REVIEW
Analysis of Ecotourism, Culture and Local Community Empowerment: Case Study of Wasur National Park - Indonesia

Inez Cara Alexander Phoek¹  Alexander Phuk Tjilen²*  Edi Cahyono³

1. Faculty of Business and Accountancy, Saint Theresa School of Economics Merauke, Indonesia
2. Faculty of Social and Political Science, Musamus University Merauke, Indonesia
3. Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Halu Oleo University Kendari, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received: 28 June 2021
Accepted: 15 July 2021
Published Online: 18 July 2021

Keywords:
Ecotourism development
Culture conditions and community empowerment
Sustainability practices
Conservation management
Economic development policy

ABSTRACT

The focus of this research lies in community empowerment based on culture and local communities as well as sustainable ecotourism, which is directed at a complicated mechanism of empowerment elements, local culture that is thick in ecotourism to get added value for the novelty of ecotourism research. The object of research is Wasur National Park (WNP), Papua, Indonesia. Qualitative methods have been used to obtain accurate data and information, i.e., in-depth interviews with indigenous people to find out the benefits or functions of their culture that can be developed in ecotourism, interviews with leaders and staff of WNP and the Department of Culture and Tourism to find out the potential and processes empowerment and existing tourism potential. As a result, from the perspective of empowerment, local people will easily follow the empowerment process provided that they use methods that are culturally appropriate which is from the viewpoints from the culture of sasi, totem and sacred places. The culture adopted by the community is in accordance with the principles of ecotourism that supports sustainability, environmental conservation, protection of environmental resources and increases economic value. However, it is recommended to carry out modified socialization in accordance with the current conditions. Hence, tourists who visit WNP do not become afraid of the very rigid sanctions which are applied to them who violate the existing cultural and environmental customs. Moreover, to get added economic value in the tourism business within WNP, it is necessary to explore the potential of cultural wealth, natural and biological wealth so that it becomes the main attraction in carrying out the economic empowerment of local communities in the field of ecotourism.

1. Introduction

Tourism and ecotourism in Papua Province currently still need to be developed intensively and professionally. This is when viewed from the large quantity of visitors traveling to Papua Province, so it becomes a challenge for the regional government of Papua Province to develop existing tourism. The tourism sector requires a strategy with a planned or structured tourism development pattern so that its potential can be developed optimally [1]. The tourism potential in Papua Province is the most important asset to be well explored, where the region has cultur-
al advantages, natural resources advantages so that the charm can make tourism the host in improving its economy. Tourist attractions that are well known on the island of Papua are Raja Ampat - Sorong which is known to the world for its exotic coral reefs and islands, Cenderawasih Bay National Park in Bintuni Bay, and Wasur National Park in Merauke with various species of mammals. The WNP area holds the potential for tourism products in the form of natural attractions supported by biodiversity, the charm of its landscape and the uniqueness of the culture of its people. There are 10 types of habitat with a diversity of flora and fauna consisting of 80 species of mammals, 390 species of birds, 39 species of fish, 48 species of attack and 21 species of reptiles that have been identified, 114 species of endemism.

In accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 33 of 2009 concerning Guidelines for Ecotourism Development which states that “ecotourism development must empower the local community” which in this case is in accordance with the principles of ecotourism, namely the active role of the surrounding community in planning, exploiting, and controlling ecotourism activities with respect for ecotourism, socio-cultural and religious values of the community around the tourist area. The tourism sector has proven to be able to make a significant contribution to the development of the national economy as a foreign exchange earning industry. Tourism is very important in solving many problems faced by many developing countries, especially economic problems with the main reason being unemployment, because with tourism people have a steady income in their lives. Therefore, with management that does not leave local wisdom, it can indicate the construction of more adequate facilities and infrastructure with the first condition that they have the uniqueness or identity of the area, secondly, tourist attractions provide security, comfort and safety, thirdly support from local government and local communities.

