

Efforts to Increase Community Participation in Supporting The Continuity of Ecotourism Development Policies

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Abstract

This research aims to identify strategies that enhance community participation in supporting the sustainability of ecotourism development policies. The study specifically explores how local communities can be involved in decision-making, implementation, benefit-sharing, and evaluation activities within ecotourism projects. The methodology used is a qualitative literature review, drawing on secondary data from sources such as journal articles, theses, government reports, and books relevant to community engagement and ecotourism. The results indicate that active community participation significantly improves the sustainability and success of ecotourism projects. By engaging local communities, ecotourism not only promotes environmental and cultural conservation but also brings economic benefits, such as job creation and income growth for local populations. In particular, the involvement of communities in planning and policy evaluation is essential for aligning ecotourism initiatives with local needs. The conclusion emphasizes that fostering community involvement through education and training is critical for empowering communities and ensuring the long-term sustainability of ecotourism projects. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers to create more inclusive and sustainable ecotourism development strategies.

Keywords: ecotourism, policy, community

A. Introduction

Tourism is a sector with immense potential for regional development, both at the local, national, and global levels. In recent years, the concept of community-based ecotourism has gained considerable attention as a sustainable approach that integrates environmental conservation with economic benefits for local communities. This model allows local communities to play a central role in managing their natural resources, ensuring that they not only participate in but also benefit from tourism activities (Sururi, 2019). The development of community-based ecotourism aims to promote rural development by improving local economies while also encouraging the sustainable use of natural resources.

The policy framework for community-based ecotourism development is critical in achieving these goals. Ecotourism is not just an opportunity but also a mode of tourism that can drive regional and national economic growth. Ecotourism has the potential to increase investment in the tourism sector, foster collaboration between businesses, create employment opportunities, and support environmental preservation efforts. Furthermore, it can empower local communities by providing them with opportunities to participate in tourism activities, thereby improving their economic standing. According to (Kurniasari et al., 2019), systematic and capable governance is required to unite various aspects of development within the tourism industry optimally. This makes it essential to have clear strategies for planning, implementing, controlling, and empowering communities in the development of ecotourism, ensuring that the potential of each region is managed effectively (Mu'tashim & Indahsari, 2021).

One of the key factors in successful ecotourism development is careful planning. Strategic planning ensures that all aspects of ecotourism are aligned with both the conservation goals and the economic needs of the community. Short-term and long-term goals must be clearly defined to create a sustainable tourism model (Zahra et al., 2024). This includes planning for infrastructure development, marketing, and community involvement, as well as assessing environmental impacts. The implementation of these plans should be coordinated between all stakeholders, including local governments, private businesses, and the communities themselves. Collaboration among these parties ensures that ecotourism activities are managed efficiently and that the benefits are shared equitably among the community members.

In the process of implementing ecotourism policies, monitoring and controlling mechanisms are equally important. Supervision and evaluation are essential to ensure that the programs are executed as planned and meet their

targets. This includes addressing any challenges that arise during the development process and finding appropriate solutions. In community-based ecotourism, the government and policymakers need to focus on monitoring the progress of projects to ensure that both the economic and environmental goals are being met. The success of such programs largely depends on the active participation of local communities, as their involvement fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for the sustainability of the projects (Safuridar & Andiny, 2019).

The role of local communities in ecotourism development cannot be overstated. Their involvement is crucial at every stage, from planning and implementation to management and evaluation. When local communities are directly involved in tourism activities, the benefits extend beyond economic improvements. As (Kurniasari et al., 2019) highlights, community participation helps enhance the quality of human resources, infrastructure development, and the overall economy of the area. Furthermore, involving the community ensures that the development is aligned with local needs and cultural values, which increases the likelihood of the project's success and sustainability.

The active participation of local communities in planning and promoting ecotourism is vital for achieving sustainable development. When communities are involved, they are more likely to support and engage with ecotourism initiatives. According to (Suta & Mahagangga, 2017), community participation in planning activities and promotional efforts for ecotourism increases awareness and ownership of the projects, leading to better outcomes. This level of involvement helps communities not only benefit from tourism but also ensures that the projects are sustainable in the long term.

