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Empowering Communities: Unleashing the Potential of Gunung Tunak Natural Park through Active Participation in Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the potential and community participation in the development of Gunung Tunak Nature Tourism Park as a destination. The research adopts a qualitative approach and utilizes data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that Gunung Tunak Natural Tourism Park holds significant potential in terms of diverse flora and fauna, as well as supporting marine tourism attractions within the forest surrounding Mount Tunak. The existing facilities include hotels, restaurants, meeting rooms, camping areas, various types of enclosures, and well-trained management personnel who have received direct training from the Korean government through ecotourism internships in South Korea. The study also highlights the importance of increasing domestic and foreign tourist visits through Mertak Village as a tourist hub, organizing events at Gunung Tunak Natural Tourism Park, and the crucial role of the community in preserving and developing the flora and fauna within the park.

Keywords: community participation, tourism development, sustainable

JEL Classification: L83, O13, Q56, O18, Z32



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Introduction

Tourism goes beyond the mere number of visitors to a destination, encompassing how its management can benefit the local economy. This aligns with the objectives outlined in Article 4 of Law No. 10 of 2009, which include economic growth, improved welfare, poverty eradication, addressing unemployment, environmental preservation, cultural promotion, enhancing national image, fostering patriotism, strengthening unity, and nurturing international friendship. These legislative objectives are in line with the global development of the tourism sector, which emphasizes sustainable management, maximizing local economic benefits, preserving cultural heritage, and minimizing environmental impact (Bitušiková, 2021; UNESCO, 2015; Zhang et al., 2022).

To achieve these tourism objectives, community-based tourism (CBT) has emerged as a promising approach, enabling active participation of the local community in the management of tourist destinations. In this context, the Mertak Village community holds significant potential, particularly with the presence of Mount Tunak, now transformed into the Tunak Nature Park (Taman Wisata Alam/TWA) with support from the South Korean government.

The South Korean government, through its Ministry of Forestry (Director General International Affairs Korea Forest Service Republic of Korea), selected Mount Tunak for ecotourism development, envisioning community-based management due to its vast potential. Mount Tunak boasts abundant and diverse flora and fauna in their natural state, along with various coastal attractions like Batu Berang Beach, with its mangrove forests, as well as Dondon Beach, Bilasayak Beach, and other supporting features.

From 2013 to 2018, the South Korean government facilitated the process of developing the Tunak Nature Park, which included preparing the park and eventually transferring its management to the Mertak Village community. Training was provided to selected community members who became managers under the umbrella of Pokdarwis Tunak Besopoq. However, despite the presence of supporting infrastructure such as roads, hotels, restaurants, and other facilities, the Tunak Nature Park has yet to generate a local economy based on tourism activities. The community primarily engages in agricultural, farming, plantation, and fishing activities in their daily lives.

While Mertak Village was initially designated as a community-based tourism village, it is still predominantly managed by a specific group prepared by the South Korean side. The community has not fully capitalized on the Tunak Nature Park to add value to their products, create employment opportunities, or engage in activities that define Mertak Village as a tourist destination. Tourists visiting the Tunak Nature Park have not yet made local values and culture their primary focus.

In light of these empirical conditions, it is essential to conduct an in-depth exploration of the potential of the Tunak Nature Park and community participation. This research aims to provide valuable insights to relevant stakeholders in formulating policies for the community-based tourism development of the Tunak Nature Park (CBT). The objective of this study is to identify the potentials of the Tunak Nature Park in Mertak Village, Pujut District, Central Lombok Regency, and describe the community's level of involvement in its development.

By implementing these revisions, the introduction becomes more concise, organized, and effectively communicates the research gap and objectives.

Research Method

This research utilizes a qualitative approach, relying on findings to provide detailed descriptions. The study involved interviews with various stakeholders, including village government officials, community leaders, community figures, the general public, and personnel involved in Pokdarwis Tunak Besopoq. Additionally, interviews were conducted with visitors to gather additional information. Observations were also made, and photographs were taken to document the diverse tourism potentials in the Tunak Nature Park. Supplementary documentation provided by relevant parties was also utilized to obtain information spanning the initial establishment phase to the present management, maintenance, and development of the park. While this research adopts a qualitative approach, a specific analytical framework or tools were not employed. The role of the researcher was to sort and analyze the acquired information in accordance with the formulated research questions, presenting the findings in a comprehensive manner.

