



EXPLORING THE ECOTOURISM POTENTIAL OF TAPALINNA AND BUJUNG MANURUNG VILLAGES: BALANCING NATURE, CULTURE, AND SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

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The village ecotourism planning in Tapalinna and Bujung Manurung Villages, Mambi Sub-district, Mamasa District, West Sulawesi Province was conducted to identify natural and cultural resources, as well as assess community readiness for managing these resources. The methods used included observation, the distribution of questionnaires to 30 respondents from the community, visitors, and managers, as well as the design of tourism programs and promotional media. The findings reveal that Tapalinna and Bujung Manurung Villages possess various cultural tourism potentials, including the Mambi language, religious systems, kinship systems, and local arts. Additionally, the villages have diverse natural tourism resources, such as flora and fauna.

The community and managers showed positive perceptions and readiness toward the ecotourism planning, with a high level of preparedness. The designed tourism programs include daily, overnight, and annual tours, supported by promotional media in the form of posters themed "One Taste of Harmonization." This initiative is expected to encourage community participation and enhance the sustainable attractiveness of the region.

Keywords: Village Ecotourism; Tourism Potential; Tourism Planning; Promotion; Tapalinna Village; Bujung Manurung Village

INTRODUCTION

Villages are a crucial component of economic and social development in Indonesia. According to Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, villages have the authority to govern and manage governmental affairs and the interests of their communities based on local initiatives, traditional rights, and customs recognized within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Sutiarso, 2018). Villages possess abundant natural and cultural potential that has yet to be fully optimized. One way to harness this potential is through ecotourism planning, aimed at developing sustainable tourism based on nature and culture (Pynanjung, 2018).



Ecotourism, as a form of tourism that combines environmental conservation and cultural preservation, has become an alternative approach in the development of tourist destinations in various regions (Astari & Aulia, 2019). According to Pynanjung (2018), ecotourism involves travel that seeks to appreciate and preserve natural and cultural heritage while also providing economic benefits to local communities. Through the ecotourism approach, not only can natural potential be utilized, but also local cultural wealth, such as customs, languages, and arts, which are often overlooked in the development of mass tourism (Astari & Aulia, 2019).

Mamasa Regency, particularly the Mambi District, has great potential to be developed as an ecotourism destination. This area is not only rich in biodiversity, such as flora and fauna, but also boasts unique cultural heritage, including the Mambi language, religious systems, and various traditional arts (Bongga et al., 2021). This potential provides a strong foundation for the development of village-based ecotourism, which is expected to attract both domestic and international tourists (Rijasa et al., 2023). However, this potential must be carefully managed to prevent negative impacts on the local environment and culture (Agustina & Darmawan, 2018). Therefore, development strategies that involve the local community and take into account ecological, social, and economic sustainability are crucial in this process (Astari & Aulia, 2019; Sutiarso, 2018).

Village ecotourism planning involves various stakeholders, including local communities, managers, and the government. According to Damanik & F. Weber (2006), community involvement in ecotourism planning and management is vital to ensuring the sustainability of the program. The community acts as active subjects, not only functioning as implementers of tourism activities but also as key drivers in environmental and cultural preservation. Thus, community participation at every stage of the planning process is critical to the success of the ecotourism program, as they possess valuable local knowledge and have a direct interest in the outcomes of these activities (Suherlan et al., 2022).

In addition to the community, tourism managers and local governments also play strategic roles in the development of ecotourism. Tourism managers are responsible for designing tourism programs that are appealing, sustainable, and suited to local conditions. Local governments, on the other hand, play a role in providing regulations as well as financial and technical support (Harun, 2023). Menurut Ridwan (2012), coordination between the community, managers, and the government is crucial for realizing sustainable ecotourism that has a positive impact on the local economy (Alam, 2023). With effective cooperation, it is hoped that all parties can contribute optimally to the development of ecotourism.

The primary goal of this village ecotourism planning is to identify the natural and cultural tourism potential and assess the readiness of the community and managers in running tourism activities. This study also aims to design tourism programs that can attract visitors, whether for day trips, overnight stays, or annual visits (Winarno, 2023). Additionally, effective promotion is needed to introduce the village's ecotourism potential to a wider audience through visual media, such as posters designed with the theme "One Taste of Harmonization" (Ginting et al., 2019).