Community involvement is not only essential during the development phase but also in the ongoing management of ecotourism initiatives. Ecotourism is unique in that it often relies on decentralized management structures, where local communities are given a key role in decision-making processes. Research has shown that public perception plays a critical role in the sustainability of ecotourism projects. For instance, (Oktami et al., 2018) conducted a study that highlighted how public perception of ecotourism influences the management and success of these projects. Public perception is shaped by factors such as community involvement, environmental conservation, and the economic benefits that ecotourism brings to local communities.

The following table presents public perceptions of ecotourism based on a Likert scale, which evaluates different aspects of ecotourism management,

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including ecological sustainability, cultural understanding, and local community welfare.

Table 1. Public Perception of Ecotourism

No	Perception of Ecotourism	Average Score	Description
1	Tourism that is ecologically sustainable	6.83	Strongly Agree
2	Encourages environmental conservation and understanding	6.77	Strongly Agree
3	Encourages cultural understanding	6.70	Strongly Agree
4	Contributes to the well-being of local communities	6.97	Strongly Agree
5	Utilizes natural resources minimally impacted by human intervention	6.17	Strongly Agree
6	Enhances awareness of local communities	6.97	Strongly Agree
7	Provides peace and comfort for visitors	6.80	Strongly Agree
8	Promotes principles that raise concern for local communities	6.74	Strongly Agree

Source: (Oktami et al., 2018)

The results from Table 1 demonstrate a strong consensus among respondents about the positive impact of ecotourism. Aspects such as the contribution to local community welfare and the promotion of environmental conservation received high scores, reflecting the importance of these factors in shaping public perception of ecotourism. These findings highlight the critical role that community involvement plays in the success of ecotourism initiatives. Without the active participation of local communities, it would be difficult to achieve the sustainable management of natural and cultural resources in ecotourism projects.

Governments and policymakers must recognize the importance of tourism in their regions and the role that local wisdom plays in developing ecotourism. Local knowledge and traditions are valuable assets that can enrich the ecotourism experience for visitors, while also ensuring that tourism activities remain culturally appropriate and respectful of local values (Asy'ari et al., 2021). The domestication of local wisdom in tourism activities can serve as a key driver of ecotourism development, providing both economic and social benefits for the community. According to (Sururi, 2019), the inclusion of local wisdom in

ecotourism development not only enhances the authenticity of the tourism experience but also strengthens the connection between the community and the environment.

With the development of ecotourism, local communities stand to gain significant benefits from tourism activities in their regions. These benefits are not limited to economic improvements; they also include social and cultural gains, such as stronger community bonds and greater pride in local heritage. Moreover, the development of ecotourism often leads to improvements in infrastructure, such as better roads, healthcare, and education facilities, which further contribute to the overall well-being of the community (Susanto et al., 2012). Community involvement is a critical element in ensuring the sustainability of ecotourism projects. Without the active participation of local communities, ecotourism projects are unlikely to succeed in the long term. Community engagement ensures that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed among the local population and that the projects are aligned with the community's needs and values.

Furthermore, when communities are involved in decision-making processes, they are more likely to support and sustain the projects over time, leading to more successful and sustainable outcomes. Ecotourism development focuses on several key aspects, including social and cultural empowerment, economic improvement for local communities, environmental conservation, and education. According to (Maak et al., 2022), ecotourism represents a holistic approach to tourism development, where economic growth is balanced with social responsibility and environmental sustainability. This comprehensive approach ensures that ecotourism not only generates economic benefits but also contributes to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, creating a positive impact on both the community and the environment.

The balance between social, economic, and environmental aspects is what makes ecotourism unique. Unlike other forms of tourism, ecotourism emphasizes the importance of preserving natural resources and respecting local cultures. It creates a connection between tourists and the destinations they visit, encouraging responsible behavior and fostering a deeper appreciation for the environment and the local culture. At the same time, ecotourism empowers local communities by providing them with the tools and resources needed to manage their natural and cultural assets sustainably (Jaya, 2022). Based on the analysis presented above, it is evident that community participation plays a critical role in the success of ecotourism development. Effective ecotourism policies must

integrate local communities into every stage of the development process, from planning to implementation and evaluation. This participatory approach ensures that tourism development benefits the community while also promoting environmental sustainability (Pattiruhu et al., 2022). When communities are actively involved, they are more likely to support and maintain ecotourism initiatives, ensuring their long-term success.