By addressing these aspects, the paragraph can become clearer, more concise, and provide a better understanding of the research methods and the role of the researcher in the study (Ferrario, 1979; Habibi et al., 2021; Nahar et al., 2019; Sofaer, 1999).

Result and Discussion

The Tunak Nature Park (TWA Gunung Tunak) is situated in Mertak Village, precisely at coordinates 116.390°E and 8.910°S. Its boundaries are defined as follows: 1) to the north: Pengengat Village and Bangket Patak Village; 2) to the south: the Indonesian Ocean; 3) to the east: Ekas Bay; and 4) to the west: Sukadana Village. With these boundaries in mind, Mertak Village boasts a coastal topology and is supported by a forested area covering 1,201.97 hectares (25.97% of the total area of 4,689.33 hectares). The village's topology influences the residents' occupations, with 86.97% engaged in farming and 12.37% involved in fishing. However, despite the vast potential of its tourist destinations, the number of individuals working in the

tourism or service sector remains significantly low. This situation can be attributed to the relatively low level of education, with 53.53% having completed junior high school, 36.46% having completed senior high school, and only 7.03% having attained a diploma-level education. To fully harness the tourism potential in Mertak Village, it is crucial to invest in education and provide support through training, experience, and other avenues.

Mertak Village is designated as a Tourism Village, with the Tunak Nature Park serving as its primary tourism attraction. The park is a grant project from the South Korean government. Notably, the beauty within the TWA, particularly in the vicinity of the hotel and restaurant managed by Pokdarwis Tunak Besopok, is captivating.



Figure 1. Landscape of Tunaq Nature Park
Source: Documentation

Tunak Nature Park offers breathtaking views that highlight its extraordinary potential. One such view showcases the topology of Mertak Village, which includes coastal areas, forests, and flatlands used for terrace farming and agriculture. In 2013, a collaboration between the Ministry of Forestry of the Republic of Korea and the Indonesian government, particularly the Ministry of Forestry and the Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) of West Nusa Tenggara Province, initiated the development of community-based ecotourism. This collaboration culminated in a complete handover in 2018.

The natural potential of Tunak Nature Park encompasses pristine forests and coastal tourism destinations such as Dondon Beach, Batu Berang Beach, and Bilasayak Beach. The park is home to a variety of unique flora and fauna, including the rare "jin" bird. The tourism potential of Gunung Tunak Nature Tourism Park, combined with the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK) in its vicinity, presents tremendous opportunities. To promote the park effectively, increased education and training are essential, as the current level of education among the residents is relatively low.

The smooth and sustainable development of Gunung Tunak Nature Tourism Park relies on the active participation of the entire community of Mertak Village. Community involvement, supported by a grant from South Korea, begins with the preparation phase and continues through construction, management, and development. The Tunak Besopoq Community-Based Tourism Group (Pokdarwis) plays a crucial role in facilitating community participation and generating income to finance operational activities.

The community's involvement spans various stages, including receiving and providing information, participating in implementation, managing development outcomes, and contributing to maintenance and ongoing development. In the short term, efforts are focused on maintaining and developing flora, exploring new crops such as coffee, developing crab

culture in mangrove areas, and planting coastal vegetation. Strategies include organizing events, collaborating with travel agencies, and utilizing natural roads for mountain biking activities.

The cultural values and traditions of Mertak Village can be leveraged to attract tourists and enhance the tourism potential of Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve and its surrounding areas. The contributions of community members depend on their knowledge, skills, and potential, and they can act as guides, provide information to tourists, and actively participate in various stages of development. The government, tourism office, conservation agencies, and NGOs should continue to support and empower the community through ongoing training and skill development.

The presence of Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve is expected to have a positive impact on the economy of Mertak Village. Increased tourist visits and extended stays can lead to economic value creation, providing opportunities for the community to offer accommodations and related services (Dwyer et al., 2010; Figini et al., 2018; Frey & Stutzer, 2010; Spenceley & Meyer, 2012). However, the economic impact will only be significant if there is a substantial number of visitors and demand for accommodations (Ghani, 2016; JENA & DASH, 2020; Lim & McAleer, 1999; Muhammad & Andrews, 2008). It is crucial for the community to preserve their values, culture, and social dynamics while developing infrastructure and facilities to avoid environmental exploitation (Carrillo et al., 2018; Norken, 2019; Suaib et al., 2020; Sunarti & Fadeli, 2021; Trček, 2022).

