

Community Empowerment Based on Ecotourism in Sukalaksana Village, Samarang District, Garut Regency, West Java Province

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ABSTRACT

Community empowerment is an important approach in village development, especially in the context of ecotourism-based tourism village development. This study aims to analyze the process of community empowerment in Sukalaksana Village, Garut Regency, with an emphasis on changes in awareness, capacity building, and changes in community structure and social relations. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with the Village Head, the Chairman of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), the Head of the Garut Regency Tourism and Culture Office, the Head of the Treasury Division of BPKAD Garut Regency, community leaders, and residents who are directly involved in the management of the tourist village, and supported by participatory observation and documentation studies. Data analysis was carried out thematically by linking field findings to the framework of Hogan's empowerment theory. The results of the study show that the community empowerment process in Sukalaksana Village is carried out by local actors who start from scratch so as to produce a change in the mindset of the community. This change in mindset encourages increased community participation in village decision-making and activities, as well as strengthening social and economic capacity through the use of local potential based on ecotourism. In addition, the formation and strengthening of the role of BUMDes contributes to social, economic and environmental changes, characterized by the involvement of various community groups, including women, in the management of village resources. This study concludes that ecotourism-based community empowerment is a sustainable process that not only impacts economic improvement, but also produces interrelated social and environmental changes. These findings affirm the importance of an empowerment approach based on local potential and community participation as a sustainable village development strategy.

Keywords: community empowerment, ecotourism, local potential-based development, Sukalaksana Village

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia still faces many challenges including economic disparities, lack of proper infrastructure and low community participation in development. Many of the programs provided cannot support change because society is considered an object. This condition is very concerning and is considered necessary for empowerment that can empower the community to be more independent. The development of ecotourism-based tourism villages is one of the strategies for village development with the aim of increasing community participation and also for environmental sustainability as a local identity and culture.

The Definition of a Tourism Village According to Aryani, Rahadian, et al., (2019) it is stated that a tourism village is a village that has tourism potential which is carried out in a way based on community empowerment and environmental preservation by utilizing local wisdom and the potential that exists in the village. The goal is to improve the economy of the village community and create sustainable employment opportunities. However, in practice, the success of tourism village development is largely determined by the extent to which the community empowerment process actually takes place, not just the achievement of economic output. Ecotourism is closely related to sustainable tourism (Bunruamkaew & Murayama, 2011; Kiper, 2013). The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as responsible travel to natural

areas that preserve the environment, maintain the well-being of local communities, and involve interpretation and education (Ecotourism.org, 2019).

Sukalaksana Village, Garut Regency, is one of the villages that previously faced limitations in various fields. The lack of basic infrastructure, low environmental awareness, and limited space for community participation are the main challenges in village development. Along with the initiative to develop ecotourism-based tourism villages, Sukalaksana Village has experienced various changes that are interesting to be researched, especially related to changes in people's mindset towards local potential, increased participation in decision-making, and the formation of village institutions. It's just that there are still few people who are able to see the potential they have even though if it can be used optimally, it will bring prosperity to the community (Rochman, 2017).

Although many studies only focus on the potential of an area and have not explained in detail the empowerment process in ecotourism development carried out by local actors by utilizing various types of potential, such as various natural potentials, local culture, and daily activities of residents and ecotourism-based tourism villages. Therefore, in-depth research was carried out on the process of ecotourism development carried out by local actors as well as the changes that occurred in the development of ecotourism-based tourism villages. This study uses Hogan's (2000) empowerment theory as the main analytical framework.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to deeply understand the process of ecotourism-based community empowerment in Sukalaksana Village, Garut Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning, experiences, and social dynamics that occur in the community empowerment process from the perspective of the actors involved.