This research aims to explore practical strategies for increasing community participation in ecotourism development with the Research Title “Efforts to Increase Community Participation in Supporting the Sustainability of Ecotourism Development Policies”. Specifically, the research seeks to identify activities that can enhance community involvement in supporting the sustainability of ecotourism policies. By examining these activities, the research will provide actionable recommendations for policymakers and tourism practitioners to strengthen community engagement in ecotourism initiatives. The goal is to ensure that the benefits of ecotourism are shared equitably and that the projects are sustainable in the long term.

B. Literature Review

Ecotourism Principles

There are several economic principles related to ecotourism as described by (Priono, 2012). These principles serve as a foundation for sustainable ecotourism development, ensuring that the interests of both the environment and local communities are balanced with the needs of tourism activities. Below is a revised version of these principles with consistent formatting, more detailed explanations, and real-life examples to provide clarity and relevance.

Ecotourism development must have the capacity to maintain, protect, and improve natural resources. This principle emphasizes the need for ecotourism to contribute positively to both cultural and natural environmental conservation. The conservation principle, as noted by (Priono, 2012), is divided into two key aspects: natural conservation and cultural conservation. Natural conservation refers to efforts to protect ecosystems and biodiversity, requiring that tourism activities follow strict ecological guidelines to minimize environmental impact. Cultural conservation, on the other hand, requires sensitivity to and respect for the cultural and religious values of the local community (Setiawan et al., 2021). For example, the ecotourism project at Gunung Rinjani National Park in Indonesia follows strict ecological rules by limiting the number of visitors and implementing a "carry-in, carry-out" policy

to manage waste. This ensures the protection of the natural environment. Simultaneously, local cultural festivals and traditions are preserved and promoted through tourist engagement, ensuring that cultural heritage remains integral to the tourism experience.

The success of ecotourism heavily depends on the active involvement of local communities. According to (Priono, 2012), the development of ecotourism must be based on deliberation and approval from the community, with a focus on respecting the socio-cultural and religious values upheld by the people living around the tourism area. This principle ensures that the community not only benefits economically but also retains control over how their lands and resources are utilized. Community participation can range from decision-making roles in tourism planning to direct employment opportunities within ecotourism projects (Priyo Purnomo et al., 2021). For instance, the Maasai Mara Conservancy in Kenya is a successful example of community participation in ecotourism. The local Maasai people are actively involved in decision-making processes regarding tourism development, and they benefit financially from land lease agreements with ecotourism operators. This has not only empowered the community but has also contributed to wildlife conservation efforts, as the locals see the value of preserving the land and wildlife that attract tourists.

The economic principle in ecotourism, as stated by (Priono, 2012), highlights the need for ecotourism development to provide sustainable economic benefits to the local community. Ecotourism must be a driver for the local economy by creating job opportunities, generating income, and fostering the sustainable use of natural resources. Moreover, the development of ecotourism should ensure that economic growth is balanced with environmental preservation, guaranteeing long-term benefits for all stakeholders. A practical application of this principle can be seen in the success of Costa Rica's ecotourism industry. The country has turned its rich biodiversity into a key economic driver, contributing significantly to the national GDP. Local communities benefit through employment in eco-lodges, guided tours, and other nature-based tourism activities, while strict environmental regulations ensure the sustainability of natural resources (Alfia et al., 2023). By implementing sustainable practices, such as promoting renewable energy and limiting deforestation, Costa Rica has become a global leader in both economic and environmental sustainability through ecotourism.

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Education plays a central role in ecotourism by fostering a deeper understanding of the environment and promoting behavior that is caring, committed, and responsible towards conservation. According to (Priono, 2012), the educational component of ecotourism should aim to change visitors' mindsets and behaviors to become more environmentally conscious. This is achieved through activities that raise awareness and appreciation for natural and cultural heritage, and by imparting knowledge to both visitors and the local community. One way in which this principle is implemented in real-life settings is through educational tours in the Galápagos Islands. Tourists are provided with detailed information about the fragile ecosystems of the islands and the efforts required to protect them. Educational programs are also conducted for the local residents, helping them understand the importance of conservation and providing them with the skills to contribute to sustainable tourism (Larantika, 2019). This two-pronged educational approach ensures that both visitors and locals are better equipped to support and maintain environmental conservation efforts.

