

Sustainable Tourism Development in Rural Communities: A Case Study of Desa Sawangan's Cultural Heritage and Infrastructure Challenges

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Abstract

This study investigates the development of sustainable tourism in Desa Sawangan, a rural area in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, focusing on community empowerment, cultural heritage preservation, and infrastructure development. The problem addressed is the limited tourism growth in the region, primarily due to insufficient infrastructure, low local engagement, and challenges in preserving cultural heritage. Using a qualitative research approach, the study conducted interviews with local stakeholders, including community leaders, tourism managers, and tourists, to explore the key barriers and opportunities in tourism development. The main findings indicate that although Desa Sawangan possesses significant cultural and natural tourism potential, the lack of adequate infrastructure, local awareness, and effective collaboration among stakeholders hinder its growth. The study concludes that improving infrastructure, enhancing local community involvement, and fostering better collaboration between stakeholders are crucial for achieving sustainable tourism development in Desa Sawangan, ultimately benefiting both the local economy and cultural preservation.

Keywords: *Sustainable Tourism, Stakeholder Collaboration, Sawangan Village*

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, much research has focused on the importance of sustainable tourism and its impact on local communities. Sustainable tourism emphasizes preserving the environment, supporting local economies, and maintaining cultural heritage (Peeters et al., 2024; Saayman & Li, 2023). Studies have highlighted that, as tourism grows globally, there is a critical need to balance economic growth with ecological and social responsibility (Darwis et al., 2024; Hilmiyatun et al., 2022). Understanding this balance has led to the development of strategies to ensure that tourism can contribute to long-term benefits for the environment and local populations while minimizing negative effects such as environmental degradation and cultural erosion. Research also emphasizes the importance of collaborative governance to achieve this balance, particularly in multi-sectoral settings where various stakeholders—governmental, non-governmental, and local communities—work together towards common goals (Patadjenu et al., 2023).

However, it remains unclear why many rural areas, particularly those in developing countries, have not fully capitalized on the potential of sustainable tourism. Research has shown that these areas face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient community involvement, and a lack of effective government policies (Bela & Utama, 2022; Kafle, 2022). For example, despite the rich tourism potential of regions like Likupang in North Minahasa, Indonesia, issues of suboptimal cooperation between government and non-government actors hinder the effectiveness of sustainable tourism efforts (Darmayasa et al., 2023; Patadjenu et al., 2023). Moreover, in areas such as Likupang, the lack of infrastructure to support tourism growth further complicates the sustainability of tourism development (Apriyanti et al., 2024; Zhuang et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding the challenges these areas face in optimizing tourism

development while preserving their local resources and communities is critical for future progress.

The purpose of this study was to explore how sustainable tourism can be effectively implemented in rural areas, focusing on community empowerment, cultural preservation, and infrastructure development. Specifically, this research investigates the case of Likupang, a tourism special economic zone in North Minahasa, Indonesia, to understand the role of local communities in shaping the development of sustainable tourism (Chirenje et al., 2013; Putra & Arafat, 2021). This study is vital, as Likupang represents both the challenges and opportunities of rural tourism development, with efforts to balance environmental, economic, and social priorities (Warouw et al., 2023). Through this research, we aim to identify key factors that support or hinder the successful development of sustainable tourism in similar rural contexts, providing a framework for other regions seeking to foster responsible tourism practices.

This study also seeks to address gaps in the existing literature regarding community-based tourism (CBT) practices, particularly in the context of developing countries. While numerous studies have examined the relationship between tourism and local economies (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023; Shasha et al., 2020), relatively few have focused specifically on the active role of local communities in sustaining rural tourism initiatives (Khalid et al., 2019; Michniewicz-Ankiersztajn et al., 2018). Recent research has underscored the significance of community empowerment, inclusive governance, and localized planning as key elements in fostering sustainable tourism models (Hu et al., 2022).

Moreover, many existing studies tend to approach tourism development from a macro-level perspective, often overlooking the nuanced influence of community-level governance, infrastructural readiness, and social capital in determining the success or failure of sustainable rural tourism (Ebel et al., 2023; Fernandez-Abila et al., 2024; Sayuti, 2023). For example, research by (Anggaini & Juviano, 2023) highlights how informal leadership and local decision-making structures can significantly impact tourism sustainability in rural Nordic regions, a finding that aligns with similar dynamics observed in Klungkung, Bali, Indonesia (Dewi et al., 2021).

