

# Ecotourism Development as a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy in Central Java

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**Abstract.** The imperative for tourism development in Central Java necessitates a systematic and organized approach, with the primary objective of fostering economic growth within the local community. Ecotourism is seen as a viable approach to sustainable tourism growth. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to assess the progression of ecotourism as a viable approach for fostering sustainable tourism growth in the region of Central Java. The present study employs a qualitative research design utilizing descriptive methodology. The findings of the study indicate that ecotourism plays a major role in fostering sustainable tourist development, yielding advantageous outcomes in terms of economic, environmental, and social aspects. Ecotourism planning must consider various aspects, including environmental carrying capacity, cost and benefit analysis, and local community involvement. Internal, external, and structural factors play an important role in ecotourism success. In Central Java Province, five main strategies have been identified: local community participation, pro-sustainability regulations, strengthening local culture, integrated marketing, and transforming existing types of tourism into ecotourism. With this strategy, Central Java can achieve the vision of sustainable tourism development and provide an example for other regions in maintaining sustainability in the world of tourism.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Development, Sustainable Tourism, Local Communities

## 1 Introduction

Currently, tourism is an industrial sector that is experiencing rapid growth. This is due to the view that the tourism industry has bright and promising potential, and can generate large profits for a country.[1] With intensive tourism management and supported by a professional workforce, this sector can become a significant contributor to the country's foreign exchange earnings. Indonesia, with its natural wealth, cultural diversity and diverse traditions, has great potential to develop tourism as a strong economic driving force.[2]

Tourism has become a new industry capable of rapidly increasing economic growth, increasing income, increasing living standards, and encouraging other production sectors in tourism destination countries.[3] In addition, this also supports the economic empowerment of local communities by creating job opportunities and opening investment doors for outside investors who wish to develop businesses in accommodation, transportation or restaurants around tourism destinations.[4] This is in line with the view of UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) that the tourism industry includes various activities such as

accommodation, culinary services, transportation, travel agents, cultural activities, sports and entertainment.[5]

An astute measure is taken by the government when it strategically utilizes the tourist sector as a means to enhance the economic conditions of the local population.[6] In order to ensure the well-being of the local community, it is imperative for the government to prioritize sustainable tourist growth.[7] According to Salim, sustainable development can be defined as a developmental approach that aims to maximize the advantages derived from both natural and human resources, while simultaneously attaining a harmonious equilibrium between the utilization of natural resources and the pursuit of human goals in the context of development.[8] Sustainable development, as defined by Susiana, encompasses the objectives of enhancing societal well-being, fulfilling human needs and ambitions, and attaining equitable development across present and future generations.[9]

The concept of sustainable tourism development pertains to endeavors aimed at guaranteeing the long-term enjoyment of natural, social, and cultural resources utilized for tourism development by future generations.[10] According to Suryawati, the establishment of tourism should adhere to sustainability principles, ensuring that it is environmentally viable in the long run, commercially viable, and socially and ethically equitable for the community.[10] According to the Sustainable Tourism Charter (1995), sustainable tourism development refers to a form of development that is environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially and ethically equitable to society. Sustainable development refers to a comprehensive and coordinated endeavor aimed at enhancing the overall well-being of individuals by effectively managing the provision, growth, consumption, and preservation of resources in a manner that ensures long-term sustainability.[11]

The concept of ecotourism represents a viable strategy towards the development of sustainable tourism. The concept under discussion is not novel, and in light of rapid technological advancements shaping global dynamics, ecotourism has emerged as a highly favorable option for locations endowed with abundant natural resources, as exemplified by our country.[12] The fundamental principle underlying the concept of ecotourism pertains to the tourism industry's obligation to the environment in its management of tourist locations. Ecotourism encompasses a range of factors that emerge from a collective concern for environmental, economic, and social matters.[13] The primary objective of this ecotourism endeavor is to mitigate adverse effects, enhance environmental and cultural consciousness, facilitate favorable encounters for both tourists and the indigenous community, and foster economic advantages and empowerment for local populations.[9]

