

The Perception of Local People on Forest Conversion

Meria Octavianti¹, Herlina Agustin²

Communication Management Department, Communication Science Faculty, Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia¹

Journalism Department, Communication Science Faculty, Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia²

{meria.octavianti@unpad.ac.id}

Abstract. Pangandaran Regency is currently promoting tourism development seriously. The region status change from kecamatan (district) to Kabupaten (Regency) of West Java makes it increase its focus to develop the tourism aspect as an added-value. The regent government encourages its communities to create, manage and build tourism objects in their respective areas. Its sloping topography makes them able to develop both in lowlands and highlands. Thus, forest conversion for tourism is dotting Pangandaran. The most recent one is Jojogan. The transformation, indeed, affects many aspects, from ecological balance to nearby local people. Public perception of the conversion has been an exciting subject to study. Therefore, using the quantitative descriptive method, this research sought to describe the perception of Dusun Gunungtiga in Desa Cintaratu, Kecamatan Parigi, Kabupaten Pangandaran on forest conversion of Jojogan in their neighborhood. Primary data was collected by distributing a questionnaire to respondents, while secondary data by interview and observation. Results reveal that local people perceived the conversion positively. The positive perception on Jojogan also shows that the tourism management of Jojogan has referred to management principles that emphasize the values of natural environment sustainability, community, and social, so it enables tourists to enjoy tourism activities and benefits local people.

Keywords: Public Perception, Forest Conversion, Tourism Communication

1. Introduction

A region with great potential in tourism and a mission to be a world tourism destination and a safe, comfortable, and religious neighborhood by 2025[1], Pangandaran is currently concerned with tourism development. A business sector, tourism can increase regional revenue. Therefore, the youngest regency of West Java with a sloping topography and extraordinary natural beauty takes the opportunity of tourism development as one of its mainstay programs in developing its region. The development, both in lowlands and highlands, will be able to contribute significantly to the improvement of the regional economy.

Though tourism is a lucrative business, still it holds some risks. As cited by Eahyudi, Daniel states that "tourism emits no smokes, but pollution comes in many forms." Besides economic benefits, tourism also significantly affect the environment.

According to Naisbitt, “the simultaneous and continuous development of the tourism sector may erode environmental quality and disclose local cultural features.” The existing concept of mass tourism results in many negative impacts. Therefore, it is replaced by an ecological concept. Naisbitt also states that the form of tourism that complies ecological principles is one that combines recreation, education, conservation, and economic elements in a complete package. It does not offer recreation to tourism objects only, but also preserve it and enjoy its all manifestations [2].

This eco-tourism concept has been implemented in Pangandaran. Local government has started to disseminate it through many tourism development programs, especially after natural disasters struck Pangandaran. One of them was flash flood soaking thousands of homes in October 2016. This happened due to forest conversion in the regency which in fact has a sloping topography. If the forest is not managed properly, it may invite a greater natural disaster. The critical area is currently 5940 acres inside, and, according to Adi Nugraha, Head of Department of Marine, Agriculture and Forestry of Pangandaran Regency, 9951 acres outside. Therefore all stakeholders must be synergized to strengthen forest management. The sloping topography makes the lowest area, where the majority of Pangandaran residents live in, the most severely affected by the flood [3].

Given the critical condition, tourism development in the highlands, where many new tourism attractions grow, should be given greater attention. One of the most recently developed tourism attractions is Jojogan in Desa Cintaratu Kecamatan Parigi Kabupaten Pangandaran, offering great sightseeing. The panorama of its vast, blue sea can be enjoyed from hills. In addition, the dense trees, the harmony of sounds of birds, and the splashing waterfall can make tourists relax as if they get a brand new, different life.

The rich tourism attractions of Jojogan's nature, such as the cave, river, waterfall, and unspoiled forest, makes its development run very fast. The number of visitors increases significantly although this new tourism object was just officially opened in 2016. This makes the government, that have already concerned with tourism, gives more attention to the development of Jojogan. Together with the management, they uphold the eco-tourism concept for its development.

Local governments and managers uphold the concept of environmentally sound tourism development in the development of tourist attraction Jojogan. This is reinforced by a statement from the head of the management, Hernayadi, that the development of Jojogan is thought deeply. It must preserve nature and uphold the character and culture of local communities.

No matter how good the tourism development is, it will not be effective and efficient if it is not supported significantly by the community. They have to get a sufficient education about how to manage tourism object so that they will highly appreciate it for themselves, their families, and neighborhood, and participate in the development. Considering this background, this research sought to provide a comprehensive description of the perception of local people on the conversion of Jojogan, from natural to tourism forest.