Ecotourism is unique in that it seeks to provide visitors with a deep, meaningful experience that goes beyond mere leisure. According to (Priono, 2012), ecotourism development should focus on providing satisfaction for tourists by offering them authentic, nature-based experiences that are both secure and comfortable (Sawir et al., 2024). The goal is to foster a sense of appreciation and connection to the environment, ensuring that visitors leave with not only positive memories but also a greater understanding of the need for environmental conservation. An example of this can be found in the sustainable tourism practices in Bhutan. The country has adopted a policy of "high value, low impact" tourism, which ensures that tourists experience the country's unique cultural and natural landscapes while minimizing the environmental footprint of tourism activities (Andri et al., 2022). Visitors are provided with guided tours that immerse them in the local culture and natural beauty, ensuring they leave with a deep sense of satisfaction and a commitment to preserving the environment. This approach has made Bhutan a premier destination for those seeking authentic, sustainable travel experiences.

In conclusion, the principles outlined by (Priono, 2012) form the foundation of successful and sustainable ecotourism. By adhering to the principles of conservation, community participation, economic sustainability, education, and providing an authentic tourism experience, ecotourism projects can achieve long-term success while benefiting both local communities and the

environment. Real-life examples such as those from Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Vietnam demonstrate how these principles can be effectively implemented to create thriving, sustainable tourism destinations that protect natural and cultural heritage while also delivering economic and educational benefits (Adharani et al., 2020).

Ecotourism Impact

Ecotourism impact is multifaceted, encompassing economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Economically, it can provide local communities with new business opportunities, job creation, and increased income. This growth can stimulate regional development, promote environmental conservation efforts, and support sustainable use of natural resources (Abdoellah et al., 2020). However, ecotourism can also present challenges, such as environmental degradation if not managed properly, and the commercialization of indigenous culture, which may dilute or erode traditional practices. Socially, ecotourism can foster stronger community engagement and cooperation, but it may also exacerbate inequalities if only a small portion of the population benefits from tourism-related activities (Karyati, 2021). Therefore, a balanced approach that ensures equitable distribution of benefits, maintains environmental integrity, and respects cultural heritage is essential for achieving sustainable ecotourism.

From an economic standpoint, ecotourism can create numerous positive outcomes. It opens new opportunities for entrepreneurship, increases job availability, stimulates the development of new businesses, and raises community income levels. This contributes to more equitable income distribution within the local population and fosters local economic growth (Abdoellah et al., 2020). Ecotourism also promotes efforts towards environmental conservation and boosts local governance revenues through taxes and retributions. Additionally, it contributes to national income and encourages the sustainable use of natural resources, benefiting both the environment and the economy. However, despite these positive effects, there are potential negative consequences if ecotourism is not carefully managed. One significant issue is the degradation of biological resources (Harahab, 2020). Mismanagement can lead to the destruction of ecosystems, diminishing an area's attractiveness for tourists. Moreover, commercialization of local art and culture poses a threat to indigenous traditions (Yatimah & Kustandi, 2021). The influx of foreign tourists, if unchecked, may erode cultural values and lead to a

shift away from the community's authentic heritage. For instance, cultural performances might become more commercialized and tailored to meet tourists' expectations rather than preserving the true essence of the local traditions. This commercialization could eventually lead to the loss of indigenous culture, a consequence that must be carefully guarded against in ecotourism planning.

Ecotourism is unique in that it often requires the involvement of the entire local community, potentially leading to widespread social, cultural, and economic changes. On the positive side, ecotourism can enhance social cohesion by creating new opportunities for social interaction and collaboration between community members and tourism operators (Hasyimi & Azizalrahman, 2021). It can also help in uplifting the community's economic status, as increased income and employment opportunities help meet the needs of the population (Erwiantono et al., 2016). However, if not managed inclusively, ecotourism can exacerbate social inequalities. When only a small portion of the community is involved in tourism activities whether due to lack of skills, resources, or access income disparities can widen, leaving certain groups marginalized. For instance, local elites may dominate tourism-related businesses while other community members remain excluded. This creates tensions and conflicts within the community, particularly when the benefits of ecotourism are unevenly distributed. To address these social inequalities, proactive strategies are necessary (Auri et al., 2022).

