



Management of Community Participation Through Education Based on Religio-Cultural Approaches for Ecotourism Development in Bantar Kulon, Lebakbarang District, Pekalongan Regency

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Abstract. Bantar Kulon is one of the villages in the Lebakbarang District, Pekalongan Regency, which is geographically located in a mountainous area called the North Serayu Mountains and is designated as a Regional Tourism Development Area (KPPD) with an eco-tourism image based on the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARDA) document of Pekalongan Regency in 2018–2025. Bantar Kulon Village has very supportive potential for ecotourism development. However, in order to accomplish the goal of transforming Bantar Kulon into an ecotourism destination, the potential already present needs to be combined with effective community engagement management. This paper aims to study the effectiveness of educational programs based on a religio-cultural approach in an effort to turn Bantar Kulon Village into an eco-tourism village. This study uses a descriptive qualitative research approach. The residents of Bantar Kulon Village can really be encouraged to take a more active role in efforts to promote ecotourism by using some education that takes a religio-cultural approach.

Keywords: Participation · ecotourism · religio-cultural approach · Bantar Kulon

1 Introduction

Ecotourism is interpreted as a type of eco-friendly tourism, which is considered one of the solutions to help protect the cultural and ecological resources of tourism sites, provide local economic opportunities, and raising tourists with greater environmental awareness [1], so that it becomes a means of saving unique ecosystems and resources, whose existence will be very threatened if an extractive economic approach is put forward as a development concept [2]. It is impossible to detach local communities from the idea of ecotourism. Local communities are crucial to the growth of ecotourism because

they possess resources and distinctive customs and cultures that serve as the main motivators for tourism-related activities [3]. Community-based ecotourism is an example of sustainable tourism that not only gives local communities the power to influence tourism planning where they live but also strengthens social identity and the caliber of local human resources that will be passed down to the next generation in order to sustain ecotourism activities [4].

Bantar Kulon is one of the villages in the Lebakbarang District, Pekalongan Regency. Geographically, Bantar Kulon Village is located on the slopes of the mountains, precisely part of the northern Dieng Plateau, or commonly called North Serayu [5]. According to the Pekalongan Regency Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARDA) plan for 2018–2025 [6], the Lebakbarang District area is one of the regions designated as a Regional Tourism Development Area (KPPD) with an eco-tourism image. Bantar Kulon Village is located in the area around the Petungkriyono Protected Forest, which, incidentally, is the only tropical forest that is still relatively naturally preserved on the island of Java [7], so that it has very supportive potential for ecotourism development. However, the existing potential must be encouraged through effective management of community involvement to realize the development vision. Community participation greatly affects the potential value of ecotourism [8], where the willingness of community participation is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of educational initiatives. Education based on a religio-cultural approach is one of the alternative options in the drive to develop ecotourism. Therefore, it is necessary to study the effectiveness of educational programs based on a religio-cultural approach in an effort to turn Bantar Kulon Village into an eco-tourism village.

2 Methods

This study uses a qualitative research approach in order to describe and analyze phenomena, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people individually and in groups. The objective of the qualitative approach is to engage with individuals and monitor their perceptible behavior [9] in the environment in order to gather descriptive information from them in the form of written or spoken words [10]. The community of Bantar Kulon Village provided these research data through unstructured observations and interviews.

Data accuracy was done by asking something, repeatedly asking the informant a question with various questions. Researchers checked the consistency of the responses from the sources using this technique, making the data's accuracy more accountable. In the meantime, data validation is done using the triangulation approach, which entails verifying data using something other than the primary data for verification or comparison, including sources, methods, and theories. Data for this study was gathered in three different ways: through interviews; observations; and documentation.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Bantar Kulon Village Overview

Bantar Kulon is one of the villages in the Lebakbarang District, one of the settlements near the Petungkriyono Protected Forest. With a total area of 5189.507 ha, the

Petungkriyono Protection Forest is made up of limited production forest with pine as its predominant plant, other natural wood forest, or natural forest that serves as a limited protection forest (HLT) for hydrological protection purposes [11]. The Petungkriyono Forest is the only unspoiled protected area on the island of Java [7], and is home to 253 species, some of which are endemic, consisting of 4 primate species, 63 bird species, 104 butterfly species, 19 species of pterydophyta, and 22 species of woody trees [12], as well as 46 species of epiphytic orchids, consisting of 22 genera [13], and 30 species from 7 families [14]. Bantar Kulon has enough ecological value due to its location in the Petungkriyono forest area, which allows it to grow into a tourist destination. A tourist village is a rural area with unique qualities that make it a popular tourist destination, where the locals continue to engage in routine tasks like building architecture, typical village spatial arrangements, or commercial operations, as well as their relatively conventional customs and cultures [15]. A special and intriguing feature with the potential to become a tourist attraction [16].

Utilization of land use in Bantar Kulon Village includes a high variance because it is divided into several areas with different functions and uses, such as residential areas, rice fields, waterfall areas, coffee plantation areas, pine forest areas, river areas, and protected forest areas. Each place has distinct and alluring qualities of its own. Protected woods, pine forests, mixed forests, coffee plantations, rice fields, and residential areas with various ecosystem characteristics make up the Petungkriyono forest region [14]. This circumstance is a very suitable one to be bundled in the idea of ecotourism with a notion of thematic village tourism. Planning and administering conservation-based tourism requires the partition of space with constraints in order to prevent harm to the area's environment from tourism activities while also presenting an exclusive image of the location, which will boost the area's appeal [17] (Fig. 1).