Several studies on the perception of local people on forest conversion have been conducted. One of them is “*The Public Perception and Behavior on the Preservation of Forest Function as Water Absorption Area*” conducted by Umar. The study aims to find out the public perception and behavior on the preservation of forest function as water absorption area. This descriptive, analytical study processed data collected from a questionnaire distributed to respondents and field observations. The study took place in Kawasan Hutan Penggaron (Penggaron Forest Area), Semarang Regency, Central Java. After analyzing data, the study concludes that the existing cultivation activities in Kawasan Hutan Penggaron disrupt the function of the forest as a water absorption area. Local people perceive that the forest not only

serves ecological but also as a source of livelihood. In regard to forest management policy, they don't have any perception of the legal norms of forest management. And in regard to forest management institutions, they don't think that they're a part of any institutions so they don't bound to the institutional rules. In regard to the rights and obligations of forest management, the community's perception is strongly related to their interest to enjoy benefits from the existence of forests without obeying any forestry law. Regarding the community's behavior (activity), they tend to conduct their cultivation activities in protected (forest) area. Accessibility support and housing infrastructure in Kawasan Hutan Penggaron have converted it to an economic area, so it's no longer an isolated area (protection area) [4].

The other study is "*The Perception of Today's Community on Environmental Conservation.*" The study conducted by Lutfi and Wijaya in 2011 aims to find out the community's perception of environmental conservation and the adoption of perception in their activities. The study used a qualitative method to obtain accurate and valid data. The results show that the community's perception of environmental conservation is inseparable from their activities as a farmer. Their dependent on environment shapes their perception of conservation inherent in their daily life patterns. But this is changing along with social changes in the community. The interaction between Sekaran community and immigrant students promotes changing views of nature and livelihood. When the livelihood system is no longer rely on the management of natural resources, the perception of environmental conservation changes as well. It is proven by their activity pattern that is not fully committed to environmental conservation. A collective ritual that used to preserve the environment has now been changed by personal activity in narrower meaning [5].

2. Method

The research of public perception on forest conversion in Pangandaran was conducted quantitatively, where the process of finding facts used numerical data [6]. The explanatory survey was used as the method where information was collected from respondents by questionnaire. Generally, the survey is defined limitedly to research where the collection of data is from representative samples of the entire population. Thus, it is research that takes samples from a population dan uses the questionnaire as its main data collection [7].

Primary data collection techniques in this study were conducted using a questionnaire, while secondary data obtained from interviews and observation. The population in this study is all the people who live in the forest area of Pangandaran Regency. By using purposive sampling, that is determining criteria appropriate with the purpose of research, then the sample in this study is all the people who live in Hamlet Gunungtiga Cintaratu Village Pangandaran regency, which is the closest settlement with the location of the object of the jungle tour Jojogan experiencing jungle tour.

Data analysis technique used in this research is descriptive analysis technique. According to Azwar, descriptive analysis technique aims to describe the object of research based on data and variables obtained from the group of subjects studied, and not intended for testing the hypothesis [8].

Data obtained from the questionnaires by the respondents were analyzed by using descriptive analysis technique that is grouping data based on the type of question, tabulated, then analyzed in depth. Validity test is done by using with an item-total correlation coefficient (Corrected Item-Total-Correlation) while the reliability test in this research is measured by Alpha Cornbach coefficient of reliability. Data obtained from this study will be presented in the form of exposure where the exposure is the respondent's answer to a number of questions

or statements submitted in the questionnaire. In addition, to facilitate researchers in analyzing and provide a clear picture of the situation, research data will be presented also by using charts, tables, and graphs. After exposure, then researchers draw conclusions from this study conducted by the deductive way. Where each meaning is successfully analyzed from data collected during this study, aims to get the final conclusion.

3. Result and discussion

Results from this research reveal that 54% of respondents were female and 46% were male, where 91% of all were the native of Dusun Gunungtiga, Desa Cintaratu. Demographically, the age range of them was from 15–75, where 35% were 35-44, 20% were 25-34, 17% were 45-54, 15% were 15-24, 11% were 55-64 and 2% were 65-75.

Based on education, the respondents are of low categories. The result reveal that all of the respondents, 46% were elementary school graduates, 40% were junior high school, 5% were high school, and 3% respectively were diploma, bachelor, magister, and non-school

The condition is correlated with the data of the research that show that most local people had a slight knowledge of the function of the forest. Only 41% of total respondents knew the correct function, 20% were in doubt, and 39% respondents admitted that they didn't know at all.

In spite of the knowledge, they still approved the existence of tourism forest Jojogan in their neighborhood. But even so, only 68% that said it benefited them, and 28% stated otherwise and 4% expressed doubt.