One such approach involves inclusive policymaking that ensures equitable access to tourism-related opportunities. This can be achieved by creating community training programs that equip local residents with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully in ecotourism. For example, training programs can focus on hospitality, cultural performance preservation, or environmental management, allowing a broader section of the population to benefit from tourism activities (Karyati, 2021). Moreover, establishing cooperatives where profits are shared among community members could help mitigate income inequalities and foster a more collaborative environment. The economic benefits of ecotourism are often highlighted, but these must be contextualized within broader economic realities. Comparative studies have shown that while ecotourism can be highly beneficial, it sometimes underperforms relative to other economic activities, such as agriculture or extractive industries. For example, while ecotourism generates income through foreign exchange and job creation, it may not provide as stable or immediate

returns as traditional industries (Hanum et al., 2021). This suggests a need for ecotourism to complement, rather than replace, other local economic activities. Diversifying income sources ensures that communities are not overly reliant on tourism, which can be vulnerable to fluctuations in tourist numbers due to seasonality or global economic shifts.

Research Gaps in Addressing Social, Cultural, and Economic Divides

Despite the growing interest in ecotourism, there remain gaps in the research concerning its long-term effects on social, cultural, and economic divides (Rizal et al., 2021). Current studies often focus on the immediate economic impacts, such as job creation and income generation, while paying less attention to the deeper, systemic inequalities that can arise. For instance, research on how cultural commercialization affects indigenous identity over multiple generations is sparse (Sururi, 2019). Similarly, studies examining the specific mechanisms through which ecotourism either alleviates or exacerbates economic disparities are still underdeveloped. Addressing these research gaps is crucial for understanding how to make ecotourism more inclusive and equitable (Syafri & Albayudi, 2020). There is a need for more comprehensive, longitudinal studies that track the social and economic outcomes of ecotourism over time. This will allow policymakers and stakeholders to develop more targeted interventions to address the challenges posed by ecotourism. Moreover, future research should explore how local governance structures can play a role in ensuring that the benefits of ecotourism are distributed more equitably. This includes examining the role of local governments in regulating tourism activities and ensuring that marginalized groups are not excluded from participating in the tourism economy.

In conclusion, ecotourism holds significant potential for both positive and negative impacts. When managed effectively, it can drive local economic growth, enhance environmental conservation efforts, and foster greater social cohesion. However, without careful planning and inclusive policies, ecotourism can also lead to environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and increased social inequalities (Waluyo, 2000). To maximize the positive impacts while minimizing the negatives, a holistic approach that incorporates community participation, equitable policy-making, and sustainable environmental practices is essential (Singgalen et al., 2019). Future research must address the existing gaps, particularly concerning the long-term social, cultural, and economic

effects of ecotourism, in order to create more sustainable and inclusive tourism models that truly benefit local communities.

C. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method, specifically utilizing a literature review approach. The research focuses on secondary data, which is derived from various credible sources such as journal articles, theses, books, and government reports, alongside documents sourced from the internet that are relevant to community participation in supporting ecotourism development policies (Abdoellah et al., 2020). The selection of these sources follows specific criteria, prioritizing those that provide recent and relevant insights into the subject matter. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, well-cited books, and official documents from reputable institutions or government sources are included to ensure the data's reliability and accuracy.

In terms of data collection, this study emphasizes a systematic selection process. The literature was chosen based on relevance to key themes such as ecotourism development, community engagement, and policy support mechanisms (Erwiantono et al., 2016). Moreover, the validity of the secondary data is ensured through a critical assessment of each source's credibility, including an evaluation of the authorship, publication medium, and the date of publication. For sources obtained from the internet, only data from established academic databases and government websites are utilized to minimize the risk of relying on inaccurate or outdated information (Mulyana et al., 2019). The data analysis process in this study is conducted systematically to ensure a structured interpretation of the information gathered. Initially, the data is organized into relevant categories based on themes such as community participation, economic impact, environmental sustainability, and policy development (Asy'ari et al., 2021). Following this, the data is interpreted and summarized, ensuring that insights from various sources are synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