The location of the research was determined purposively with the consideration that Sukalaksana Village is a village that has succeeded in developing ecotourism-based tourism villages and showing changes in social, economic, and environmental changes. The research informants were selected based on purposive sampling consisting of the Village Head, the Head of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), the Head of the Garut Regency Tourism and Culture Office, the Head of the Treasury Division of BPKAD Garut Regency, community leaders, and people directly involved in tourism village activities. The selection of informants is based on their involvement and knowledge of the ongoing empowerment process.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were used to explore the views and experiences of informants related to changes in awareness, participation and management of local potential. Observations were carried out to directly observe empowerment practices, social interactions, and community activities in the management of tourist villages. The documentation study includes the analysis of village documents such as BUMDes reports and village development planning documents. Data analysis is carried out by examining the information obtained more deeply by preparing and processing data for analysis, reading the data as a whole, conducting a more in-depth analysis by coding data, making qualitative reports on descriptions and themes, interpreting data that can be done by comparing the findings with the theory or concept used. This data analysis relates the findings of the field to the empowerment framework of Hogan

(2000) which has the theme of reflecting on the experiences of empowerment and non-empowerment, discussing the reasons for empowerment and powerlessness, identifying priority issues and priority projects in a participatory manner, identifying local power bases and strengths as capital for change and developing and implementing collective action plans. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources by confirming findings to informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Re-bringing Empowering and Non-Empowering Experiences

The results of the study show that the allocation of makeshift funds makes the village government almost unable to make improvements to the village, even to innovate or start pioneering long-term programs such as improving sanitation is very difficult and also does not have the ability to initiate community empowerment programs because it requires financing, as well as to carry out maintenance of existing infrastructure is very unexpected. This happens because the Village Government must choose to improve the surrounding environment or ensure that government operations continue to run. The small APBDes also shows that the village does not have active economic activities, the Village Original Income (PADes) is almost non-existent, because the village does not have an operating business unit or productive assets that can generate income. Full dependence on aid funds from the government and the private sector makes the village unself-sufficient, so every year it has to wait for the allocation of funds to come even though the amount is never enough to solve the village's problems completely.

Based on this, Sukalaksana Village reflects on past events that made the community start to rethink what to do to overcome the problems experienced such as a sense of helplessness and a sense of backwardness so that the community is moved and not passively accepting the existing situation. This reflection process raises the awareness of the people of Sukalaksana Village to be in a helpless position, namely the social and economic conditions experienced are not only caused by the weakness of each individual but also influenced by social influences, policies and power relations. This finding is in line with Hogan's (2000) view that it helps individuals realize that helplessness is often socially generated, rather than personal failures, that experiential reflection is the initial basis for the formation of empowerment awareness.

Discussing the Reasons for Empowerment and Helplessness

The results of the study show that the people of Sukalaksana Village can be empowered if they have a critical awareness in themselves by taking and utilizing the potentials that exist both in individuals and potentials that come from other resources such as local potential, culture, skills and crafts as explained to the people of Sukalaksana Village who were invited by the Village Head to discuss and hold regular meetings including to recall past events that were causing the village community to still be trapped in poverty so that they find a way out together so that they can be free from the shackles of poverty and so that the people of Sukalaksana Village have pride in themselves and their village. This activity is also not only a forum for exchanging ideas but also as a forum to motivate each other to support each other and embrace each other. This discussion also invites all the people of Sukalaksana Village to dare to commit to building a village with village programs that have been made together in

collaboration with various elements because the concept of the program made is from, by and for the people of Sukalaksana Village.

This discussion process is very important because it can open up the mindset and critical awareness of the people of Sukalaksana Village, such as the statement of Hogan (2000) that each individual has its own power that can be radiated so that it has power over other individuals to move the empowerment activity in the form of power to lead or share their skills with other individuals, because the people of Sukalaksana Village can progress. Because having togetherness to control oneself to develop. The people of Sukalaksana Village were invited by the Head of Sukalaksana Village to have critical thinking so that they could think from having nothing to do to produce something that had value. One of them is to take advantage of the potential that exists in the village and even the unique potential that does not exist in other villages, that the people of Sukalaksana Village do not always have to depend on the assistance provided.

Identify Priority Issues and Priority Projects in a Participatory Manner

The results of the study show that the people of Sukalaksana Village are actively involved in determining the problems that need to be addressed and the programs that are considered most relevant to the development of ecotourism-based tourism villages. Many parties are involved in this process such as the village government, community groups and other institutions. The first thing to do is to visit Pentingsari Village in Yogyakarta, many lessons are obtained there starting from observing what is in the village, then learning how to manage tourist villages, also learning about tourist attractions and activities, environment and sustainability, culture and local wisdom and how to develop the tourist village.

This participatory approach emphasizes that society is no longer positioned as an object of development but as a subject that determines the direction of change. The selection of priority programs is not the result of external coercion but arises from the common awareness of the community due to economic needs, limited village budgets and the existence of local potential owned by Sukalaksana Village.

