

Strategy of Village Government in the Development of Ecotourism Based on Civic Engagement

Mutiara Mega Pratiwi¹, Dewi Gunawati², Rini Triastuti³

^{1,2,3}Master of Pancasila and Citizenship Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strategy of the village government in developing ecotourism based on civic engagement. The research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative with field research, and data collection methods through observation and interviews with eight informants. Based on the results of the field study, it shows that the Kemuning Village Government has developed and implemented strategies to promote ecotourism based on civic engagement. These strategies include involving the community in the initial planning of tourism object creation, management, and evaluation, forming a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) named Aspekta, where this Pokdarwis acts as an extension of the village government in developing ecotourism in Kemuning Village. Additionally, the village government, together with Pokdarwis, organizes training, mentoring, and collaborates with various institutions and organizations to improve the quality of human resources involved in tourism in Kemuning Village. The strategy also includes absorbing local labor from Kemuning Village, using social media to attract visitors, and collaborating with the youth organization (karangtaruna) to develop and use village land for tourism purposes. A recommendation for the Kemuning Village Government to further develop and regulate tourism is to establish regulations that govern tourism in the Kemuning Village area.

Keywords: Village government strategy, ecotourism, civic engagement

1. Introduction

Humans and the environment are integral natural systems in the form of ecosystems that influence each other. Humans have an obligation to interact with nature responsibly according to environmental ethics by maintaining, preserving, and not damaging the environment. Awareness and responsibility among citizens are crucial in managing the environment as part of fulfilling their roles and forming ecological citizenship. The development of ecological citizenship in such conditions is necessary to shape citizens who are aware of their environment. Citizen awareness of the environment needs to be developed, especially since Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest number of active volcanoes in the world. Most of these volcanoes remain active because Indonesia is located on the Pacific Ring of Fire. Living alongside volcanoes has become a part of Indonesian life. Volcanoes store the potential for beauty, with unique and captivating views that can attract both domestic and international tourists. The natural potential of Indonesia's landscapes must be utilized wisely, while also ensuring its conservation.

Specifically, in Karanganyar Regency, which consists of seventeen districts, there is a wide variety of both natural and man-made tourism potential. The location of Karanganyar Regency, situated on the slopes of Mount Lawu, has led to the development of numerous natural tourist destinations. Many of these are located in Tawangmangu and Ngargoyoso Districts due to their location on the slopes of Mount Lawu, with well-preserved natural surroundings, cool air, and beautiful views, including expansive tea plantations that make the area ideal for tourism development. The Kemuning Tea Plantation is one of the plantations located in Central Java. Kemuning Village is situated in a highland area at an altitude of 800-1500 meters above sea level. According to Andaryani (Marni, 2017), tea plants grow well in cool climates, making Kemuning an ideal location with an average daily temperature of 22°C and a highest temperature of 28°C. Ngargoyoso District is one of the areas in Karanganyar Regency with extensive tea plantations, but every year it experiences a reduction in land area.

Table 1: Changes in the Area of Tea Plantations and Forests in Ngargoyoso District from 2010-2020

No	Year	Tea Plantation (Hectares)	Rubber Plantation (Hectares)	Forest (Hectares)
1.	2010	341,097	417,696	2344,31
2.	2013	340,872	423,256	2285,91
3.	2015	317,321	404,727	2261,15
4.	2017	314,912	440,833	2203,68
5.	2020	299,265	318,992	2155,09

Source: Sanjaya & Kurniawan (2021)

Based on the table above, it is specifically noted that the area of tea plantations decreased by 15,647 hectares from 2017 to 2020. The most significant reduction in tea plantation land occurred from 2013 to 2015, amounting to 23,551 hectares. The table explains that from 2010 to 2020, tea plantations consistently experienced a decrease in land area. This reduction was used for tourism area development, as by 2020, tourism in Ngargoyoso District had grown rapidly due to many investors recognizing the potential of the area's natural tourism, which generated substantial profits (Sanjaya & Kurniawan, 2021). This reduction was used for tourism area development, as by 2020, tourism development in Ngargoyoso District had rapidly increased due to many investors recognizing the potential of natural tourism, which could generate substantial profits (Sanjaya & Kurniawan, 2021). Utilizing the environment without considering its limited capacity to provide for various human needs can lead to negative effects on the environment (Muhaimin, 2014). This impact is referred to as an environmental crisis. According to Sudibyo (Saputra, 2017), an environmental crisis is one of the effects of human life, which tends to be chaotic due to increasing world population growth exceeding the earth's natural productivity capacity, rapid development of communication and transportation, and resulting world interlinkages. The development of tourism is determined by the quality of the environment, so tourism development must pay attention to environmental quality (Soemarwoto, 1997). This creates a dilemma between economic growth through tourism development or environmental preservation in Kemuning Village, which is known as a tourist village and a water catchment area.

