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Community-Based Tourism Development Strategies at Lejja Hot Springs Soppeng Regency

Strategi Pengembangan Pariwisata Berbasis Komunitas di Permandian Air Panas Lejja Kabupaten Soppeng

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) around Lejja Hot Springs in Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi. The main focus of this research is to explore the role of local government and the community in managing the tourism destination and to assess the economic, social, and environmental impacts of community-based tourism development in the area. A qualitative approach was used in this research, with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews with government officials, tourism operators, and local community members, along with direct observation at the site. The findings show that active community participation in tourism planning and management has led to positive impacts on economic empowerment and the preservation of local culture. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, lack of training for the community, and environmental management issues still pose significant barriers to further development. This study is expected to provide recommendations for stakeholders to enhance the sustainability of community-based tourism at Lejja.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Tourism Management, Economic Empowerment, Cultural Preservation, Lejja.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi pariwisata berbasis komunitas (CBT) di sekitar Permandian Air Panas Lejja, Kabupaten Soppeng, Sulawesi Selatan. Fokus utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi peran pemerintah daerah dan masyarakat setempat dalam pengelolaan destinasi wisata, serta menilai dampak ekonomi, sosial, dan lingkungan dari pengembangan pariwisata berbasis komunitas di wilayah tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara mendalam dengan pejabat pemerintah, pengelola wisata, serta masyarakat lokal, diikuti dengan observasi langsung di lokasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi aktif masyarakat dalam perencanaan dan pengelolaan pariwisata telah memberikan dampak positif terhadap pemberdayaan ekonomi dan pelestarian budaya lokal. Namun, beberapa tantangan seperti terbatasnya infrastruktur, kurangnya pelatihan untuk masyarakat, dan masalah pengelolaan lingkungan masih menjadi hambatan utama dalam pengembangan wisata ini.

Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan rekomendasi bagi pengelola dan pihak terkait untuk meningkatkan keberlanjutan pariwisata berbasis komunitas di Lejja.

Kata Kunci: Pariwisata Berbasis Komunitas, Pengelolaan Wisata, Pemberdayaan Ekonomi, Pelestarian Budaya, Lejja.

INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a pivotal strategy in sustainable tourism development, emphasizing the active participation of local communities in managing and benefiting from tourism activities. This approach not only fosters economic growth but also ensures the preservation of cultural and environmental assets. In Indonesia, a country rich in natural and cultural diversity, CBT has been recognized as a means to empower local communities and promote sustainable tourism practices.

Community-Based Tourism is defined as a form of tourism where local communities are directly involved in the planning, development, and management of tourism activities. This involvement ensures that the economic benefits of tourism are distributed equitably among community members and that the cultural and environmental integrity of the destination is maintained. According to Suansri (2003), CBT is characterized by community participation, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability.

The significance of CBT lies in its ability to empower local communities, enhance cultural exchange, and promote environmental conservation. By involving community members in tourism activities, CBT fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to better management of natural and cultural resources. Additionally, CBT contributes to poverty alleviation by creating employment opportunities and generating income for local residents. As noted by Telfer and Sharpley (2008), CBT can lead to improved livelihoods and increased community well-being.

Lejja Hot Springs, located in Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is a prime example of a natural resource with significant tourism potential. The area is renowned for its therapeutic hot springs, which have been utilized for centuries by local communities. The unique geological features and the rich cultural heritage of the region make it an attractive destination for both domestic and international tourists.

Implementing CBT in Lejja Hot Springs offers numerous benefits. It provides an opportunity to preserve the traditional knowledge and practices associated with the hot springs, while also promoting sustainable tourism development. Engaging the local community in tourism activities can lead to the development of infrastructure, improvement of services, and enhancement of the overall visitor experience. Moreover, it can serve as a model for other regions across Indonesia, such as *Bali* and *Wae Rebo* village in East Nusa Tenggara, which have successfully implemented CBT programs and demonstrated the benefits and challenges of such an approach. By integrating the experiences from these regions, CBT at Lejja Hot Springs can be further strengthened and optimized.