Globally, ecotourism has become a trend in the tourism industry, especially as awareness of the importance of environmental conservation increases. According to Mukasyaf (2024), ecotourism offers a solution for maintaining biodiversity while

supporting the local economy. Indonesia, with its rich natural and cultural resources, has great potential to develop ecotourism as a leading economic sector. However, achieving this requires careful planning, active community participation, and support from various stakeholders (Naibaho et al., 2022).

This research is expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of ecotourism in Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village. The results of this planning are not only expected to improve community welfare through increased tourist visits but also to ensure the preservation of the villages' natural and cultural wealth. With proper planning, village ecotourism can become a solution to address various rural development challenges, such as poverty and limited access to economic resources.

Furthermore, it is hoped that through the concept of ecotourism, a balance can be achieved between tourism needs and the preservation of local nature and culture. Thus, the ecotourism programs designed can provide long-term benefits, both for the local community and the environment they inhabit. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi nyata dalam pengembangan ekowisata di Desa Tapalinna dan Desa Bujung Manurung.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Planning in the context of tourism plays a crucial role as the foundational step in determining the strategic actions required to achieve desired objectives. According to Supriadi & Roedjinandari (2017), , planning is a systematic process of designing activities to achieve specific goals effectively and efficiently. In relation to ecotourism, planning must take into account various aspects, such as environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and the economic sustainability of the local community. This aligns with the views of Damanik & F.Weber (2006) who emphasize that ecotourism planning must involve multiple stakeholders, including the local community, to ensure that the designed programs can run effectively and have a positive impact on both the environment and community well-being.

The concept of ecotourism was first introduced as an effort to align tourism activities with environmental conservation. According to Fiorello & Bo (2012) ecotourism is a form of tourism that aims to promote environmental and cultural awareness through direct interaction between tourists and nature, as well as with local communities. Ecotourism stresses the importance of preserving biodiversity and appreciating local cultures while providing sustainable economic benefits to local communities. In this regard, the development of ecotourism becomes especially important, particularly in areas rich in natural and cultural potential, such as Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village in Mamasa Regency.

Ecotourism possesses several key characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of tourism. Nugroho (2018) states that ecotourism is not solely focused on recreation but also on the preservation of nature and culture. In ecotourism, visitors are encouraged to learn about conservation values and engage in activities that support preservation efforts. For example, in bird conservation-based tourism, tourists can participate in bird conservation activities in Jatimulyo organized by the local community, such as adopting nests and donating towards nest preservation.

Through these activities, tourists not only enjoy the beauty of nature but also gain a deeper understanding of environmental conservation (Afif & Aisyianita, 2023).

Additionally, ecotourism requires a sustainable approach to its management. Zekan et al (2022) emphasize that ecotourism should be designed in such a way that it does not cause environmental damage or disrupt the socio-cultural balance of local communities. Sustainability in ecotourism can be achieved through careful planning, including the selection of tourism locations, waste management, and limiting the number of visitors to avoid overtourism. Therefore, it is essential for ecotourism managers to understand and implement sustainability principles at every stage of planning and operational processes.

In the context of village ecotourism planning, Damanik & F.Weber (2006) explain that one of the crucial components that must be considered is community involvement. The local community should be actively engaged in every stage of the planning process, from identifying tourism potential to managing the tourism programs that will be implemented. This is because the community is the primary custodian of the natural and cultural resources that serve as the main attractions in ecotourism. Community participation not only enhances the success of ecotourism programs but also ensures that the economic benefits generated can be directly felt by the local community. Thus, the sustainability of ecotourism relies not only on environmental factors but also on the social and economic well-being of the local population.

In addition to community involvement, the promotion of ecotourism also plays an important role in attracting tourists. According to Yoeti (2006), promotion is one of the key elements in the tourism marketing mix, aimed at introducing tourism destinations to potential visitors. In this regard, effective promotional media, such as posters, brochures, or digital campaigns, can help raise public awareness about existing ecotourism potential. However, promotional efforts must align with the principles of ecotourism, which advocate for balanced and moderate promotion that maintains harmony between the number of tourist visits and the environmental carrying capacity.