Thus, this research aims to fill these gaps by exploring local-level governance mechanisms, infrastructure planning, and community-driven initiatives as critical factors in achieving sustainable tourism in rural contexts. It emphasizes the importance of bottom-up approaches that prioritize local needs, knowledge, and cultural values in tourism planning and development.

The principal findings of this research will offer insights into how community-based initiatives, cultural heritage conservation, and infrastructure development interact to support sustainable tourism in rural areas such as Likupang. By analyzing local programs, institutional frameworks, and the challenges faced by stakeholders, this study seeks to develop practical policy recommendations applicable to similar rural destinations. The study is structured to first assess the current tourism landscape in Likupang, followed by an evaluation of strategies implemented by local authorities and communities. It concludes by synthesizing these insights into a replicable framework for sustainable rural tourism. Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on CBT and provides policymakers with actionable tools for promoting inclusive and resilient tourism development (Liow, 2022; Liu et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted in Sawangan Village, located in Airmadidi District, North Minahasa Regency, a village with emerging tourism potential. Interviews and observations were

conducted in 2023 to gather qualitative data related to tourism development in the village. The report writing process was carried out in 2024, after the data collection and analysis phase, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of the local community in sustainable tourism development in Sawangan Village. Qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observations, are widely recognized for their ability to provide detailed insights into local perspectives and experiences (Creswell., 2017).

The research involved seven participants, each with a distinct role in tourism management and community activities in Sawangan Village. The informants included: EK (Manager of Pokdarwis, Sawangan Village), SR (Head of Bumdes, Sawangan Village), MP (Head of Karang Taruna, Sawangan Village), DJP (Village Chief of Sawangan Village), FT (Head of Marketing Division, Tourism Office of North Minahasa District), SM (Waruga Caretaker, Sawangan Village), and AW (Tourist of Sawangan Village). Interviews were conducted to gain insights from the experiences and perspectives of each informant, while observations were made to directly assess the tourism management practices in the village. The collected data was then analyzed to identify the key factors influencing the success of sustainable tourism development in Sawangan Village. The use of a case study approach, as described (Lexy J, 2019), allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the unique context and challenges faced by the village in its tourism development efforts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sawangan Village, located in Airmadidi District, North Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi, holds significant potential as a cultural, historical, and natural tourism destination. The village is renowned for its rich historical heritage, with landmarks such as colonial-era buildings that once served as government centers during Dutch rule. These buildings, featuring a unique blend of Minahasa and Dutch architectural styles, stand as silent witnesses to Indonesia's struggle for independence. Additionally, historical sites like the Waruga Ancient Tombs and the Japanese Cave, which trace the events of World War II, add depth to the region's historical offerings, making it an appealing destination for tourists interested in history and culture.

In addition to its historical assets, Sawangan Village also offers remarkable natural attractions. The Tondano River, known for its 9-kilometer stretch of rapids, provides an exciting challenge for adventure seekers with 12 distinct rapids points, making it a prime location for rafting activities. The surrounding beauty of Mount Klabat further attracts nature lovers. The local community also preserves rich social traditions, regularly hosting cultural events that showcase the Minahasa heritage. This sense of community, combined with friendly locals, enhances the appeal of the village for visitors, encouraging repeat visits. Moreover, the village has the potential to develop local products like Minahasa crafts and agricultural products such as vanilla, cloves, and mangosteen, which can serve as souvenirs for tourists. Although the village has gained recognition with awards such as the 2021 Trisakti Award and being in the top 500 of the 2022 ADWI, there is a need for improved infrastructure, accessibility, and sustainable tourism management to fully realize its potential. With the right steps, Sawangan could become a leading tourism destination, boosting the local economy while preserving its natural and cultural heritage.



Figure 1. Sawangan Waruga Antiquities Park



Figure 2. Japanese Cave Cultural Heritage



Figure 3. Rafting

Figure 1 depicts the Sawangan Waruga Antiquities Park, a historical site that houses the ancient Waruga tombs, which are significant to the Minahasa culture and offer visitors a glimpse into the region's past burial practices. Figure 2 showcases the Japanese Cave Cultural Heritage, a site tied to World War II, where visitors can explore remnants of the past, including Japanese-era structures and artifacts, providing a deep historical connection to the war. Figure 3 illustrates the exhilarating rafting experience on the Tondano River, where adventure enthusiasts can navigate through its 9-kilometer stretch of rapids, offering both an adrenaline-pumping activity and an opportunity to enjoy the village's natural beauty. Each of these attractions highlights a unique aspect of Sawangan's rich cultural, historical, and natural offerings, making it a well-rounded destination for various types of tourists.