This condition is in accordance with Hogan's concept that empowerment requires the active involvement of the community in defining problems and solutions to be implemented. This is in line with the findings in the field, namely the people of Sukalaksana Village began to map the potential in their villages, starting from surveys and identifying all villages to find potential that can be highlighted, also exploring local knowledge from community leaders or those who are elders in the village about the unique potential of Sukalaksana Village, including Kewer Tea and Garut Sheep, then the potential that has been obtained is grouped into several clans.

Identifying Local Power Bases and Powers as Modal for Change

The results of the study show that there has been a change in the perspective of the people of Sukalaksana Village from a mindset of having nothing to having a mindset to make an asset that can be used. Local strengths identified by the people of Sukalaksana Village include natural potential, local cultural values, mutual cooperation traditions, community cohesiveness, and partnership networks with various parties including academics and the private sector that are capital in change. These strengths are then summarized into Saung Ciburial Tourism Village, starting with determining where to go in the direction of the development of this village, Sukalaksana Village takes the concept of a village as it is which really displays the

simplicity of the village so that visitors can feel the pattern of life of Sukalaksana Village, then determine how to manage this Sukalaksana Village, namely with the concept of, by and for the people of Sukalaksana Village so that the management is based on results Joint decision. Because this village has the concept of an ecotourism-based tourism village, it is necessary to pay attention to its sustainability by prioritizing the environmentally friendly concept in the implementation of its tourist attractions and also setting the permitted tour packages.

This process is in line with Hogan's statement that it is necessary to recognize the strengths that exist in oneself to build confidence and reduce dependence on external support, so that one has the ability to mobilize existing resources, utilize one's expertise and learn from one's experience (Hogan, 2000, pp.12-16). This stage gives the community's confidence increased and adds confidence that the community has the ability to make changes independently. These findings are in line with Hogan's view that the recognition and utilization of internal power is key to building self-reliance and sustainability of empowerment.

Developing and Implementing a Collective Action Plan

The results of the study show that the people of Sukalaksana Village prepare and implement an action plan based on the results of reflection, discussion and strength mapping. The action plan is carried out in accordance with the principles of participation, readiness to carry out empowerment and support from experienced parties. The tangible evidence of the action plan focuses not only on achieving physical results such as the development of ecotourism facilities and infrastructure, but also on increasing the capacity of individuals and community institutions to be able to manage programs in a sustainable manner. So that empowerment does not stop as a short-term program but develops into a sustainable empowerment process.

Hogan emphasized that successful empowerment will extend beyond individual projects and become an ongoing learning process. The action taken is to manage clean water. Villages that have high-quality spring water have the potential to manage the water through the village institutional system such as the Drinking Water and Sanitation Facilities Management Agency (BP-SPAMS). Sukalaksana Village develops water management that must involve delivering water through pipes to residents' homes, setting service rates fairly and based on agreements with residents, utilizing profits for service financing, and strengthening the capacity of water management institutions. The road that was previously narrow, unorganized, and did not support tourist activities was rearranged by considering the mobility needs of residents as well as the comfort of visitors. Road planning includes widening and repairing the entrance, arranging drainage so that the road is always dry, installing lighting at strategic points, and making roads for pedestrians for visitors. There is also the construction of Saung Pelupuh as a unique resting place for visitors.

Changes that have occurred in community empowerment in the development of ecotourism-based tourism villages

Changes in Awareness and Outlooks on Life

The Head of Sukalaksana Village has an initiative and can move many things, especially the people of Sukalaksana Village so that they have a sense of pride in their village. After the village began to be known as a tourist destination, pride emerged that influenced the way people looked at it. Activities such as cultural festivals, improvements to public spaces, village

greening, and the promotion of local potential provide a unique place for people to show their identity to the outside world.

Hogan emphasized that changes in consciousness are closely related to identity and belonging, because empowerment is about knowing oneself, recognizing feelings and being able to set and achieve goals (Hogan, 2000, p.18). When the mindset changes, social actions also follow and perspectives change so that people who feel marginalized (women and youth) become active participants.