Tea plantations are water catchment areas, but they are being developed into buildings above the water sources, which affects the quality and flow of water. This issue prompted the Kemuning community to

hold hearings and even protest to reject the land conversion (Nabila & Ashshidiqy, 2024). The negative impacts reported by the community are in line with research by Sanjaya & Kurniawan (2021), which found negative effects from tourism activities in Ngargoyoso, such as land degradation, air pollution, reduced water quality, waste, and traffic congestion. These tourism impacts illustrate that tourism is a double-edged sword, with one side blunt and the other sharp. This has led many parties to become interested in analyzing tourism from various perspectives. Ultimately, this spurred the development of a type of tourism service that guarantees the creation of welfare, known as ecotourism. Ecotourism has evolved into a community-based concept that emphasizes the region's natural resources and local culture, which has conservation value and can enhance the local community's economic income (Tisnawati et al, 2019). Kemuning Village has a diversity of potential resources, which should be managed well with a focus on ecotourism and prioritizing environmental conservation, local community welfare, environmental education, and respect for local culture. The local population plays both an object and subject role in ecotourism development. Community-based ecotourism development is expected to be a solution, making tourism not only economically oriented but also educational for the community, raising awareness of environmental protection, participating in conservation, and preserving local wisdom in the region.

Research on ecotourism development strategies is essential to maximize the tourism potential in Kemuning, preserve local wisdom, and enhance the local economy while remaining environmentally sustainable. Based on the issues outlined above, it is interesting for researchers to examine the strategies of the village government in developing ecotourism based on civic engagement for environmental preservation. This research is important because Kemuning Village is a tourist village with natural tourism potential, and its utilization must consider both human economic aspects and environmental preservation. Furthermore, stakeholders play a role as a means of environmental awareness education that moves within the community, aligned with the study of citizenship education in the realm of civic society.

2. Literature Review

a. Village Government

A village is the smallest unit of government within the scope of governance in Indonesia. Etymologically, the word "desa" (village) comes from the Sanskrit word "deca," which means homeland, native land, and birthplace. Widjaja (2003) explains that a village is a legal community unit with an original structure based on customary rights that are special in nature. A village is a legal community unit with territorial boundaries, empowered to regulate and manage government affairs and the interests of the local community based on community initiatives, traditional rights, and ancestral rights recognized by the Indonesian government system (Sugiman, 2018). The fundamental concepts of village governance are participation, diversity, indigenous autonomy, community empowerment, and democratization. Economic growth is closely tied to efforts of community empowerment as one of its strategies (Sugiman, 2018). Village development involves participatory processes, with planning, implementation, and evaluation carried out by, for, and with the people (Sumodiningrat & Ari, 2016).

b. Ecotourism

Ecotourism is nature-based, sustainable tourism focused on experiencing and learning about nature, managed with specific management systems that minimize negative impacts on the environment. It is not consumptive and is oriented toward local control and the benefits derived from the business

activities (Fennel, 1999). According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2000), ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. Sustainable tourism focuses on the experience of the area itself, thus enhancing conservation efforts and increasing environmental and cultural awareness. The concept of ecotourism encompasses sustainable development and conservation. The dimensions of ecotourism development include environmental protection, conservation, economic development, education, income generation, and local community involvement. The local community is the direct owner of the tourist attractions visited. Modern ecotourism emerged as a sustainable form of nature-based tourism, with a core principle of offering experiences and learning about nature while minimizing consumptive impacts and emphasizing local values (Hanan & Rahmawati, 2020). The key focus of ecotourism is education, promoting local values, and not being profit-driven, as well as empowering communities. This is in stark contrast to conventional tourism, which primarily focuses on economic aspects and exploitation.

