback highlighted that inadequate infrastructure, such as roads and accommodations, was a primary barrier to attracting tourists. Proposed improvements included better road maintenance, establishment of basic accommodations, and provision of visitor facilities. Such infrastructure upgrades are crucial to ensuring a positive visitor experience and were identified as essential by the community.

In terms of marketing, a robust digital presence was recommended to raise awareness and attract visitors. Social media campaigns and collaborations with travel agencies were suggested as effective strategies to reach a broader audience. Comparative analysis with similar models in Southeast Asia revealed that strategic marketing can significantly increase visitor numbers and local income, supporting economic growth in rural areas (Ammirato, 2020).

A strategic approach to promoting Sampe Raya Village's tourism potential involves a multifaceted campaign utilizing both traditional and digital media. Printed brochures can serve as informative handouts, particularly for on-site visitors, while a robust online presence is essential to reach a wider audience. Leveraging digital platforms, promotional materials should emphasize visually appealing designs, timely updates on local attractions and events, and targeted marketing strategies to attract both domestic and international tourists. This integrated marketing approach aims to position Sampe Raya Village as a unique and compelling destination, thereby stimulating tourism and economic growth.

4. Comparative Analysis with Similar Models

Case studies from other Asian countries with successful community-based tourism models, such as those in Thailand and Indonesia, demonstrate that combining community involvement, government support, and effective marketing strategies leads to sustained tourism growth. In these cases, rural communities have benefited from increased tourism income, job creation, and preservation of cultural heritage (Chiodo et al., 2021).

The findings from Sampe Raya align with these case studies, suggesting that a multi-stakeholder approach involving the community, local government, and private sector can foster sustainable tourism development. This approach supports not only economic development but also environmental and cultural preservation, essential aspects for any sustainable tourism model. Differences in geographic and cultural context were noted, yet the overarching strategies of capacity building, infrastructure improvement, and digital marketing were consistent across regions.

Interpretation of Results

The results align closely with the study's objectives and provide clear answers to the research questions outlined in the introduction. Each component of the findings contributes to a holistic strategy for developing Sampe Raya into a sustainable agritourism destination. The positive feedback from community members regarding training sessions suggests that skill-building initiatives are fundamental to empowering communities to take an active role in tourism. Additionally, the demand for infrastructure improvements and digital marketing strategies reflects a need to modernize rural areas to meet visitor expectations while maintaining cultural authenticity.

These findings are consistent with literature on sustainable rural tourism, where capacity building, improved infrastructure, and targeted marketing are recognized as pillars of successful community-based tourism (Khairabadi et al., 2020). However, this study also highlights unique challenges specific to Sampe Raya, such as the need for agripreneurship training to maximize the economic value of agricultural products. This aspect is less frequently addressed in other studies, indicating a distinctive opportunity for Sampe Raya to develop a specialized agrotourism niche. While the study identifies clear strategies for developing Sampe Raya as a sustainable agrotourism destination, potential challenges in implementation include securing sufficient funding for infrastructure development, ensuring consistent community participation, and addressing external market fluctuations that could affect the demand for local products. In conclusion, the findings underscore that while Sampe Raya faces notable challenges, targeted interventions in infrastructure, training, and marketing could transform the village into a model of sustainable agrotourism. The study advocates for a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to realize this vision, emphasizing the integration of community empowerment, environmental conservation, and economic development.

D. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to uncover the potential of developing a sustainable, community-based agrotourism model in Sampe Raya Village, North Sumatra, by addressing challenges related to infrastructure, marketing, and community capabilities. Using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, the study demonstrated how active community involvement can create actionable strategies for tourism promotion while empowering the local population and preserving the village's natural and cultural heritage. The findings underscore that sustainable agrotourism in Sampe Raya requires a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach. Practical next steps include:

1. Establishing a Tourism Management Board: A community-led organization that coordinates tourism activities, maintains infrastructure, and collaborates with external partners.
2. Implementing Marketing Campaigns: Utilizing social media platforms and partnering with travel agencies to target eco-tourists and agrotourism enthusiasts, thereby increasing visitor footfall.
3. Developing Agro-Based Tourism Packages: Creating experience-based packages, such as salak and pineapple harvesting tours, culinary classes, and cultural showcases, to attract diverse tourists.
4. Securing Financial and Technical Support: Collaborating with government agencies and private enterprises to secure funding for infrastructure development and capacity-building programs.

Future research should monitor the impacts of these initiatives over time to evaluate their effectiveness. Specifically, studies should focus on:

1. Economic Progress: Tracking improvements in household income and employment levels as tourism activities expand.
2. Cultural Preservation: Assessing the influence of increased tourism on local traditions and social cohesion.
3. Environmental Conservation: Measuring the impact of tourism activities on local ecosystems to ensure sustainability.

By integrating these actionable strategies and conducting longitudinal assessments, Sampe Raya can establish itself as a model for rural agrotourism. This approach not only contributes to regional development but also serves as a replicable framework for other communities with similar aspirations.

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