Ecotourism as one of the activities of the tourism industry will interact with various aspects of local community life, including in terms of economic, social, cultural, physical, and so on.[14] This shows that ecotourism activities will later affect the course of the economy and various local social and cultural phenomena. In general, the products of ecotourism include potential, attractiveness, facilities and accessibility.[15] The application of the ecotourism concept is usually carried out in areas with abundant natural resources or rich landscapes such as villages or outskirts. The implementation of the ecotourism concept focuses on how to manage an object as best as possible and provide education or understanding so that no damage or pollution occurs, be it on environmental, social or local cultural aspects. In its development, community involvement and participation is one of the keys to the success of this ecotourism activity.[2]

Research conducted by Itamar et al concluded that the tourist attraction development program has not gone well, it is still not optimal because it is connected to nature, so problems often occur due to nature.[16] Tourism development requires community participation. Tourism

development must pay attention to the main potential that exists in the region so that the most appropriate and appropriate steps will be obtained. The demand aspect of tourism continues to increase due to the increasing level of social welfare, there is a change in the scale of basic needs, where refreshing with tourism becomes one of the primary needs.[17] This understanding causes the number of tourists to continue to increase from time to time, not only domestic tourists but also foreign tourists.

Central Java is one of the provinces in Indonesia which has mainstay tourism potential. Tourist attractions in Central Java Province are spread across all districts/cities, in the form of natural tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, shopping tourism and culinary tourism. Leading ecotourism in Central Java includes the Dieng Plateau in Banjarnegara Regency, Karimunjawa National Park in Jepara Regency, Umbul Panggok in Klaten Regency, Baturaden Tourism in Banyumas Regency, and many other ecotourism spots. One of the main problems is how to utilize the existing ecotourism potential to increase economic growth and preserve the environment at the same time. Other challenges include sustainable infrastructure development, wise management of natural resources, empowerment of local communities, and promotion of tourism that focuses on ecological and cultural values.

This research aims to examine and formulate an ecotourism development strategy that can help Central Java utilize its natural and cultural potential in a sustainable manner. By understanding Central Java's ecotourism potential and designing appropriate strategies, we can create economic sustainability, maintain biodiversity and preserve valuable cultural heritage. Apart from that, sustainable ecotourism development can also increase public awareness of the importance of environmental and cultural preservation, making Central Java a sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism destination.

## **2 Method**

The study employs a descriptive research method characterised by a qualitative research approach. According to Sugiyono[21], a qualitative research method can be defined as an approach rooted in the postpositivist philosophy. This method is employed to investigate the state of natural phenomena, as opposed to experimental settings. In qualitative research, the researcher assumes a central role as the primary instrument, employing data collection techniques through triangulation.[18] The analysis of data in qualitative research is characterised by an inductive and qualitative approach, with an emphasis on extracting meaning rather than seeking generalizable findings. The researchers made the decision to employ a descriptive research methodology that incorporates a qualitative approach. There is an expectation for the acquisition of comprehensive, thorough, and significant data and information, with the aim of achieving the objectives of Ecotourism Development as a Sustainable Tourism Strategy in the region of Central Java.

## **3 Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Ecotourism as a Support for Sustainable Tourism Development**

The development of the tourism sector has a major impact on other sectors, one of which is the economic sector. The increasingly advanced and developing tourism sector brings various significant economic benefits to a country. First of all, the tourism sector can contribute to increasing the country's foreign exchange earnings. When domestic and foreign tourists come to enjoy the natural beauty, culture and culinary delights offered by a country, they spend money on accommodation, food, transportation, as well as various recreational and shopping activities. This creates new money flows into the country's economy, which in turn can strengthen the country's currency and provide financial stability.[19]

Apart from that, the tourism sector also drives overall national economic growth. With increasing tourist arrivals, there is greater demand for local services and products. This provides incentives for local entrepreneurs to expand their businesses and create new jobs. As the tourism industry grows, other sectors such as hotels, restaurants, transportation and creative industries are also growing rapidly. This increase in economic activity helps reduce unemployment rates and increases a country's productivity.[20]

When undertaking the implementation of tourism sector growth, one frequently encounters actions that possess the potential to generate adverse effects, particularly on the environment. Hence, it is imperative for the development of tourism to take into account the inherent potential and distinctive attributes of every place. The development of the tourism sector necessitates a comprehensive approach that goes beyond solely prioritizing economic advantages. It is imperative to also take into account the social, political, and ecological dimensions of the region.[21] The significance of sustainable development within the realm of tourism development is a matter of great importance. According to Grundy, the notion of Sustainable Development encompasses three distinct system aspects that are interconnected:[22]

- a) Ecological Sustainability. Ecological sustainability is a prerequisite for development and the continuation of life. Ecological sustainability will ensure the sustainability of the earth's ecosystem.
- b) Economic sustainability. Economic sustainability from a development perspective has two main aspects, both of which are closely related to the objectives of other aspects of sustainability.
- c) Social Sustainability. Overall, social sustainability is expressed in social justice, human dignity and improving the quality of life for all humans.