A key part of the analysis involves the use of SWOT analysis, which helps to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats related to increasing community participation in supporting ecotourism development (Priono, 2012). In the context of this research, Strengths might include the community's local knowledge and cultural heritage, while Weaknesses could encompass limited resources or lack of access to training. Opportunities may involve the rising global interest in sustainable tourism, and Threats could

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include environmental degradation or external competition. By using SWOT analysis, the research aims to maximize the strengths and opportunities while mitigating the weaknesses and addressing the potential threats. This framework ensures that strategies developed for increasing community participation are grounded in a thorough understanding of the current landscape and future possibilities.

D. Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the VOSviewer analysis, which helps identify key clusters and recurring themes related to ecotourism development. The analysis, as visualized in Figure 2, reveals various clusters based on frequently occurring keywords in the literature. Each color in the clustering reflects a distinct thematic group, representing the broad scope of ecotourism-related discussions.

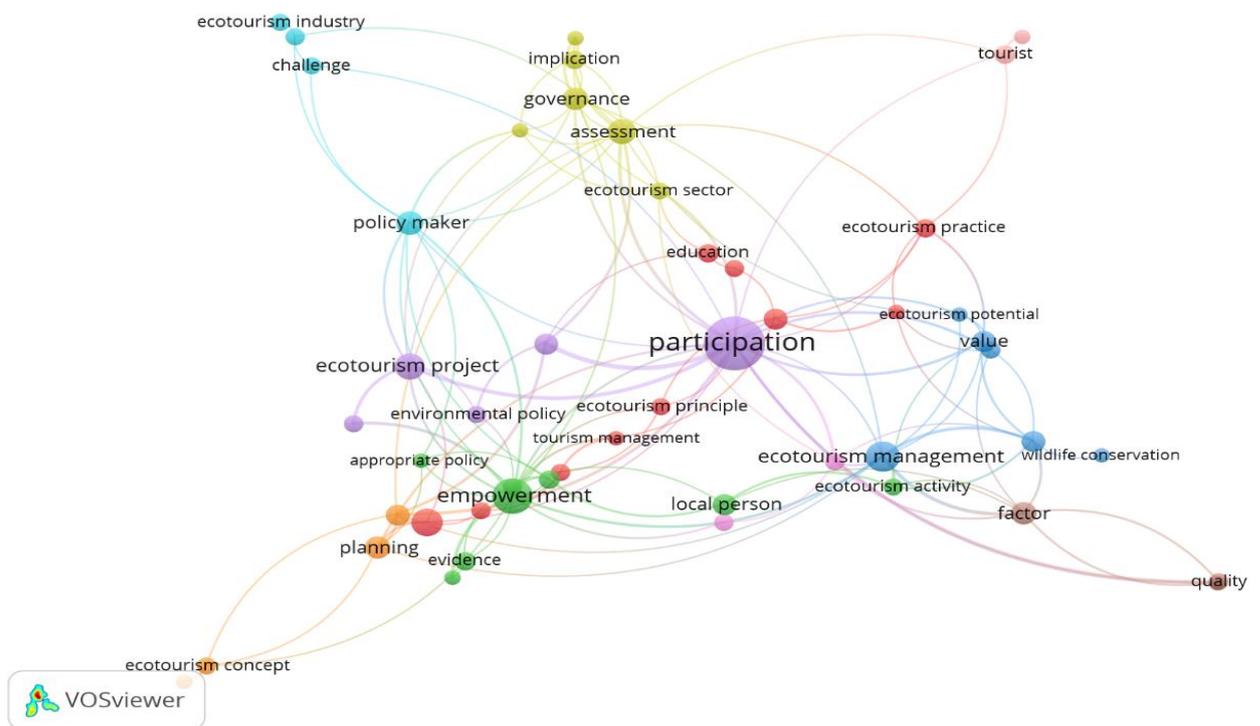


Figure 2. The Results of the Alaysis Using VOSviewer
Source: (VOSviewer, 2023)