Despite its advantages, the implementation of CBT in Lejja Hot Springs faces several challenges. These include limited infrastructure, lack of capacity among local communities, and the need for effective marketing strategies. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative approach involving local communities, government agencies, and private stakeholders. Capacity building, infrastructure development, and strategic marketing are essential components for the successful implementation of CBT.

Furthermore, what makes Lejja Hot Springs distinct from other community-based tourism destinations in Indonesia is its unique combination of natural and cultural aspects. Unlike other

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destinations, Lejja is not only known for its therapeutic hot springs but also for its deep-rooted cultural practices that involve the community in every aspect of the tourism experience. The integration of these traditional practices, such as healing rituals and local performances, offers a unique experience for visitors, differentiating Lejja from other similar destinations.

Community-Based Tourism presents a viable pathway for the sustainable development of Lejja Hot Springs. By leveraging the natural and cultural assets of the region and involving the local community in tourism activities, it is possible to achieve economic benefits, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. However, careful planning, capacity building, and collaboration among stakeholders are crucial to overcoming the challenges and realizing the full potential of CBT in Lejja Hot Springs.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, aiming to understand the dynamics of community-based tourism (CBT) at Lejja Hot Springs, located in Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for a deep exploration of the perspectives, experiences, and behaviors of local communities, government representatives, and tourism stakeholders. By focusing on a single case, this research provides detailed insights into the specific factors that influence the development and management of CBT in the area.

The research is designed as a case study, offering an in-depth examination of how CBT can be applied in a rural destination with strong cultural and natural resources. Lejja Hot Springs, known for its therapeutic hot springs and natural beauty, is selected as the focus of this research due to its potential for sustainable tourism development through community involvement. The study aims to explore how local communities, government agencies, and other stakeholders collaborate to manage tourism while ensuring economic, social, and environmental benefits.

A purposive sampling method is employed, with participants selected based on their direct involvement or influence on tourism activities in Lejja. This sampling strategy ensures that those who are key stakeholders in the development and management of CBT are included, providing a comprehensive view of the subject. A total of 30 participants were selected to ensure a diverse representation of the community and tourism sector. These participants include local government officials, community leaders, tourism operators, business owners, and a small number of tourists who have visited the area. This sample size is adequate for a qualitative study, allowing for in-depth insights while maintaining a manageable scope for analysis.

The selection of participants was made to capture a range of perspectives within the local community. Local government officials were included to provide insights into policy and administrative support for CBT. Community leaders and tourism operators were chosen to understand the grassroots level of tourism management and the direct impacts on the local population. Business owners, including those running homestays, souvenir shops, and local eateries, were selected to offer insights into the economic impacts of tourism and the challenges they face in providing services. A small number of tourists were included to gauge the visitor experience and the effectiveness of the community's engagement with tourists.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with these stakeholders to gather information on the strategies they use to develop and manage CBT, their perceptions of its impacts, and the challenges they face in implementing it. The semi-structured interview format allows for flexibility, enabling the researcher to explore topics in depth while ensuring that key aspects of CBT are addressed. This interview format provides a balance between structured data collection and the freedom to explore emerging themes.

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In addition to interviews, field observations are conducted to capture the on-the-ground realities of tourism in Lejja. Observations focus on the infrastructure, services, and interactions between local people and tourists. These observations help the researcher gain a better understanding of how tourism is managed and the extent of local community involvement in tourism activities. Furthermore, the study includes an analysis of relevant documents such as local government tourism policies, development plans, and environmental regulations to understand the formal frameworks guiding tourism development.

Data analysis follows a thematic analysis approach, where the researcher systematically identifies patterns and themes in the data. The process begins with familiarization with the collected data, followed by coding and categorizing relevant information. Themes related to community participation, government roles, infrastructure development, and sustainability are identified and analyzed. Thematic analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of the research questions and helps synthesize findings from multiple data sources.