However, if it's compared to previous forest condition, 72% of villagers stated that tourism forest was much more favorable, 15% expressed doubt, and 13% still preferred the original Jojogan. This fact is reinforced by research data since all villagers of Dusun Gunungtiga, Desa Cintaratu, Kecamatan Parigi, Kabupaten Pangandaran were pleased with tourism forest Jojogan in their neighborhood.

Eighty percents of villagers stated that tourism forest Jojogan would not damage nature's sustainability and will not cause environmental problems as well. Only 11% stated otherwise and 9% expressed doubt. This is not only due to local community forest management, but the enforcement of nature conservation. Eighty-five percents also stated that the visitors of Jojogan might also preserve the forest by not littering.

Although only 37% of villagers stated that tourism forest Jojogan was important, 55% expressed doubt, and 8% said otherwise. Sixty-seven percents said that the conversion was the right thing to do, 24% expressed doubt, and 9% said it's wrong.

Sixty-eight percents of villagers participated in the management and development of tourism forest Jojogan, 28% did not participate, and the remaining 4% participated occasionally.

This is due to the great support of the local government in the development of Jojogan. Ninety-one percents of villagers considered the government supporting the development, while the remaining 9% expressed doubt.

According to Law number 41 of 1999 regarding forestry, a forest is an ecosystem unit in term of a plot of land containing bio-natural resources dominated by vegetation in integrated unity of environment thereof [9]. Whereas according to Suparmoko, the forest is a community association of plants and animals dominated by vegetation in a certain area to form a micro-climate and certain ecological conditions. Suparmoko also states that the functions of the forest are as follows: (1) to manage water, prevent and resolve flood and erosion, and maintain soil fertility; (2) to provide forest products for community and industry so as to support

economic development; (3) to maintain climate and provide good influence; (4) to provide natural beauty in form of nature reserves, wildlife reserves, hunting park, and excursion park as well as a lab for science, education, and tourism; (4) one element of national development strategies [10].

According to Forestry Service of West Java, by function, the types of forests are as follows: (1) Protected Forest. It serves as a protection for life support systems. (2) Conservation Forest. It has certain characteristics and serves as preservation for the diversity of plants and animals and their ecosystems. Conservation forest comprises: (a) Forest Preserve is a forest with certain characteristics that serves as preservation for the diversity of plants and animals and their ecosystems as well as a life support area. It comprises nature preserve, wildlife reserve, and hunting park. (b) Nature conservation forest is an area of land or waters with certain characteristics that serve as a protection for life support systems, preservation for the diversity of plants and animals, and sustainable use for natural resources and the ecosystems. Nature conservation forest comprises national park, forest park (TAHURA) and excursion forest. (3) Production Forest. It is a forest area for forest products to meet the needs of public, development, industry and export. There are three types of this forest: limited production forest (HPT), permanent production forest (HP), and convertible production forest (HPK).

Jojogan is an excursion forest, so it is a conservation forest functioning as a protection for life support systems, preservation for the diversity of plants and animals, and sustainable use for natural resources and the ecosystems. In spite of their knowledge, the villagers supported the existence of Jojogan as a tourism destination, tourism forest, that gave a different color to public perception.

According to Jalaludin Rakhmat, perception is an experience about objects, events, and relationships obtained by concluding information and interpreting message. It gives meaning to sensory stimuli. Interpreting the meaning of sensory information involves not only sensation but also attention, expectation, motivation, and memory [11].

The results show that the perception of the villagers of Dusun Gunungtiga, Desa Cintaratu, Kecamatan Parigi, Kabupaten Pangandaran on Jojogan is high.

Ninety-eight percent of villagers who lived around the tourism forest perceived it positively. Only 2% expressed neutral. This shows that Jojogan as a tourism forest is needed. It is by Sugianto that a person's perception will be positive if the object is in accordance with his needs. Otherwise it will be negative if it's against the needs of that person [12].

According to Sattar, perception is valuation, vision or one's point of view through a selective psychological process of an object or everything in his environment through his senses. As a unity of psychology, perception can affect the conception of an individual and directly affect his behavior change. One's behavior can not be separated from his perception of his/her actions [13].

According to Muchtar, perception is a process of sensing and interpreting the stimuli of an object or event informed so that one can perceive and interpret the received stimuli according to his state and his environment [14].

According to Kayam, perception is one's view of an object so that he gives a certain reaction resulting from his ability to organize observations and relate them to acceptance or rejection. The key to understanding one's perception lies in the unique introduction and interpretation of the object in a particular situation and not as a recording of a particular situation [15].

4. Conclusion

The positive perception on Jojogan also shows that the tourism management of Jojogan has referred to management principles that emphasize the values of natural environment sustainability, community, and social, so it enables tourists to enjoy tourism activities and benefits local people, in this case, the villagers of Dusun Gunungtiga, Desa Cintaratu, Kecamatan Parigi, Kabupaten Pangandaran.

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