In this case the concept of ecotourism is suitable to be developed. Ecotourism is an alternative tourism considered as a way to improve the economic life of rural communities because it is considered to be able to provide employment opportunities, business opportunities, and increase the development of business capabilities, as well as provide greater opportunities to control the use of natural resources in certain areas as one of the assets of ecotourism activities.[23]

Developing an area into an ecotourism destination must begin with a careful assessment of the environmental carrying capacity. This is a key step in the ecological aspect, because it will ensure that ecotourism can take place in a balanced and sustainable manner. The carrying capacity of the environment includes various important elements, such as the availability of adequate clean water, the ability to manage land in a sustainable manner, and biodiversity which is an attraction for tourists. This assessment will help determine the maximum capacity of the ecotourism site to receive tourist visits without destroying the existing natural environment.

Furthermore, in the economic aspect, ecotourism development planning must include a comprehensive cost and benefit analysis. This includes not only calculating the potential economic benefits that can be obtained by all parties concerned, but also considering the costs that must be borne to protect and preserve the environment. This can include conservation costs, infrastructure maintenance, and other costs associated with operating and maintaining ecotourism. It is important to note that the timeframe for calculating costs and benefits may vary depending on the agreement between all stakeholders involved, with a focus on long-term sustainability.

In a socio-cultural context, ecotourism planning must take into account local social and cultural conditions. This includes identifying potential social and cultural assets that can be introduced to tourists, such as local customs, handicrafts and local community traditions. However, planning must also consider possible negative impacts that may occur as a result of increased tourism activity, such as changes in local community lifestyles or cultural conflicts. Therefore, socio-cultural impact management measures must be integrated into ecotourism planning, including strategies to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive benefits for local communities.

With a comprehensive approach to ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects in ecotourism development planning, sustainable ecotourism destinations can be produced, providing economic benefits to local communities, while maintaining the preservation of the natural environment and unique cultural heritage. This ensures that ecotourism not only provides a valuable experience for tourists, but also makes a positive contribution to the well-being of the environment and local communities.

Furthermore, the success of ecotourism development is highly dependent on a number of factors which can be grouped into three main categories: internal factors, external factors, and structural factors. An in-depth analysis of these factors is important for understanding and planning sustainable ecotourism development.

The first internal factor is the regional potential for ecotourism development. This includes natural wealth, environmental beauty, and the unique charms of a location. This potential is the main basis for the development of ecotourism, because without natural resources and striking beauty, it is difficult to attract tourists. Furthermore, the knowledge and commitment of ecotourism operators to environmental preservation is also an important internal factor. Operators who have a good understanding of the impact of ecotourism on the environment and are committed to managing ecotourism sustainably will be more likely to achieve long-term success. In addition, the active participation of local residents in the development and management of ecotourism is another important factor. Local community involvement not only creates strong social ties with ecotourism destinations, but can also increase acceptance and support from local communities.

External factors include aspects that come from outside the ecotourism location. Tourist awareness and behavior towards environmental sustainability is an important factor in the success of ecotourism. Tourists who care about preserving the environment tend to respect the rules and guidelines that apply, and choose environmentally responsible ecotourism operators. In addition, research and educational activities carried out in ecotourism areas for the purpose of environmental preservation can increase public understanding and awareness of environmental issues. This can help create a strong conservation culture around ecotourism sites. The active participation of local communities in educational and research activities can also strengthen their involvement in conservation efforts.

Structural factors include various institutions, policies and regulations governing the management of ecotourism areas. This includes local, regional, national, and international levels. This structure greatly influences the way ecotourism is developed, supervised and promoted. Policies that support environmental preservation, regulation of tourist traffic, and sustainable management of natural resources are examples of policies that can support the success of ecotourism. In addition, cooperation between various stakeholders, including government, private sector and local communities, is an important structural factor in managing conflict and ensuring the sustainability of ecotourism.