Based on the interviews conducted, several key findings and insights emerged regarding the development of tourism in Desa Sawangan. Firstly, a significant challenge identified by the stakeholders was the lack of adequate attention from the government. As Ibu Erni Kalalo, the Manager of Pokdarwis, noted, "The limited budget and facilities for managing the tourism destination severely affect our efforts in developing tourism in this area." This lack of support from the government hampers the ability to improve infrastructure and create a more attractive tourism environment for visitors. Despite the recognition of the potential, there remains a gap in governmental assistance, which is crucial to the growth of the sector.

In addition to the lack of government attention, another major obstacle is the insufficient infrastructure in the village. Ibu Erni Kalalo emphasized that the limited access to roads, inadequate toilets, and lack of parking spaces made it difficult for tourists to have a positive experience. The narrow roads leading to Desa Sawangan, coupled with underdeveloped public facilities, create a barrier for both visitors and local businesses. Without improvements in these

essential facilities, tourism growth in the area will be severely constrained, as it directly impacts the comfort and convenience of visitors.

Another key finding concerns the community’s awareness and involvement in preserving the cultural heritage of the region, specifically related to the Waruga heritage site. Ibu Syane Mawuntu, the Waruga caretaker, highlighted that “the local community’s awareness of preserving cultural heritage, especially regarding Waruga, is still not optimal.” This suggests a need for more educational efforts to increase community involvement in the conservation of local traditions and historical sites. While some initiatives exist, greater community engagement is required to ensure the long-term protection and sustainability of cultural resources, which are vital to the tourism experience in Desa Sawangan.

Lastly, the lack of cooperation between different stakeholders also emerged as a significant challenge. According to Bapak Denny J Pieter, the Village Chief, "The lack of cooperation among stakeholders has had a considerable impact on tourism development efforts." There is a need for stronger collaboration between local government, tourism managers, and the community to ensure cohesive and effective strategies for sustainable tourism development. Better coordination could lead to more comprehensive solutions to the identified challenges, fostering a more robust and thriving tourism sector in Desa Sawangan.

Table 1. Key Insights, Strategies, Challenges, and Suggestions for Tourism Development in Desa Sawangan

Thema	Aspect	Informant	Key Insights/Strategies/Programs	Challenges	Suggestions/Comments
Community Empowerment	Community Empowerment	EK	Community education on environmental conservation, cleanliness, and hospitality. Skills training for souvenirs and traditional food industries.	Lack of local awareness and initial resistance to the programs.	Increasing community engagement and awareness about the importance of tourism.
Cultural Heritage	Cultural Preservation	SR	Emphasizing local cultural diversity as a tourism asset; organizing cultural performances.	Challenges in maintaining traditions and local interest in cultural practices.	Increase efforts to involve locals in preserving and promoting cultural heritage.
Tourism Development	Tourism Packages	EK	Developing tourism packages featuring Waruga, rafting, and Japanese caves. Provides a wide range of experiences for tourists.	Infrastructure limitations affecting the smooth execution of the tourism packages.	Focus on improving infrastructure to support a more seamless tourist experience.

Local Economy	Food and Souvenir Services	MP	Encouraging local food and souvenir production for tourists.	Low local participation in food and souvenir services.	Encourage locals to take part in food and souvenir businesses through training and incentives.
Infrastructure Development	Infrastructure and Facilities	DJP	Developing supporting infrastructure such as roads, toilets, parking spaces, and transportation.	Limited infrastructure impeding tourist access and experience.	Improve basic infrastructure to ensure tourists' comfort and safety.
Policy and Promotion	Tourism Promotion and Policy	FT	Coordination with stakeholders for tourism promotion and policies. Public relations and physical infrastructure improvement.	Slow process in policy and infrastructure development	Continue collaboration with local governments and increase tourism budget allocation.
Cultural Heritage Conservation	Cultural Heritage Conservation	SM	Promoting Waruga as a cultural heritage site. Educating locals on the importance of preserving heritage sites.	Lack of sufficient collaboration between stakeholders and local community.	Improve collaboration between all stakeholders (government, community, cultural groups) to preserve heritage.
Human Resource Development	Human Resource Development	DJP	Offering training programs for locals on tourism skills, including foreign languages and guiding.	Lack of trained professionals in the tourism sector.	Develop more comprehensive training programs for locals to become qualified tourism professionals.
Youth Involvement	Youth Engagement in Tourism	MP	Preparing the younger generation for careers in tourism. Encouraging youth to pursue tourism studies.	Insufficient awareness among youth about career opportunities in tourism.	Facilitate partnerships with educational institutions and training programs for the youth.
Tourist Experience	Tourist Experience and Feedback	AW	Appreciates attractions like Waruga and Japanese caves. However, highlights issues with limited infrastructure (roads, toilets, parking).	Infrastructure issues affecting overall tourist satisfaction.	Improve infrastructure to ensure a more positive experience for tourists.