3.2 Community Participation in Ecotourism Development

According to age, the residents of Bantar Kulon Village can be divided into three groups: children, young adults, and individuals over the age of 35. The community's involvement in Bantar Kulon Village's ecotourism development has really included all facets of society, as evidenced by the active participation of children's organizations as well as that of adults and older members of the community. However, as evidenced by the fact that only up to 10 individuals attend the community service events for ecotourism development, the number of people who are actively involved is still deemed to be relatively small. Human factors, which include processes that cross the material landscape in the form of values, meanings, symbols and identities, give a greater role to the success of rural-based tourism development compared to object planning [18]. The biggest challenges in rural-based tourism development often come from internal factors such as management planning and management [19]. Community environmental knowledge is significantly correlated with the community's willingness to be involved in ecotourism management, so that public education becomes a very important activity to shape the image and encourage positive public attitudes towards ecotourism while still prioritizing local attractions as part of the planning [20]. Due to a lack of information and public understanding of environmental preservation as a resource for ecotourism development,



Fig. 1. (a) Bantar Kulon Village, (b) Visual Landscape, (c) Terrace Field, (d) “Sedekah Bumi”

one of the major barriers to the development of ecotourism in certain areas of Indonesia is a lack of environmental awareness among the population [21].

The community of Bantar Kulon Village is reasonably homogeneous in terms of education level and technological know-how, but it is varied in terms of cultural interests and individual religiosity. As a result, the level of excitement with which each community in Bantar Kulon Village participates in the development of ecotourism varies. Participating in ecotourism development projects will elicit varying levels of reaction effectiveness from different community groups. The moral standing of the community,

community culture, community education, and community economic status, as well as the proficiency of community technology, continue to frequently hinder the efficacy of community engagement in environmental conservation activities. People's propensity to engage in ecotourism is significantly influenced by environmental awareness, economic impact, social impact, and impact on local culture [22].

3.3 Religio-Cultural Approach Through Organizing “Sedekah Bumi”

The religio-cultural-based approach is an alternative approach aimed at increasing the active participation of the people of Bantar Kulon Village in an effort to develop ecotourism [23]. Community knowledge of religion and culture in the form of community local wisdom [24] has a very vital role in efforts to develop a better appreciation of the environment so that it will increase community participation and willingness to be involved in ecotourism development. When it comes to achieving objectives and addressing difficulties in sustainable development, culture and religious beliefs may be a source of strength [25]. Religion must be understood in the context of its social setting, where it serves a purpose in protecting the environment, which is essential to existence [23]. The emergence of social unity among groups can be sparked by religion [26]. Most religious communities tend to be less accepting of unethical patterns of economic behavior, and most of them are willing to do volunteer-oriented jobs [27]. Religion is a form of expression of culture that has historically been in symbiosis with nature and the environment through spiritual practices and cultural expressions, so that religion has close relevance to the spirit of environmental conservation typical of ecotourism [28].

The religio-cultural approach is modified by keeping cultural practices close to religious rituals in the form of prayers and adorations to God in the Universe, which take the form of a procession known as “Sedekah Bumi” in the local language. Implementing “Sedekah Bumi” is a way for the community to express appreciation to God for the plentiful harvests of natural resources that provided nourishment, as well as a way to petition God for abundant sustenance for the upcoming agricultural season. Local wisdom such as Sedekah Bumi is often used as a guide for community attitudes and behavior in environmental conservation activities in the form of routine and incidental physical and ritual activities on the basis of benefits [24]. The attitude of environmental concern frequently takes the form of rituals and performances in a cultural organization that can highlight the sacred nature of the environment itself, making individuals unintentionally more considerate of their surroundings [29]. Local wisdom practices in community life, particularly in rural communities, are closely related to environmental conservation efforts, so in order to achieve sustainable biological resources, there needs to be an integrated concept between community local wisdom, which is part of the community's concept of thinking about the environment holistically, and ecological conservation [30].

The Bantar Kulon Village community's long-standing local custom, “Sedekah Bumi,” is being progressively abandoned. “Sedekah Bumi” is implemented in this way, with numerous embellishments such as a scarecrow parade known as “pecing” in the local language and gunung rice tumpang, which is packed as a performance (event). A very flexible code of conduct can be built on an area's cultural identity and integrated with its natural character [31]. In the future, extensive and critical study of indigenous

cultures and local knowledge systems will probably serve as the primary method for achieving sustainable development [32]. It is critical to understand the local context (historical and cultural knowledge) and its potential effects on ecotourism [33]. Even with economic value that can be utilized to support necessities, lost local culture can be revived through ecotourism operations [34].

The implementation of “Sedekah Bumi” is actually able to increase interest in community participation and support in ecotourism development. This is demonstrated by the community’s strong desire to make the scarecrow procession a success, which comes from people of all backgrounds. The number of participants in community service activities increased rapidly, and unexpected ideas and creativity emerged from the community, both in packaging and organizing events. The effectiveness of a religio-culturally based educational strategy in the promotion of ecotourism in Bantar Kulon Village may be seen in the community’s voluntary donations of time, energy, and thoughts, as well as material costs to make the event more lively and alluring. When the community’s culture and traditions are ignored, public interest in the idea of ecotourism will be low, which will prevent the effects of the activities from being felt [35]. Future development must consider the availability of existing natural and cultural features because they are essential components in the development of rural ecotourism [36]. In principle, ecotourism seeks to advance the idea of environmental sustainability through educational initiatives while simultaneously working to preserve cultural traditions and generate income [37].

4 Conclusion

The settlement of Bantar Kulon offers a wealth of potential in terms of the natural features required for the growth of ecotourism. However, if the community’s passion and involvement in the development of ecotourism is lacking, natural attractions will be worthless. Education based on a religio-cultural approach can actually be an effective tool to increase the active participation of the people of Bantar Kulon Village in an effort to develop ecotourism.

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