c. Civic Engagement

Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. This definition emphasizes activities by individuals or groups to address social issues (Pancer, 2015). A broader definition is provided by Thomas Ehrlich (Pancer, 2015), who defines civic engagement as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes.” This definition means that civic engagement encompasses all activities aimed at improving the quality of life in a community, not only addressing social issues. Civic engagement is a central concept in community civics. It involves actions where individuals participate in personal and public concerns that individually enrich and socially benefit the community (Gusmadi, 2018). However, given the broad nature of the concept, Adler & Goggin (2005) classify civic engagement into different types based on the topic of discussion: civic engagement as community service, civic engagement as collective action, civic engagement as political involvement, and civic engagement as social change.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted in Kemuning Village, Ngargoyoso, Karanganyar, Central Java, Indonesia, using a descriptive qualitative research method. Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore social or human problems. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in natural settings (Creswell, 1998). The strategy used is a case study. The choice of qualitative research was made because the researcher aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the ecotourism development strategy implemented by the village government with community involvement. The data used comes from interviews, observations, and document studies. The informants in this study include the village secretary, the head of the tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis), the head of the Village Community Empowerment Institute (LPMD), the head of the Village Representative Body (BPD), the manager of Kalipucung River Tubing, the manager of the Mini Zoo, and the manager of Kalimas. In accordance with the characteristics of qualitative research methods, this study was conducted without any intervention with the research subjects.

4. Research and Discussion

The tourist destinations in Kemuning Village are indeed genuinely planned, managed, and developed by the local residents in each hamlet with tourism potential, with the village government providing permits and advice as these areas still fall within the jurisdiction of Kemuning Village. Based on this community involvement in opening new job opportunities through the creation of tourist sites, the community becomes empowered, and even areas that were previously dirty are now cleaner due to being maintained for tourism purposes. Although the planning, management, and evaluation are carried out by the community itself, this does not mean that the village government does not play a role in the development of these tourist sites. The village government serves as the foundation for the existence of these tourism sites and should be seen as part of the integrated planning process in Kemuning Village. Therefore, there is strong collaboration between the community, the village government, and related institutions in the development process. This research also included observations of ecotourism sites based on civic engagement. One of the observations took place on October 25, 2024, at the Kalimas, Kalipucung, and Mini Zoo tourist destinations. The results regarding participation showed that decision-making for managing the tourist sites at these three locations was done effectively, with both the local community and the employees at the tourist sites actively participating. This was marked by weekly meetings held every Monday evening, which also coincided with the payment of wages for employees, particularly at the Mini Zoo. In addition to the meetings, the local community actively participated during the planning and management stages, and they even took part in the evaluations organized, as they had a significant role in the management of these sites. As a result, these three tourist destinations have become very popular. This is evidenced by the initial development of the tourist sites, which began with the community's awareness of untapped tourism potential and concerns about environmental issues. The community then sought permission from the relevant authorities to use village land and riverbanks to establish tourism sites, transforming what was once a polluted river into an attractive tourist destination. Kemuning Village, designated as a tourist village, certainly has many must-visit tourist spots due to its appealing tourism potential. The increasing number of visitors and the tourism potential have led to the local community becoming involved and having a stake in the management of the existing tourist destinations, allowing the community to become more empowered, with a more transparent management process. Additionally, the flattening of tea plantations to build structures has impacted water flow and quality. The tourism potential of Kemuning Village lies in its landscape, which is promoted as a beautiful natural tourist destination. However, if land conversion continues, the existing potential will diminish and no longer be viable. With the involvement of the community in the strategy for sustainable tourism development, as implemented by the Kemuning Village government, the negative impacts of land use for tourism purposes are expected to be minimized because the community, as the manager, is better able to understand the surrounding environmental capacity. This is because the community itself is directly impacted by these changes. Based on this, the Kemuning Village government, as a stakeholder, must have a strategy to address this issue through community empowerment or civic engagement by developing the existing tourism potential without altering the landscape and by continuing to involve the community. This ensures that if investors enter, the development can be controlled according to the environmental carrying capacity. The strategies of an organization vary depending on the objectives of that organization. The strategy employed by Kemuning Village is a framework used by the village government, which can be viewed as a method or technique to achieve a specific goal—in this case, for the development of community-based tourism. A well-designed strategy

by the Kemuning Village government will realize the goals set according to the village's vision and mission. Based on the research findings, it was found that the planning, management, and evaluation are carried out directly by the community itself.