As stated, several elements that must be fulfilled as a tourist destination, namely tourist attraction, accessibility, infrastructure, and community empowerment. Economically, on average, community empowerment programs are able to increase the income of the beneficiaries and even those outside the project target. The philosophy is simple, that the problem of the poor mainly is not having the capital to do business. With mentoring interventions, it is possible to mobilize group savings that are used for business capital. The empowerment model developed for tourism has launched sustainable tourism campaigns and poverty alleviation programs as a tool to increase the economic benefits of marginalized communities with the aim of increasing the economic status of these communities in line with preserving traditional cultures and communities, leading to increased tourist interest in local culture. In community-based tourism research, community strength and empowerment have been considered as an important issue for community-based tourism, and many conceptual and qualitative studies have been investigated noting the application of the concept of community-based tourism in developing countries by highlighting community involvement in relation to the economic benefits of tourism, however, that the study ignores another important element, namely the culture of the people around the tourism location. Research on ecotourism and culture explain tourists face many problems in the traditional culture tourism, which is a form of mass tourism, thus, creative cultural tourism came to solve these problems, so it is necessary to study the relationship between ecotourism, culture, and community empowerment.

The novelty of research lies in community empowerment based on culture and local communities as well as sustainable ecotourism, as a follow-up research of Ecotourism Based on Local Community Empowerment in Wasur National Park.

Research focus is directed at a complicated mechanism among the elements of empowerment, local community culture that is thick in sustainable ecotourism to get added value for the novelty of ecotourism research.

Research purpose highlights the issue of the need for further research on how the process of community empowerment and the cultural carrying capacity of local communities towards ecotourism tourism in WNP.

2. Research Methodology

This research method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative, to provide a systematic and accurate description and description of the object of research. Primary data were obtained using field observation methods to obtain an overview of the location and interview methods with informants, community leaders, traditional leaders and national park managers. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through library research at WNP Office, WWF Indonesia Region Papua in Merauke, Culture and Tourism Office of Merauke Regency, and data search via the internet.

Research site is the WNP located in Merauke Regency, Papua, which is unique in that the original community as the owner of customary rights still lives in the location of the WNP, with an area of 413,810 ha, according to the Decree of the Minister of Forestry Number 2882 / Kpts-IV / 1997 dated 23 May 1997.

Research on socio-cultural aspects was carried out in Kuler Village, Onggaya Village and Yanggandur Village,
which are villages with the majority of the Kanum tribe. Based on government administration, it is located in the southeastern part of Papua Island within the administrative area of Merauke Regency and 4 sub-districts / districts, namely Merauke, with the following research location boundaries:

- To the East is bordered by Tonda Wildlife Reserve in Papua New Guinea,
- To the west is bordered by Merauke City,
- To the south is bordered by the Arafura Sea,
- North side is bordered by the Maro River area.

3. Finding and Discussion

3.1 Ecotourism Concept

Ecotourism tries to raise environmental awareness by exploring ecology and ecosystems and by providing environmental type experiences. Taking an active role in ecology and getting a direct impression of how ecosystems work influences people’s thinking, which ultimately increases awareness of conservation and protection, the important benefits of ecotourism policy and planning benefit local communities and the surrounding environment. Ecotourism includes new jobs, additional income, markets for local products, improved infrastructure, community facilities and services, new technologies and skills, increased cultural and environmental awareness, protection and conservation, and improved land use patterns [11].

Obstacles to the success of ecotourism development in order to minimize the negative impacts of ecotourism and maximize the possibilities for conservation and sustainable development one must acknowledge the barriers to ecotourism development. Lack of community capacity to take advantage of ecotourism development and minimize its negative impacts is one of the most significant obstacles [12]. Although ecotourism can create jobs for local people, community members are often trapped in low-skilled and low-paying jobs due to a lack of skills and bargaining power. High-skilled jobs are given to foreigners, which contributes to foreign control. Women are particularly at risk of being refused entry to tourism jobs due to skills constraints, indicating that women are given vocational training but lack the education and skills to benefit from it [13]. Lack of business knowledge is also an obstacle to entrepreneurial ecotourism in local communities. As is the case with tourism product development, the nature-based ecotourism component often depends on the degree of cooperation between the various providers of these products, and therefore conflicts of interest between these parties cannot be avoided [14].