Source: processed data, 2024

The table provides a summary of key insights, strategies, challenges, and suggestions from various informants regarding the development of tourism in Desa Sawangan. It highlights

community empowerment through education and skills training, with a focus on local cultural heritage, such as promoting Waruga and organizing cultural performances. It also addresses the development of tourism packages and local economy initiatives, like food and souvenir services. Challenges include limited infrastructure, lack of local participation, and slow policy implementation. The suggestions emphasize improving infrastructure, increasing local engagement, fostering collaborations among stakeholders, and expanding training programs for human resources and youth involvement in tourism

Discussion

The findings of this study clearly show that Desa Sawangan has significant potential to become a prominent tourist destination, thanks to its rich cultural heritage, historical sites, and natural beauty. The local community, led by initiatives such as the Pokdarwis, has been actively involved in fostering tourism-related activities. However, despite the promising potential, the development of tourism in Desa Sawangan faces several challenges, particularly in infrastructure, local engagement, and collaboration among stakeholders. The study suggests that while the local community's efforts in promoting cultural heritage and developing tourism packages are commendable, significant improvements are needed in both the physical and human resources required for sustainable tourism development.

One explanation for the challenges in tourism development in Desa Sawangan lies in the limited infrastructure, as noted by several informants. The village's roads, parking facilities, and essential amenities such as toilets need significant improvement to accommodate the growing number of tourists. Studies on Development of Rural Tourism (Xue et al., 2023) highlight that inadequate infrastructure often leads to negative tourist experiences and reduced destination attractiveness. Moreover, local participation in the food and souvenir sectors remains low, which is an essential aspect of tourism development, as highlighted by previous research (Huo et al., 2023). The low local involvement in tourism-related businesses may result from limited awareness and a lack of proper training programs (Chan et al., 2021). Consequently, this has a direct impact on the economic benefits that tourism can bring to the local community.

Additionally, the local community's involvement in preserving cultural heritage sites, particularly the Waruga and other historical monuments, remains inconsistent. Several studies have shown that cultural preservation is crucial in attracting tourists seeking authentic experiences (Alparisi & Nuraeni, 2021). The lack of sufficient collaboration between local residents, cultural groups, and government bodies has hindered the optimal conservation of these historical sites. According to (Suprpti et al., 2022), involving local communities in heritage conservation leads to more sustainable outcomes and greater pride in cultural assets. However, the absence of coordinated efforts has led to the slow progress of these initiatives. Therefore, it is essential to establish more robust mechanisms for collaboration and community involvement established to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage. By strengthening these collaborative efforts, the development of tourism villages can achieve its full potential, driving both economic growth and the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage (Tahlia Kartika et al., 2024).

The findings suggest that overcoming the challenges in infrastructure and local engagement will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including government agencies, tourism professionals, and the local community. By improving infrastructure and investing in training programs for local residents, Desa Sawangan can enhance its capacity to serve tourists effectively. However, as shown in previous studies (Junaid, 2021; Junaid et al., 2019), the development of sustainable tourism requires not only physical infrastructure but also a strong human resource framework to ensure the long-term success of the industry. Despite these potential benefits, limitations such as political barriers, insufficient funding, and a lack of technical expertise may hinder the full realization of these objectives. Furthermore, as stated

(Drápela, 2023), tourism development in rural areas may face resistance from local communities who may fear the negative consequences of rapid commercialization.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that sustainable tourism development in Desa Sawangan can be realized through a series of concrete and collaborative actions. Key priorities include improving basic infrastructure such as road access, sanitation, and wayfinding systems to enhance accessibility and tourist satisfaction. Capacity building for local residents is also essential, particularly through structured training in tourism management, hospitality, and cultural interpretation. Establishing a community-based tourism task force can facilitate coordination and ensure inclusive participation in tourism planning and decision-making. Furthermore, integrating tourism development into local policy frameworks will help align initiatives with environmental sustainability and cultural preservation goals. To ensure accountability and long-term success, local authorities should implement clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess progress and adapt strategies as needed. These operational steps provide a practical roadmap for Desa Sawangan and similar rural communities to pursue sustainable and community-centered tourism development.

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