Effective collaboration between society, government, academics and practitioners is the key to success in developing the tourism sector through ecotourism. The importance of this collaboration is strengthened by the understanding that sustainable ecotourism development is not a short-lived effort that can be realized in a short period of time. Instead, a long-term strategy is needed that focuses on ecological, social and economic sustainability. This involves careful planning, continuous monitoring, and adjustments as developments occur over time. The process of sustainable ecotourism development cannot be realized in a short time, but requires long-term planning and strategies.

### **3.2 Ecotourism Development as a Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in Central Java**

The overarching objective for the development of the tourism sector in Central Java Province is to position Central Java as a prominent and highly sought-after tourism destination. In order to realize the envisioned goals, there are four primary missions that need to be accomplished. These missions include: (a) the development of tourism destinations that possess unique characteristics, ensure safety and comfort, exhibit attractiveness, are easily accessible, prioritize environmental sustainability, and contribute to the economic growth of the community and region; (b) the effective, synergistic, and responsible execution of tourism marketing strategies to increase the number of tourist visits from both domestic and international sources; (c) the establishment of a competitive tourism industry that fosters business collaboration and assumes responsibility for the preservation of the natural and cultural environment; and (d) the enhancement of local government organizations, private sector involvement, community engagement, human resources, regulations, service quality, and operational efficiency to facilitate sustainable development within the tourism sector.

The development goals of the tourism sector in Central Java Province encompass several objectives. Firstly, there is a focus on enhancing the quality and quantity of tourism destinations. Secondly, there is an emphasis on implementing effective, efficient, and responsible communication strategies for Provincial Tourism Destinations (DPP) through various marketing channels. Thirdly, the aim is to establish a tourism industry that contributes positively to the national economy. Lastly, there is a commitment to developing tourism institutions and governance that can effectively integrate tourism destination development, tourism marketing, and the tourism industry with a high level of professionalism. The development of the tourism sector in Central Java Province encompasses four primary aspects, which are the development of tourism destinations, the enhancement of tourism marketing efforts, the promotion of sustainable growth within the tourism industry, and the establishment of effective tourism institutions and

governance. These aspects are derived from the vision, mission, and objectives set forth for the province's tourism sector.

The development of a sustainable tourism industry in Central Java Province requires a strategy that includes the development of ecotourism as an important component. This province is fortunate to have diverse and abundant natural potential and cultural riches, so that the development of ecotourism is a very relevant approach in optimizing these resources while maintaining their sustainability. Therefore, several strategies that can be applied in the development of ecotourism in Central Java, namely:

#### 3.2.1 Participatory Tourism Development

Participatory Tourism Development is one strategy that is very relevant in developing ecotourism in Central Java. This concept creates opportunities for local communities, including indigenous communities and farmers, to be actively involved in the planning, implementation and management of tourism destinations. By involving local people, decision-making becomes more inclusive, and they have a say in how ecotourism will be developed in their area. This participation can also create a more equitable economic impact, as revenue from tourism can flow to local communities through various businesses such as homestays, local tour guides, or selling local products. In addition, community involvement in protecting the environment becomes stronger, because they have a personal interest in maintaining the natural and cultural attractions that form the basis of ecotourism. Thus, Participatory Tourism Development not only enriches the tourist experience, but also provides significant positive benefits for the people and nature of Central Java.

#### 3.2.2 Create regulations and policies that favor ecotourism development

This involves local and central government in drafting regulations that direct tourism development that is sustainable and environmentally sound. These regulations should prioritize the protection of nature, culture and local resources while regulating tourist activities and management of tourism destinations. The importance of proper regulations and policies is to control negative impacts such as environmental damage, noise, and increased waste, which often result from uncontrolled tourism growth. Regulations can also regulate visit quotas, visiting times, and types of activities permitted at each ecotourism destination. In this way, these regulations help maintain the sustainability of ecotourism and protect natural and cultural ecosystems that are tourist attractions. In addition, regulations and policies that support ecotourism development can also encourage private investment and participation that supports sustainable ecotourism principles. This includes tax incentives, training programs, or regulations that support the use of renewable energy and environmentally friendly practices in tourism infrastructure.