The results of VOSviewer processing indicate several important clusters: (1) Purple cluster, this cluster emphasizes participation, ecotourism projects, and environmental policy. It highlights the significance of community involvement and environmental governance in developing ecotourism; (2) Blue cluster, this group focuses on ecotourism management, value, policy, wildlife, potential, and conservation. These terms illustrate the intersection of ecotourism potential and its management, particularly in relation to wildlife and conservation policies; (3) Light blue cluster, keywords in this cluster include policymaker, challenge, ecotourism, and industry, reflecting the role of governance and the challenges faced by industry stakeholders in promoting sustainable ecotourism; (4) Red cluster, the red cluster emphasizes ecotourism principles, education, ecotourism practice, and empowerment, suggesting that education and community empowerment are critical for implementing ecotourism practices effectively; (5) Light green cluster, this cluster focuses on the ecotourism sector, assessment, governance, and implication, highlighting the role of governance and systematic evaluation in ensuring sustainable ecotourism practices; (6) Green cluster, it emphasizes empowerment, appropriate policy, local involvement, and ecotourism activities, suggesting the importance of empowering local communities through suitable policies; (7) Orange cluster, this cluster covers planning and the ecotourism concept, indicating the critical role of strategic planning in ecotourism development.

These clusters offer a comprehensive understanding of how different elements of ecotourism, such as policy, community involvement, and management, are interconnected and how they have been addressed in existing research. The findings presented through the VOSviewer analysis provide key insights into the complexity of ecotourism development, particularly regarding community involvement, governance, and sustainability. This discussion further elaborates on those results, drawing connections between the identified clusters and established theories, while addressing challenges related to community participation, policy, and equity.

The Purple and Green clusters, which highlight the importance of community participation and empowerment, align with community-based ecotourism (CBET) theory. This theory underscores the need for local communities to be central players in ecotourism, allowing them to benefit both socially and economically from the tourism activities that impact their environment (Oktami et al., 2018). However, despite the significance of this

approach, the findings suggest that local communities are often excluded from crucial decision-making processes. Policy development tends to be dominated by governmental bodies and external stakeholders, with minimal input from the communities themselves. This imbalance undermines the sustainability of ecotourism, as decisions made without local knowledge may not adequately address the unique needs and conditions of these communities (Ginting et al., 2019).

The Blue and Light Blue clusters point to the challenges of governance, particularly in balancing economic and environmental goals. According to collaborative governance theory, effective ecotourism requires cooperation between various stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, and private industry (Auri et al., 2022). This cooperative approach ensures that the interests of all parties are considered, especially when it comes to wildlife conservation and resource management. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that many ecotourism policies remain disconnected from local realities, focusing more on economic development than on sustainability or community well-being. The misalignment between policy objectives and community needs can exacerbate environmental degradation and social inequities.

The Red and Orange clusters, emphasizing the role of education and strategic planning, highlight the importance of capacity-building initiatives in fostering sustainable ecotourism practices. Empowering communities through education is crucial to enabling them to take an active role in tourism management and ensuring that they benefit from the industry (Andita & Kahfi, 2019). Strategic planning, particularly in the form of inclusive and forward-looking policies, can help mitigate some of the challenges faced by ecotourism, such as unequal benefit distribution and environmental degradation. Planning that incorporates the perspectives of local communities is more likely to result in sustainable and equitable outcomes (Taruh, 2024).

Community participation in decision-making is a critical component of successful ecotourism, yet the results indicate that local involvement is often limited. Decision-making processes are typically controlled by government bodies or private stakeholders, with little opportunity for local communities to contribute (Oktami et al., 2018). This top-down approach can lead to the development of policies that are not aligned with the specific needs or knowledge of the community, reducing the likelihood of long-term success. The lack of involvement in decision-making can also be attributed to structural barriers, such as limited access to education and resources. Communities with

lower levels of education may be less equipped to participate in formal decision-making processes, leaving them marginalized in ecotourism governance (Kawuryan et al., 2022). To address this, it is essential to create inclusive governance models that facilitate community input. This may involve establishing local councils or forums where community members can contribute to the development of ecotourism policies and strategies (Auri et al., 2022).