The development of community-based ecotourism, which is the strategy of the Kemuning Village Government, is necessary because it aims to improve the welfare of the Kemuning Village community. Based on interviews, observations, and document studies, it was found that the tourism destinations in Kemuning Village are genuinely planned, managed, and developed by the local communities in each hamlet with tourism potential, with the village government serving as the grantor of permits and advisors, as these areas still fall within the Kemuning Village jurisdiction. This community involvement in creating new job opportunities through the opening of tourist sites allows the community to become more empowered, and even places that were once dirty are now cleaner because they are maintained for tourism purposes. This aligns with the theory of civic engagement by Adler & Goggin (2005), which states that community involvement in a strategy is a form of collective action to ensure the success of the strategy developed by the Kemuning Village government. One example of this collective action is participation in the tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis), involvement in village development planning (Musrenbangdes), and efforts to plan, manage, and evaluate tourism potential together with the village government, which has developed into ecotourism.

The form of civic engagement in the development of ecotourism as part of the Kemuning Village government's strategy begins with environmental issues, particularly the decline in water flow and quality caused by land-use changes. This issue is related to the scope of ecological citizenship. First, the community has knowledge about environmental issues and understands that everything related to the environment is both the responsibility and the right of citizens. As a result, the community actively takes concrete actions, such as participating in the development of sustainable tourism to ensure that the environment is preserved while still being utilized.

A strategy is a broad outline derived from realistic, comprehensive, and conceptual thinking that can take the form of techniques, methods, tactics, or approaches using organizational resources and skills to achieve the established goals and objectives. Thus, the definition of strategy in this study refers to a framework or guideline used by the Kemuning Village government, which may involve methods or techniques to achieve a specific goal, particularly in the development of sustainable tourism. A good strategy or approach from the Kemuning Village government will help achieve the set goals. The strategy employed by the Kemuning Village government in developing ecotourism must involve the community in the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. It is known that the form of community involvement in developing sustainable tourism is through participation in Musrenbangdes (village development planning meetings), where the community works to design, manage, and evaluate tourism potential together with the village government, thus transforming it into ecotourism. Therefore, it is clear that the community plays a significant role in the development of ecotourism in Kemuning Village.

The strategy of the Kemuning Village government in developing ecotourism involves engaging the community in the early planning of tourism sites, management, and evaluation. It also includes the establishment of a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) named Aspekta, which acts as an extension of the village government in developing ecotourism in Kemuning Village. The village government, together with Pokdarwis, organizes training, guidance, and collaborates with various organizations and institutions to enhance the quality of human resources for tourism workers in Kemuning Village. This

also includes employing local labor and using social media to increase the appeal of visitors. Additionally, the village government collaborates with the youth organization (karangtaruna) to develop and utilize the village's land as a tourism site. Based on these findings, it can be analyzed that the establishment of Pokdarwis by the Kemuning Village government is in line with the village's authority, as stipulated in Article 18 of Law No. 3 of 2024 on the Second Amendment to Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, which grants villages the authority to empower local communities based on local initiatives. According to Tisnawati (2019), the community-based ecotourism model does not mean that the community will run the ecotourism business on its own. The implementation of ecotourism should be viewed as part of an integrated planning process conducted by a region, requiring the involvement of various parties, including communities, the government, institutions, and organizations, which are expected to form a network and collaborate based on their roles and expertise in their respective fields. This view is reflected in the actions of the Kemuning Village government in developing ecotourism based on civic engagement by involving community groups, institutions, and agencies according to their respective fields.

5. Conclusion

The form of civic engagement in the development of ecotourism as part of the strategy implemented by the Village Government of Kemuning originates from environmental issues, particularly the decrease in water discharge and quality caused by land use conversion. This issue is related to the scope of ecological citizenship. The strategy employed by the Village Government of Kemuning in developing ecotourism involves engaging the community in the initial planning, development of tourist sites, management, and evaluation. This includes the formation of a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) called Aspekta, which acts as an extension of the village government in developing ecotourism in Kemuning Village. The village government, together with the Pokdarwis, organizes training, guidance, and collaborates with various institutions and agencies to improve the quality of human resources for tourism activists in Kemuning Village, as well as absorbing local labor from the village community. Social media is also used to increase the attraction of visitors. In addition, the village government collaborates with the youth organization (karangtaruna) to develop and use village-owned land (village treasury land) as a tourist attraction.

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