Ethical considerations are crucial in this study, ensuring that all participants are informed about the purpose of the research and their rights. Consent is obtained before interviews and observations are conducted, and confidentiality is maintained throughout the study. The findings are reported in a way that respects the privacy and anonymity of participants.

Overall, the methodology combines interviews, observations, and document analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of how community-based tourism is being implemented at Lejja Hot Springs. The study will contribute valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges of developing sustainable tourism initiatives in rural Indonesia, with potential implications for other similar destinations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study reveal a comprehensive picture of community-based tourism (CBT) implementation at Lejja Hot Springs in Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi. Through interviews with local government officials, community leaders, tourism operators, and visitors, as well as observations and document analysis, several key themes emerged related to the strategies, opportunities, challenges, and impacts of CBT at this destination.

Strategies for Developing CBT

One of the primary strategies identified for developing CBT in Lejja was active community participation in both the planning and management of tourism activities. According to local government officials, there has been a concerted effort to involve local residents in decision-making processes. A key informant, the head of the local tourism department, mentioned, “We encourage community members to take part in tourism initiatives from the outset, from planning to managing tourism services. This ensures that tourism benefits the local population directly.”

Additionally, the establishment of small businesses such as homestays, souvenir shops, and local eateries has been a significant strategy for generating income and fostering local entrepreneurship. This aligns with the principles of CBT, which emphasize the economic empowerment of local communities through tourism. A local business owner shared, “We have seen an increase in visitors, and by offering homestays and local products, we are able to benefit directly from the tourism flow. It's a win-win for both the community and the tourists.”

Social and Cultural Impact

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The social and cultural impacts of CBT in Lejja are significant. Interviews with community leaders and residents revealed that active participation in tourism has helped strengthen local identity and pride. Local cultural performances, traditional crafts, and the sharing of stories related to the hot springs have allowed the community to showcase their heritage to visitors. A community leader explained, "We are proud of our culture and want to share it with tourists. By offering cultural experiences like local performances and traditional crafts, we make visitors aware of our rich cultural heritage."

Moreover, CBT has fostered greater social cohesion within the community. People from different sectors of the community, including farmers, artisans, and business owners, have collaborated in tourism-related activities, strengthening social ties. This cooperation has not only empowered the community economically but also helped preserve the local culture. As one tourism operator mentioned, "We see that CBT has helped bring our community together. Everyone, from the elders who know the traditions to the youth who are more involved in tourism, is working together to make this successful."

However, there are also challenges related to social and cultural impacts. Some residents expressed concerns about the commercialization of their culture and the risk of losing traditional values to accommodate tourist demands. A local artisan commented, "Sometimes, I feel that we are doing things just for the tourists, and it worries me that our traditions might be diluted over time."

Economic Impact and Community Empowerment

The economic impact of CBT at Lejja is noteworthy, as it has provided an avenue for local economic development. Interviews with community members revealed that tourism has created new income-generating opportunities, especially for families involved in homestays, food services, and guided tours. The head of a local community organization remarked, "Tourism has opened up new jobs for people in the village. Not just in the hot springs area, but also in the broader community, as we offer services like transportation and guided tours for visitors."

The income generated through tourism has allowed many local families to improve their livelihoods. However, some residents highlighted the seasonal nature of tourism, which can result in fluctuating incomes. A local homestay owner mentioned, "While tourism brings in money, the seasonality means that we don't always have visitors. We need more year-round activities to sustain us during the low season."

Infrastructure Challenges

Infrastructure limitations remain a critical barrier to further growth of CBT in Lejja. Although the area is naturally beautiful and rich in cultural heritage, practical challenges such as poorly maintained roads, limited public transportation, and insufficient visitor facilities hinder tourism development. The main road leading to Lejja Hot Springs, for example, is narrow and often difficult for larger vehicles to navigate, especially during the rainy season. A local government official noted, "The lack of proper road access to Lejja is a major obstacle. It deters many potential visitors, especially those who are not familiar with the area."