Although community involvement in decision-making is limited, the findings indicate that participation in the implementation of ecotourism projects is more common (Alfia et al., 2023). Local communities often engage in tourism activities by providing services, acting as guides, or running small businesses related to the tourism sector. However, their roles tend to be operational rather than managerial, limiting their influence over how ecotourism is conducted in their region. For ecotourism to be sustainable, community participation must extend beyond direct service provision. Communities need to be involved in the management and governance of tourism resources, ensuring that they have a say in how these resources are used and conserved (Hanum et al., 2021). This can be achieved through capacity-building programs that provide community members with the skills needed to manage ecotourism projects effectively. Such programs should focus on areas such as business management, environmental conservation, and hospitality (Nala & Indriani, 2020).

The Green and Blue clusters suggest that while communities can benefit economically from ecotourism, these benefits are not always distributed equitably (Yatimah & Kustandi, 2021). Individuals with specific skills, such as language proficiency or business acumen, are often better positioned to capitalize on tourism opportunities, while others may be left behind. This unequal distribution of benefits can exacerbate existing social inequalities within the community, undermining the potential of ecotourism to promote inclusive development (Zahra et al., 2024).

To ensure that the benefits of ecotourism are shared more equitably, policymakers must focus on empowering marginalized groups within the community. This could involve providing targeted training programs that equip these groups with the skills needed to participate fully in ecotourism activities. Additionally, policies should be designed to promote inclusive economic development, ensuring that all community members have the opportunity to benefit from tourism (Pratama et al., 2022).

The Light Green and Orange clusters emphasize the role of governance and evaluation in ecotourism, yet the findings suggest that local communities are often excluded from the evaluation process. Evaluation is typically conducted by external actors, such as government agencies or private sector partners, with minimal input from the communities affected by tourism activities. This lack of community involvement in evaluation can result in assessments that do not fully reflect the local context, leading to misguided policy adjustments or interventions (Harahab, 2020; Purnomo, 2018).

Participatory evaluation methods, which involve community members in assessing the outcomes of ecotourism initiatives, can help address this issue. By incorporating local perspectives into the evaluation process, policymakers can ensure that tourism projects are meeting the needs of the community and contributing to sustainable development (Ginting et al., 2019). Furthermore, participatory evaluation allows communities to provide feedback on the social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism, ensuring that future projects are better aligned with local priorities.

Despite the potential benefits of community participation in ecotourism, there are significant barriers that must be addressed. Structural issues, such as limited access to education, financial resources, and technology, can prevent communities from fully engaging in ecotourism activities. Additionally, cultural factors, including traditional power dynamics and gender roles, can further limit participation, particularly for marginalized groups such as women or indigenous peoples (Zahra et al., 2024).

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to develop policies that promote social inclusion and address the root causes of inequality. This may involve providing targeted support to marginalized groups, improving access to education and training, and creating platforms for these groups to have a voice in ecotourism governance (Hijriati & Mardiana, 2015). Furthermore, efforts should be made to reduce the reliance on external actors in decision-making processes, empowering local communities to take ownership of ecotourism initiatives.

In addition to structural and cultural barriers, the commercialization of ecotourism poses a significant challenge to its sustainability. As tourism becomes more commercialized, there is a risk that the focus shifts from conservation and community development to profit maximization (Marta, 2016). This can result in the exploitation of natural and cultural resources, undermining the long-term viability of ecotourism. To prevent this, ecotourism

policies must prioritize environmental protection and community well-being over short-term economic gains (Taruh, 2024). (Formating and consistance number)

D. Conclusion

The VOSviewer analysis reveals key themes and challenges associated with ecotourism development, particularly in relation to community participation, governance, and equity. The findings underscore the importance of involving local communities in all stages of ecotourism, from decision-making and implementation to evaluation. However, significant barriers remain, including structural inequalities and a lack of inclusive governance models. To address these challenges, policymakers must adopt more inclusive governance structures that prioritize community involvement. Capacity-building programs should be expanded to ensure that all members of the community have the skills needed to participate fully in ecotourism activities. Additionally, participatory evaluation methods should be employed to ensure that tourism projects are meeting the needs of local communities and contributing to sustainable development. By addressing these issues, ecotourism has the potential to become a powerful tool for promoting social, economic, and environmental sustainability. However, this will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders to ensure that the benefits of ecotourism are shared equitably and that the industry remains focused on its core principles of conservation and community empowerment. (Done conclusion)

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