Changes in Individual and Group Capacity

The people of Sukalaksana Village, both at the individual and group levels, are starting to increase their capacity. This increase can be seen by increasing knowledge, skills in making products and public confidence in managing ecotourism activities. Residents who have knowledge of village history, natural environment, and local culture are trained to convey information to tourists in a communicative and educational manner. The existence of local tour guides not only increases the value of the traveler's experience, but also opens up new sources of income based on local skills and knowledge. In addition, the community also develops homestay services, which provide opportunities for residents to use their homes as accommodation for tourists. Homestays are not only an additional livelihood, but also a place of cultural exchange between guests and society. Hogan states that empowerment provides the development of skills, confidence and the ability of individuals to dare to act (Hogan, 2000, pp.9-11).

This change in capacity has an impact on the economic aspect, where individuals are able to develop sources of income based on local potential. Societies that previously viewed limitations as a big problem, are now beginning to realize that their natural, cultural and social potential is a shared asset that can be managed independently. Hogan added that increasing individual capacity can affect self-reliance both socially and economically, thereby reducing dependence on external assistance and increasing individual control over resources (Hogan, 2000, pp. 14-17).

Structural Changes and Social Relations

There has been an increase in community participation in Sukalaksana Village. The community is trained to sort organic and inorganic waste, understand the recycling category, and turn some of the waste into handicrafts that can be sold to tourists. The village also emphasizes the use of eco-friendly products as a local icon. Two superior products that then stand out are Fragrant Root Coffee and Kewer Tea. Akar Wangi Coffee was developed from the use of vetinous root which was previously underutilized, processed into a distinctive drink that has a natural and strong aroma. Meanwhile, Kewer Tea is not only a healthy herbal drink, but also a symbol of local wisdom and Kewer plant conservation which is the identity of the village.

Furthermore, the community makes an environmentally friendly drainage system, plants trees in water catchment areas, and promotes the habit of not throwing waste or detergents into the river flow. In addition to sorting, the village also determines the location of the Temporary Disposal Site (TPS) that is more appropriate and strategic. The impact of these changes is clear, such as a decrease in the habit of open defecation, an improvement in the quality of well and spring water, and the creation of a cleaner residential environment.

Hogan said empowerment is incomplete if it does not lead to changes in participation, decision-making and power structures. (Hogan, 2000, p.15). This explains that individuals are no longer objects in empowerment but subjects who have an active role. According to Hogan, sustainable empowerment must be followed by changes at the structural level and social relations (Hogan, 2000, pp.29-33)

CONCLUSION

The process of community empowerment in the development of ecotourism-based tourism villages in Sukalaksana Village occurs gradually and sustainably through increasing awareness and changing perspectives, capacity building, and changes in structure and social relations. This empowerment process began with an initiation from the Village Head to involve or involve internal parties in developing Sukalaksana Village. Furthermore, the Village Head involves or involves external parties and forms BUMDes Bina Laksana to become a business unit in managing the tourist village.

Efforts made in the development of ecotourism-based tourism villages through community empowerment provide positive changes in social, economic and environmental aspects. Changes in the social aspect are illustrated by the strengthening of identity, wider social relationships, the community becoming active and the empowerment of women in the process of empowering the community in the development of tourist villages in Sukalaksana Village. Meanwhile, changes in the economic aspect are reflected in the village being able to manage its own assets, being able to diversify sources of income, and being able to manage the village economy regularly by operating BUMDes to become the center of Tourism Village management and the driving force of local economic activities and to develop a transparent profit-sharing system. Finally, changes in the environmental aspects depicted by the village are able to create environmental innovations, are able to conserve springs, are able to maintain environmental cleanliness by regulating the management system, use proper sanitation by building septitanks in each house and erecting toilets or latrines according to health standards; and able to preserve local plants such as planting kewer, root and mustard greens/sausages.

Practically, the findings of this study show that the development of ecotourism-based tourism villages needs to place community empowerment as a long-term process that focuses on changing awareness and strengthening social structures. Theoretically, this study expands the application of Hogan's empowerment theory in the context of village development in Indonesia.

Based on the findings, the researcher gave suggestions to the Regional Government of Garut Regency to provide support to villages in Garut Regency to develop their potential as opportunities in efforts to build a village economy that will have an impact on community welfare and provide technical guidance to villages that are still included in the indicator of "poor villages or underdeveloped villages" in Garut Regency for empowerment in alleviating community poverty village. In addition, to the Village Government and residents to maximize the use of digital technology to increase the marketing of village products and maintain the sustainability of the results that have been achieved through the development of ecotourism-based tourism villages with community empowerment.

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