The research findings presented above have several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study highlights the importance of community participation in the utilization and development of natural reserves for tourism purposes. It emphasizes that successful tourism initiatives in such areas rely on the active involvement of local communities, their knowledge, and their skills. This finding aligns with the concept of community-based tourism, which recognizes the significance of empowering communities and incorporating their cultural values and traditions into tourism practices.

Practically, the research findings suggest several strategies for the sustainable development of Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve and its surrounding areas. First, there is a need to continue training and empowering community members in tourism-related skills and ecotourism management. This can be achieved through collaboration with grantors and organizations involved in community empowerment. By improving their knowledge and skills, community members can actively contribute to the development and management of the reserve.

Second, efforts should be made to enhance community awareness and participation. Socialization and information dissemination activities can be organized to educate the community about the potential benefits of tourism and their role in supporting the reserve. Engaging the community through events, collaborations with travel agencies, and profit-sharing concepts can incentivize their investment in tourism-related businesses and infrastructure.

Third, the preservation of cultural values and traditions is crucial in maintaining the uniqueness and authenticity of the destination. Exploring and showcasing these cultural elements can attract tourists and further promote the area's tourism potential. It is important, however, to strike a balance between tourism development and the preservation of the local social dynamics, ensuring that the community's social life is not negatively impacted.

Lastly, the findings emphasize the need for continued support from the government and relevant organizations even after the handover period. Ongoing training, capacity building, and financial support can help sustain the development of Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve and ensure its long-term economic impact on the community. By actively involving stakeholders and encouraging collaboration, the reserve can thrive as a tourist destination while safeguarding its natural and cultural heritage.

In conclusion, this study highlights the significance of community participation and sustainable practices in the development of Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve and its surrounding areas. Theoretical implications emphasize the importance of community-based tourism, while practical implications provide strategies for fostering community involvement, preserving cultural values, and ensuring ongoing support from relevant organizations. By implementing these implications, stakeholders can work together to unlock the full potential of the reserve, benefiting both the community and the tourism industry..

Conclusion

The study findings reveal the following conclusions: Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve (WTA) holds significant potential as an ecotourism development destination, driven by its rich natural resources and its close proximity to popular coastal tourist destinations like Dondon Beach, Batu Berang Beach, and Bilasayak Beach. Infrastructure development in the area includes the establishment of hotels, restaurants, camping areas, fauna breeding facilities, and road networks. To promote sustainable tourism, the grantor collaborated with Pokdarwis Tunak Besopoq, a community-based organization that received ecotourism training in South Korea.

The active involvement of the Mertak Village community throughout the stages of the Gunung Sasak Wildlife Reserve's development as a sustainable destination is noteworthy. During the preparation stage, community members actively participated in activities such as trail marking, identifying suitable locations based on topography, and constructing roads connecting Gunung Tunak with the surrounding coastal tourist spots. Their engagement continued during the infrastructure development phase, where they contributed their skills and were financially rewarded for their work. In the management stage, community members with adequate knowledge received training and took on managerial roles within the Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve under the umbrella of Pokdarwis Tunak Besopoq. Furthermore, the community actively partakes in the maintenance of the reserve's existing flora and fauna. Notably, the Mertak Village government and community are committed to preserving and developing the coastal tourist destinations that complement the Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve. Additionally, collective labor groups within each hamlet play a vital role in providing labor support for the reserve's development.

The participation of the Mertak Village community in the Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve is driven by various factors. Their alignment with the values and cultural beliefs of their ancestors, who foresaw Gunung Tunak bringing light and prosperity, acts as a strong motivating factor. Economic and social benefits are also anticipated by the community, and assurances from all stakeholders that the reserve's presence will not have adverse impacts further contribute to their involvement. However, inhibiting factors include limited knowledge, skills, and investment capabilities among community members, which hinder their active participation in certain aspects.

In summary, the study highlights the substantial potential of Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve as an ecotourism destination. The active participation of the Mertak Village community across different stages of the reserve's development, driven by cultural alignment, economic expectations, and assurance, showcases their commitment. By addressing the inhibiting factors, such as improving knowledge, skills, and investment capabilities, the community's engagement can be further enhanced, leading to more sustainable development and preservation of the Gunung Tunak Wildlife Reserve and its surrounding coastal areas.

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