Local governments and policies play a crucial role in supporting sustainable tourism development. According to Purwanto (2008), the government has a strategic role in providing the necessary regulations, infrastructure, and funding for the development of ecotourism destinations. Eco-friendly policies, such as offering incentives to ecotourism operators who implement environmentally friendly practices, can encourage the sustainable development of ecotourism. On the other hand, policies that lack environmental considerations, such as infrastructure development that neglects environmental impacts, can damage existing ecotourism potential.

By using a holistic approach, it is hoped that this ecotourism planning can provide accurate recommendations regarding the tourism programs that can be developed, as well as appropriate promotional strategies to attract tourists. Additionally, the findings of this research are expected to offer valuable input to local governments in formulating policies that support the sustainable development of ecotourism, ensuring that the area's natural and cultural resources are optimally utilized without compromising environmental and social balance.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods. These methods were chosen to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the ecotourism potential in Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village, as well as to assess the perceptions, readiness, and preferences of the community, visitors, and tourism managers regarding the development of village ecotourism. According to Sugiyono (2014), a descriptive approach aims to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate portrayal of the facts and characteristics of a specific population or area. In this research, a thorough description of the ecotourism conditions in these villages will be obtained through various data collection techniques that have been carefully designed.

Location and Time of Research

This research was conducted in Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village, Mambi District, Mamasa Regency, West Sulawesi. These locations were selected based on their natural and cultural potential, which are considered highly attractive for ecotourism development. The research took place over four months, from March to June 2016. This timeframe was chosen to align with weather conditions and the tourist season, allowing for the collection of more accurate data on the characteristics of both visitors and the local community.

Types and Sources of Data

This research uses two types of data: primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through direct field observations, questionnaire distribution, and in-depth interviews with the community, tourism managers, and visitors. Secondary data was gathered from various official documents, such as tourism statistics reports, village planning documents, and literature related to ecotourism. Secondary data was used as a reference for analyzing the potential and challenges of ecotourism development in the two villages.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods in this study consist of three main techniques: observation, questionnaires, and interviews.

Observation was conducted to identify the natural and cultural potential in Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village. The natural potential observed included the diversity of flora, fauna, and the landscape features that serve as tourist attractions. Meanwhile, the cultural potential observed included local traditions, arts, language, and customary activities that could be developed into tourist attractions. Direct observation was carried out using assessment indicators proposed by Avenzora (2016), such as uniqueness, rarity, beauty, and the sensitivity of resources to change.

Questionnaires were used to understand the perceptions, motivations, and readiness of the community, visitors, and tourism managers regarding the village ecotourism planning. The questionnaires were distributed to three groups of respondents: local community members, visitors to the village, and tourism managers. Each respondent group consisted of 30 people, selected using random sampling for the community and managers, and accidental sampling for the visitors. The questionnaire questions were structured as closed-ended questions, using a

Likert scale of 1 to 5 to measure the respondents' level of agreement with various statements related to ecotourism (Sugiyono, 2014).

Interviews were conducted to gather more in-depth information about the perceptions of the community and tourism managers regarding ecotourism development in the villages. The interview technique used was semi-structured interviews, where the researcher prepared a list of open-ended questions but allowed the respondents space to elaborate on their answers. Interviews were conducted with several community leaders, tourism managers, and village government officials to obtain a more detailed understanding of the potential, challenges, and expectations regarding ecotourism development. This technique was chosen because it provides richer and more detailed information compared to closed-ended questionnaires (Sugiyono, 2014).

Data Analysis Method

The data obtained from observations, questionnaires, and interviews were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as percentages and averages, to describe the perceptions, motivations, and readiness of the community and visitors toward village ecotourism planning. This analysis was conducted to determine the level of support and interest from the community and visitors in developing village ecotourism. The data are then presented in tables and graphs to facilitate interpretation.

Meanwhile, the qualitative data obtained from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis, where the data are categorized into specific themes relevant to the research objectives. These themes include natural potential, cultural potential, challenges in tourism management, and community expectations for ecotourism development. The results of this analysis are then used to design ecotourism programs that align with the conditions and potential of the villages (Creswell, 2014).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data obtained, this study employed source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from various sources, such as the results of questionnaires, interviews, and observations, to arrive at more valid conclusions. Meanwhile, method triangulation was conducted by using various data collection techniques, such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations, to test the consistency of the data obtained (Sugiyono, 2014). This approach ensures that the validity and reliability of the data are maintained, making the research results trustworthy and suitable for use in ecotourism planning.