These infrastructure challenges have direct consequences for both visitors and the local community. Visitors often experience difficulties reaching the site, leading to frustration and dissatisfaction, while local businesses struggle to cater to increasing tourist demand due to the lack of adequate facilities. The lack of proper road access also limits the ability to attract larger tourist groups or more frequent visitors. One local business owner shared, "If the road was better, we could have more tourists come, and that would help us grow our business. Right now, we rely on the few tourists who manage to find us."

Environmental and Cultural Sustainability

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Environmental sustainability remains a critical concern as tourism grows at Lejja Hot Springs. Observations indicated that while the area is well-maintained, there are concerns about waste management and the potential for over-exploitation of the natural resources, particularly the hot springs. According to a local environmental officer, "We are trying to strike a balance between promoting tourism and protecting the environment. We've implemented waste management programs, but we still face challenges in ensuring that all tourists are mindful of their environmental impact."

Cultural preservation is also a central element of CBT in Lejja. Local residents emphasized the importance of maintaining traditional practices and culture while embracing tourism. A community leader explained, "Our culture is important to us, and we want visitors to understand and respect our traditions. We offer cultural experiences like local performances and traditional crafts to share our heritage with tourists."

Challenges in CBT Implementation

Despite the successes, several challenges hinder the full potential of CBT in Lejja. The primary challenge identified by both government officials and community members is the lack of adequate infrastructure. The road leading to Lejja Hot Springs, for example, remains underdeveloped, limiting access for some tourists. A government official noted, "The lack of proper road access to Lejja is a major obstacle. It deters many potential visitors, especially those who are not familiar with the area."

Additionally, there is a lack of training and capacity-building for community members involved in tourism. While the local community is enthusiastic about tourism, some residents lack the skills to provide high-quality services, which affects the overall visitor experience. A tourism operator shared, "We need more training in hospitality and tourism management. The local people are eager to learn, but they need support to improve their skills."

Government Support and Policies

The local government has played a significant role in supporting CBT initiatives at Lejja. However, participants indicated that more could be done in terms of policy implementation and resource allocation. A local government official explained, "While we have policies in place to promote tourism, there are limitations in terms of funding and resources. We need greater investment in tourism infrastructure and human resource development."

Community members also expressed a desire for more support from the government in terms of marketing and promotion. A community leader stated, "We need help to reach a broader audience. The government could assist by promoting Lejja Hot Springs on national tourism platforms, which would bring more tourists to our area."

Discussion

Social and Cultural Impact

The social and cultural impacts of CBT in Lejja show both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, community participation in tourism activities has fostered a sense of pride and helped preserve local heritage. Local residents are not only benefiting economically but also taking an active role in maintaining and showcasing their traditions. The promotion of cultural experiences, such as traditional crafts and performances, serves as a way to educate visitors while ensuring that local customs are respected and shared. This helps create a deeper connection between tourists and the local community, enriching the visitor experience and reinforcing the importance of cultural preservation.

However, the commercialization of culture poses a potential risk. There is concern among some residents that tourism may lead to the dilution of their traditions to meet tourist expectations. This issue

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is not unique to Lejja and has been observed in other CBT projects globally. As tourism grows, there is often pressure to modify cultural practices to appeal to tourists, which could eventually undermine the authenticity of these traditions. Therefore, finding a balance between cultural preservation and commercial viability is critical.

Infrastructure Challenges and Solutions

Infrastructure remains one of the most pressing challenges for CBT in Lejja. Poor road access is not only an inconvenience for tourists but also restricts the potential growth of the tourism sector. For many rural destinations in Indonesia, infrastructure limitations are a common barrier to attracting a larger number of visitors. As mentioned by the local government officials, efforts to improve road access are ongoing, but the financial and logistical challenges are significant.