Facilitating formal training, information education programs and industry networks, as well as the management of various sub-elements of the ecotourism component such as recreational activities can ideally help minimize these conflicts [15]. Paying attention to the concept of ecotourism characteristics has many factors that can be drawn into the focus of activities that can be carried out according to the culture and character of the area’s conditions and potential as well as the conditions in the WNP to become a tourist spot with the concept of protecting nature and conservation, providing jobs to the community local and respecting the privacy and culture of the local community. The sustainability of tourism attractiveness needs to be maintained in order to strengthen the community’s economy. Sustainable tourism has the following characteristics: 1) optimizing environmental resources which are a key element in tourism development; 2) maintaining the ecology of flora and fauna to preserve natural heritage and germplasm; 3) respect the indigenous socio-cultural values of local communities; 4) contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance; 5) ensure viable long-term economic operation; 6) providing socio-economic benefits for all stakeholders that are evenly distributed including stable employment and income opportunities and social services to accommodate the community; and 7) contribute to poverty alleviation [16,17].

3.2 Community Empowerment

A development activity that is based on the values of the people and the local community as the main resource. Local people are the people who know the local conditions best and every development activity must take into account the socio-cultural values of development. Every empowerment activity must pay attention to community participation, considering the composition of women’s participation in its implementation, therefore every step of planning decision must reflect local communities who are actively involved in it [18]. Comprehensive community involvement will further ensure the conformity of development and management programs with the aspirations of local communities, and according to existing capacities [19] (Tjilen et al., 2019), as well as ensuring community commitment because of a strong sense of belonging. This refers to the results of research that the empowerment approach is bottom up that comes from the society strength of themselves can be either (1) natural resources, (2) human resources, (3) a supportive environment, (4) socio-cultural and (5) public participation [6].

The concept of development and empowerment [20] states that empowerment refers to the ability of vulnerable and weak people / groups / communities, so that they have the power or ability to: (a) fulfill their basic needs so that they have freedom, not just in the sense of freedom of
expression, but free from hunger, ignorance, and pain; (b) reach productive resources that enable them to increase their income and obtain the goods and services they need; (c) participate in the development processes and decisions that affect them. The characteristics of an empowered community are as follows (a) able to know and understand its potential; (b) able to plan and anticipate changing future conditions, self-directed fibers; (c) they have the power to negotiate and cooperate on a mutually beneficial basis with sufficient “bargaining power”; (d) take responsibility for their own actions \[21,6\]. The empowerment process has a positive impact on the community by providing an example or being directly involved with the following principles in running ecotourism: (1) based on the natural environment, (2) having ecological value, (3) providing insight into the environment, (4) having benefits for local communities, and (5) makes it attractive and satisfies visitors \[22\]. Based on this explanation, empowerment and the empowerment process will provide great added value to existing culture and ecotourism yielding long-term, community-based development will enable a high degree of continuity.

3.3 Culture

Culture is the work of humans in maintaining and improving living standards and as a process of adaptation to the environment. As a system, culture needs to be seen from the manifestation of human life related to ideas, behavior and materials. Culture is a characteristic that appears in a certain group of members of society so that it can be used to distinguish it from other groups. Human culture is distinguished by history, background and social development. Culture is an “identity” that has the same innate characteristics (traits) and can be grouped including components of living culture (social, economy, politics, language, religion, aesthetics and livelihoods), wisdom and technology (livelihood, peace, pleasure, etc.), language, education, knowledge, and technology), as well as culture heritage (artifacts, monuments, manuscripts, traditions, and art) \[23\]. In brief, the factors in the culture can be described as follows:

In developing Indonesian cultural tourism in the era of autonomy and paradigm shift, several main things need attention, namely the integration of the application of the principles of sustainable development, sustainable tourism, resource management and culture. The correlation between these components becomes the framework in the ecotourism system. The benefits of culture in business from ecotourism are an important factor in social empowerment, because the development of ‘community-based tourism’ will provide a strong social dynamic influence for these community groups. Adequate social empowerment for local communities allows them to have political power over the construction of public facilities or the development of an ecotourism business \[24\]. In its implementation, a culture that is packaged in a well-managed ecotourism business culture also allows it to be used to maintain the existence of the indigenous culture of the local population \[25\].

The Kanume people have a high interaction relationship with natural resources. They have their own customary rules to regulate protection and utilization patterns in using forest resources that have been passed down from generation to generation from their ancestors \[26\]. The culture of the Kanume tribe explains that the clans in the Kanume people who inhabit the Wasur National Park area believe that humans are an integral part of nature so that nature becomes a unity that cannot be separated from human life and the community has a culture that protects the nature around them with a belief that has been going on for generations. Indigenous people in Papua believe that the forest and sea are the parents of those who provide food for them \[24\]. The cultural elements of the Kanume tribe which are related to ecotourism can be explained through; sasi, totem/dema and, sacred place \[27\] with the following explanation:

![Figure 1. Culture (Source: [23])](https://doi.org/10.30564/mmpp.v3i2.3414)
a. Sasi. In general, sasi known as a traditional resource management practice, has been carried out from generation to generation in various regions in Maluku and several areas in West Papua [28]. There are differences regarding the origin of the word Sasi, but in essence it is a prohibition or taboo on the use of a part of land, trees or sea, during a certain period.

b. Totem/dema. Protection of resources also has to do with totemism. The totem is dema changes form into the form of plants, animals or objects and becomes a symbol of the group. The totem in the clan has become a very important symbol of the group. People believe that their ancestors were the incarnation of animals/plants.

c. Sacred place/pamali, is also used as a place of refuge for ancestral spirits and as a place for ancestral travel. This is an ecological space cannot be separated from the values of belief in their previous ancestors, ancestors, and elders. Therefore, there are ecological areas which are pamali (forbidden), haunted areas, and are believed to be sacred places for ancestors to reside to protect their generations, automatically protected parks established by the community which have very strict customary sanctions which can lead to sickness and death. Therefore, in this management, guests who come are required to be polite, not throwing trash and including arranging speech while in a sacred place [29].

The benefits of culture encapsulated in the function of the sasi, totem and sacred place can be explained [30] has the following functions:

a. Aesthetic function, in terms of traditional beauty, decorated with traditional sasi tools. The tradition of sasi becomes a forum for ritual actors to develop ideas for art creation in the form of sasi buildings. In the implementation of traditional rituals, sasi is a forum for channeling the creative ideas of ritual actors in making traditional buildings, decorating or decorating according to the mood and ideas of beautiful art creations. The ritual performers do not arbitrarily or do not want to install the traditional sasi tools.

b. Pragmatic functions are seen in the utilization of tradition. The pragmatic function is a function of practicality and utility of an oral tradition in society. The practical function is seen in terms of practicality and the usefulness of the sasi tradition for the village community as a means of fulfilling human instinctive needs to secure goods or plants; 2) as a tool to maintain the integrity of the social structure in society by applying customary laws and norms based on the sasi tradition, 3) as a means of legalizing community culture, 4) as a means of fostering a sense of solidarity to respect and appreciate each other in a collective, 5) to show superiority someone as a ritual performer who is respected and respected, 6) as a means of disclosing and solving problems, and 7) as a source of knowledge and wisdom in facing the progress of the times.

c. Ethical function seen from the community using it as an educational tool about the knowledge of natural beauty and events around them life, able to generate a sense of liking, joy, and happiness captured and translated by the five human senses through experience, poured in the form of art.

d. Historical function, the sasi tradition in terms of identity formation and preservation of the cultural system of the village community. An enduring tradition of sasi living in society has changed both in purpose, function, and the ritual implementation follows the changing situation and condition in society. Based on the function described and the existing village tradition, being able to form a community identity as the owner of a tradition based on the preservation of a cultural system carried out orally and from generation to generation will produce good synergy for the realization of sustainable ecotourism.