The research method used is expected to provide a clear picture of the potential and challenges of ecotourism development in Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village. The results of this analysis will be used to formulate recommendations for tourism managers and local governments in developing sustainable ecotourism programs that have a positive impact on the local community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to identify the ecotourism potential in Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village, Mambi District, Mamasa Regency, West Sulawesi Province, as well as to design an ecotourism program that involves local community participation. The research was conducted through field observations, questionnaires, and interviews with the community, visitors, and tourism managers in these two villages. The results include the identification of natural and cultural potential, the characteristics of the community, and the design of tourism programs that are expected to support sustainable ecotourism development in the region.

Ecotourism Resource Potential

The villages of Tapalinna and Bujung Manurung possess a variety of natural and cultural tourism potentials that can be developed into ecotourism attractions. The natural resources in these two villages include diverse flora and fauna, as well as landscapes conducive to nature tourism activities. Observations indicate the presence of three types of cultivated flora, six types of non-cultivated flora, and one type of wild flora in this area. Additionally, the fauna identified includes one species of livestock for production, two species of non-production livestock, and two species of wild fauna, which are integral to the local ecosystem (Suranny, 2020).

The cultural resources in Tapalinna and Bujung Manurung also hold significant potential to attract tourists. There are eleven traditional livelihood systems, two religious systems, four local livelihoods, eight systems of local knowledge, and eleven art forms that are still preserved by the community. The Mambi language, which is the indigenous language of the local population, serves as a unique cultural attraction that is rarely encountered elsewhere (Kaya, 2023). The management of these cultural potentials is essential in the development of ecotourism, as it can provide tourists with authentic experiences.

The development of ecotourism in Tapalinna and Bujung Manurung could generate significant economic benefits for the local community. The growing interest among tourists in more authentic and immersive experiences presents a major economic opportunity for rural communities (Sofiani, 2024). Furthermore, the development of ecotourism that involves local communities in the management of natural and cultural resources can enhance the sense of ownership and responsibility towards environmental preservation (Nazahah, 2024). This aligns with research indicating that community involvement in ecotourism development can strengthen cultural identity and improve socio-economic welfare (Hartoni, 2024).

However, there are also counterviews that need to be considered. Poorly planned ecotourism development can result in negative impacts on both the environment and the community. For instance, if the number of tourists is not well managed, it could lead to damage to local ecosystems and disrupt the lives of the local population (Harahap, 2024). Moreover, there is a risk that tourism development may commodify local cultural values, focusing solely on economic gain and thereby diminishing the traditional values that exist (Rhamadana, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to undertake careful planning and involve all stakeholders in the ecotourism development process.

Community Characteristics

Based on the results of questionnaires distributed to the residents of both villages, it was found that the majority of respondents were between the ages of 20 and 59, accounting for 90% of the population. Most of the villagers work as farmers (40%), indicating that agriculture is the backbone of the local economy. The majority of the residents have completed junior high school (SMP/MTs) education (40%), highlighting a challenge in enhancing the community's skills and knowledge regarding ecotourism management.

In terms of community perception of ecotourism, the majority of respondents demonstrated a positive attitude and readiness to participate in ecotourism activities. These findings align with the study by Andayani et al (2017), which emphasized that the involvement of local communities is crucial to the success of ecotourism programs, particularly because they possess in-depth knowledge of the natural and cultural potential in the region.

A similar conclusion was found in the research conducted by Yulianto (2023) which showed that empowering communities through the development of tourism villages can strengthen the socio-cultural resilience of the area, in line with the involvement of the community in ecotourism management. This study highlights the importance of community participation in the planning and implementation of tourism programs, which can enhance the sense of ownership and responsibility towards local resources. Furthermore, Wulandari (2023) also noted that the community's positive perception of ecotourism can encourage active participation in the development and management of ecotourism, which in turn provides economic benefits to the community.

However, there are also opposing views. Kaya (2023) revealed that although the community shows readiness to engage in ecotourism, there are still challenges in improving skills and knowledge, particularly for those with lower educational backgrounds. This could hinder their effective participation in ecotourism management. Additionally, despite the positive perception of ecotourism, not all members of the community feel actively involved, and some may feel that the economic benefits of ecotourism are not equally distributed (Kaya, 2023). This suggests that while there is great potential, challenges in the implementation and management of ecotourism must still be addressed to ensure the success and sustainability of the program.