To address these challenges, there have been efforts at collaboration with private stakeholders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The local government has engaged with private sector partners to explore possible investments in transportation infrastructure and to improve public facilities. Moreover, the government has also sought assistance from NGOs to secure additional funding for infrastructure projects. While these efforts are still in early stages, they show promise for alleviating some of the barriers caused by poor infrastructure.

Furthermore, local community members have taken matters into their own hands by implementing small-scale initiatives to improve the tourist experience, such as enhancing signage, setting up kiosks, and ensuring cleanliness. These efforts, although modest, demonstrate the community's commitment to improving the tourism experience in the absence of major infrastructure improvements. In the long run, collaboration between the government, private sector, and community will be essential to address these infrastructure challenges effectively.

Environmental and Cultural Sustainability

Environmental sustainability remains a critical issue as tourism expands. As more tourists visit Lejja, the pressure on natural resources, particularly the hot springs, increases. While the community has implemented waste management programs to mitigate the environmental impact, there are still concerns about over-exploitation of the natural resources. Balancing tourism growth with environmental conservation is a challenge faced by many CBT destinations, and Lejja is no exception.

In terms of cultural sustainability, the local community is committed to maintaining its traditions while accommodating tourists. The challenge lies in ensuring that cultural experiences do not become commodified but remain true to their origins. One potential solution is to involve community members more deeply in the decision-making process, ensuring that they maintain control over how their culture is presented to visitors. By doing so, the community can preserve its authenticity while benefiting from the economic opportunities that tourism provides.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant potential of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in fostering sustainable development at Lejja Hot Springs in Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi. The involvement of local communities in the management and development of tourism activities has brought tangible benefits, including economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and improved local livelihoods. As observed, the establishment of small businesses, such as homestays and local eateries, has provided new income-generating opportunities for community members, aligning with the principles of CBT.

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However, the findings also indicate several challenges that need to be addressed for CBT to reach its full potential. Infrastructure limitations, particularly in terms of road access and facilities, remain a significant barrier to the growth of tourism in the area. Moreover, the lack of capacity-building programs for local residents hinders the quality of services provided to tourists, impacting the overall visitor experience. Environmental sustainability also remains a concern, as the growing number of visitors poses a risk to the natural resources of the hot springs.

While the local government has shown support for CBT through policies and initiatives, more comprehensive strategies are needed to address infrastructure and human resource development. The government must play a more active role in providing financial and technical support for tourism projects, as well as promoting the destination on national and international platforms to attract a larger number of visitors.

In conclusion, while CBT at Lejja Hot Springs has brought positive economic and social impacts to the community, its long-term success will depend on addressing these challenges through collaborative efforts between the government, local community, and tourism stakeholders. By investing in infrastructure, capacity-building, and sustainable practices, Lejja can serve as a model for other rural destinations seeking to develop tourism in a way that benefits both the local community and the environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are made to enhance the development and sustainability of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) at Lejja Hot Springs, Soppeng Regency. First, improving infrastructure, especially road access and public facilities, is essential to accommodate an increasing number of tourists and ensure a smoother travel experience. The local government should prioritize funding for infrastructure development to make the area more accessible for both local and international visitors. Second, capacity-building programs should be implemented to train local community members in hospitality, customer service, and tourism management. These programs will help improve the quality of services offered by local businesses, ensuring a positive experience for tourists and increasing their likelihood of returning. Third, greater collaboration between the local government, community, and private sector is needed to promote Lejja as a tourism destination. A well-coordinated marketing strategy, supported by the government, can help increase awareness and attract a broader audience. Additionally, preserving the environmental and cultural integrity of Lejja should remain a priority. The community and stakeholders must work together to develop sustainable tourism practices that minimize environmental impact, such as waste management and conservation programs. Lastly, it is recommended that the local government and tourism stakeholders continue to engage with the community in decision-making processes to ensure that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably and that local traditions and culture are preserved. By addressing these recommendations, Lejja has the potential to become a model for sustainable and community-driven tourism in rural Indonesia.

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