3.4 Synergy of Ecotourism, Culture, and Empowerment

The cultural factor of the Kanume tribe has a close relationship with ecotourism which is unique to the life pattern of the Kanume people related to the positive behavior of the community in protecting and exploiting natural resources (space) and adaptation to the surrounding environment. The pattern of socio-cultural life originates from the cultural, religious and local customs which are a form of traditional wisdom values. The results showed that the Kanume people had wisdom in their relationship with nature which was reflected in a series of natural balances.

The function of the ecotourism business as a factor that supports social empowerment, the development of ‘community-based tourism’ will provide a strong social dynamic influence for these community groups. As a result, community members will feel included in ecotourism business activities. Social empowerment is a need that creates a situation of a sense of unity and integrity for a community group to become stronger. Social empowerment that can be seen directly and indirectly by carrying out ecotourism business activities is that the community will receive government program assistance and repair of public facilities, such as roads, airports, health, education, and so on. A well-managed ecotourism business culture
factor also allows it to be used as a means to maintain the existence of the indigenous culture of the local population. Adequate social empowerment for the local community enables them to have political power over the construction of public facilities or the development of an ecotourism business. Tourism activities as an alternative to earning income for the community and foreign exchange for the country because it provides a large contribution to the country’s economy, tourism still provides employment and business opportunities for the Indonesian people, both formal and non-formal. To overcome the decline in the number of mass foreign tourists and the government’s understanding of the negative impacts of mass tourism, at the end of this decade tourism activities have been initiated that lead to Special Interest Tourism by including culture as a differentiator from the tourism industry, which is characterized by several distinctive features, and involves local community so that it has a positive impact on community’s economics.

The findings explain the success of the empowerment process in culture and ecotourism on the criteria for community-oriented development as follows:

a. Advancing the level of community life while preserving local cultural identities and traditions
b. Increase income economically while distributing it evenly among the local population
c. The use of development results from ecotourism that is more environmentally friendly and has greater sustainability

4. Conclusions

The empowerment process in ecotourism in WNP is supported by local culture and customs that highly respect the environment, plants and forests, which are trusted as their home and parents. The cultural benefits of sasi, totem and sacred places provide heavy sanctions for people who do not respect forests and the environment and customs which are their ancestral heritage, as well as have added value to the community’s economy if used properly. The implementation of empowerment requires the intervention of the government, NGOs and universities, empowerment is very important for tourism, however, the relationship between tourism, culture and empowerment, empowerment in ecotourism does not damage the existing culture and environment.

Too strict protection against the environment will complicate business potential, and economic improvement and welfare are the goals of empowerment. Tourism exploitation with high activity can have a negative impact on the environment, if the existing culture and customs are not considered. The concept of tourism development which is based on the uniqueness and conditions of the region can be developed by implementing ecotourism business development or the development of sustainable tourism development. Local conditions for its success can be measured through a sustainable socio-cultural process that involves the identity of the local community; sustainable natural resource and environmental cycles; and economic processes that can provide sustainable benefits.

Ecological and cultural tourism business is well implemented, so the tourism industry has the potential to have positive impacts that are beneficial to the environment through environmental protection and conservation efforts where tourism can be a source to finance efforts to protect environmental resources and increase the economic value of resources/environment, as well as their empowerment, in the social and cultural fields of the surrounding communities.

References