Characteristics of Tourism Managers and Visitors

The characteristics of tourism managers in both villages reveal that the majority of managers are male (73%), predominantly aged between 20 and 59 years old. Most managers have a senior high school (SMA/SMK) education (50%) and work as farmers (40%), indicating that the tourism managers in these villages still require training in more professional tourism management.

From the visitors' side, the majority of visitors to these villages are also male (53%), with 73% falling within the age range of 20-59 years. Most visitors are married (53%) and have completed their education at the senior high school level (67%). The majority of visitors come with the motivation to enjoy the natural beauty and cultural experiences, indicating that these villages have great potential as nature- and culture-based ecotourism destinations.

This view is supported by a study conducted by Hayati (2019), which showed that ecotourism managers with lower educational backgrounds can improve their skills through appropriate training, thereby enhancing the quality of ecotourism management in the area. The study also highlights the importance of training for managers to improve visitor experience and their satisfaction with the services provided.

However, there are also opposing views. Naibaho et al. (2022) revealed that despite having similar educational backgrounds, a lack of experience and adequate training can hinder the effective development of ecotourism. This suggests that while there is potential, challenges remain in achieving professional tourism management, requiring more attention to providing appropriate training to improve the skills of the managers. Additionally, Pande et al. (2019) pointed out that visitors who share similar educational backgrounds with the managers may not always have the same motivation to engage in ecotourism development, thus creating a gap between expectations and reality in ecotourism management.

Tourism Program Design

The findings of this research also resulted in the design of tourism programs that can be implemented in the villages of Tapalinna and Bujung Manurung. The proposed tourism programs encompass three types of activities: daily tours, overnight tours, and annual tours. Daily tours include activities such as hiking, birdwatching, and visits to local coffee plantations. Overnight tours involve a homestay program in traditional village homes, allowing tourists to directly interact with the local community and learn about their daily activities.

The annual tour program is designed to widely introduce local traditions and culture through a cultural festival, showcasing local arts and traditions. This festival is expected to become a major attraction that draws large numbers of tourists at specific times, while also serving as a means of preserving local culture. The program is also designed to provide direct economic benefits to the local community, particularly for those involved in providing accommodation and other tourism-related activities.

Challenges in Ecotourism Development

The development of ecotourism in Tapalinna and Bujung Manurung faces significant challenges, including limited infrastructure, lack of management capacity, and low environmental awareness among the community. Poor road conditions and insufficient facilities such as accommodations and eateries limit access to the villages, especially during the rainy season, hindering tourism growth and reducing potential economic benefits. Addressing these issues through infrastructure improvements is crucial for enhancing accessibility and visitor experience.

In addition to infrastructure, the community's limited experience in tourism management poses challenges to providing high-quality services. Training programs are essential to equip locals with the necessary skills to manage ecotourism effectively and sustainably. Raising environmental awareness through education is also critical to ensure that ecotourism development aligns with the preservation of natural resources, ensuring long-term benefits for both the community and the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study successfully identified the ecotourism potential in Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village, Mambi District, Mamasa Regency. The ecotourism potential in these two villages is significant, with natural resources that include diverse flora and fauna, as well as beautiful landscapes, which can support various nature-based tourism activities. In addition, the richness of local culture, such as the Mambi language, religious systems, traditional arts, and well-preserved customs, offers a unique attraction for tourists interested in cultural tourism.

The readiness of the community to support ecotourism programs was also assessed as fairly high, with the majority of the community expressing interest and willingness to participate in the management and implementation of tourism activities. This indicates that the development of ecotourism in these villages can proceed successfully if there is active participation from the local community. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, low management capacity, and a lack of awareness about the importance of environmental conservation need to be addressed to achieve sustainable ecotourism.

To overcome these challenges, this study recommends improvements in infrastructure, training for tourism managers, and environmental education programs for the community. By implementing these recommendations, it is hoped that ecotourism in Tapalinna Village and Bujung Manurung Village can develop sustainably, provide economic benefits to the community, and preserve the local natural and cultural resources.

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