#### 3.2.3 Strengthening local wisdom values

Strengthening local wisdom values is a key strategy in developing ecotourism in Central Java. This includes efforts to respect, preserve and promote traditions, culture and local knowledge that exist in communities around tourism destinations. In this way, ecotourism becomes not only about exploring beautiful nature, but also about understanding and appreciating the cultural and historical roots underlying the destination. Integrating local wisdom values in ecotourism development means paying respect to indigenous communities, efforts to preserve language, traditional arts and other cultural

practices that are characteristic of the area. This not only supports cultural continuity, but also provides additional income to the community through arts and crafts demonstrations, organizing cultural events or providing traditional food and drinks. In addition, strengthening local wisdom values can also enhance the tourist experience, giving them deeper insight into local culture and traditions. This can open doors for interaction between tourists and local communities, which can enrich the tourist experience and strengthen the link between the community and tourism.

#### 3.2.4 Integrated Ecotourism Marketing

This concept refers to efforts to combine various marketing aspects, from online promotions to partnerships with travel agents, to market ecotourism destinations effectively. With this approach, the main goal is to reach a wider and more diverse audience, as well as ensuring that the tourism messages conveyed take into account sustainability, culture and natural beauty. Integrated marketing also includes collaboration between government, the private sector and local communities to create strong and cohesive campaigns. This can involve the use of social media, official websites, advertising campaigns and even participation in tourism fairs. By pooling resources and marketing efforts, ecotourism destinations can gain greater visibility in the global tourism market. In addition, integrated marketing can also support sustainability principles by educating tourists about responsible tourism practices, such as keeping the environment clean, respecting local culture, and minimizing environmental impacts. This not only helps protect ecotourism destinations, but also ensures a positive and rewarding tourist experience.

#### 3.2.5 Changing all other types of tourism into an ecotourism concept

This concept means transforming various existing types of tourism, such as cultural, historical or adventure tourism, into a more sustainable and environmentally friendly form of tourism. This can be done by incorporating ecotourism principles in the management and promotion of these destinations. For example, cultural tourism can be integrated with an ecotourism approach by ensuring that visitors understand and appreciate existing cultural heritage, while supporting the preservation of local traditions. Likewise, adventure tourism can be transformed into ecotourism by ensuring that activities such as hiking, rafting or diving are carried out with minimal environmental impact and with the welfare of local communities in mind. This concept not only focuses on changing existing types of tourism but also involves educating tourists and training tourism service providers to understand the principles of ecotourism. In this way, Central Java can optimize existing tourism potential while maintaining a balance between sustainable tourism development and environmental and cultural protection. Additionally, this can be a positive example for other regions to adopt more sustainable ecotourism practices in the global effort to protect our earth.



## 4 Conclusion

In the development of the tourism sector, ecotourism is the main support for sustainable tourism development. Increasing tourist visits not only contributes to the country's foreign exchange earnings and national economic growth, but also has a positive impact on the environment and local communities. To achieve ecotourism sustainability, comprehensive planning must pay attention to ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects. This includes environmental carrying capacity assessment, cost and benefit analysis, and active involvement of local communities. Internal, external, and structural factors also play a key role in the success of ecotourism. The importance of cross-sector collaboration and understanding that ecotourism development is a long-term effort that requires continuous planning and monitoring is the basis for creating ecotourism destinations that are sustainable and provide benefits for all parties.

Ecotourism development has become a crucial strategy in efforts to achieve the vision of sustainable tourism development in Central Java Province. In this context, five main strategies have been identified to optimize the region's diverse natural and cultural potential. First, participatory tourism development that involves local communities in decision making and management of tourism destinations, creates equitable economic benefits, and strengthens commitment to environmental preservation. Second, regulations and policies that favor ecotourism development to regulate tourist activities, maintain environmental sustainability, and support environmentally friendly practices. Third, strengthening local wisdom values that promote traditions, culture and local knowledge, provide additional income to the community, and enrich the tourist experience. Fourth, integrated ecotourism marketing that includes various communication channels and involves various stakeholders to reach a wider audience and support the principles of sustainability. And fifth, the transformation of various types of tourism into the concept of ecotourism is also a relevant strategy.

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