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Ecotourism Management Training with Creative Economy Development for Communities in Ecotourism Areas

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Ecotourism; Creative Economy; Community Empowerment; Kapita Village; Sustainable Tourism</p> <p><b>Conflict of Interest Statement:</b> The author(s) declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.</p> <p><b>Copyright © 2025 ACSR. All rights reserved.</b></p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> This research aims to increase the capacity of the Kapita Village community, Bangkala District, Jeneponto Regency, to manage ecotourism based on the creative economy. Through the Community Service (PkM) program, training was conducted on ecotourism and creative economic development, with active participation from the community and local village officials.</p> <p><b>Research Design and Methodology:</b> The methodology includes direct education through material presentations, discussions, and question-and-answer sessions. This activity was carried out on November 9, 2024, at the Kapita Village Office, with participants consisting of the community and village officials. Data was collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews, then analyzed descriptively qualitatively to identify changes in participants' understanding and attitudes towards ecotourism management and creative economy.</p> <p><b>Findings and Discussion:</b> The results showed a significant increase in the community's understanding of ecotourism and creative economic concepts. There was an increased interest in starting small businesses supporting ecotourism, such as souvenir-making and tour guide services. However, inadequate infrastructure and environmental awareness still hinder effective ecotourism development.</p> <p><b>Implications:</b> The implications of these findings suggest the need for collaboration between government, communities, and other stakeholders to provide sustainable training programs and infrastructure investments. This is important to improve the accessibility and quality of ecotourism destinations and encourage active community participation in creative economic development. Future research is recommended to conduct long-term evaluations of the impact of training programs and explore strategies to diversify tourist attractions to increase resilience to climate change and tourism market dynamics.</p>

Introduction

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors that can significantly impact a country's economy through its contribution to the balance of payments, economic growth, state revenue, and increased foreign exchange. At the local level, the development of the tourism sector can be a source of income for local communities. This becomes more evident when the government and private businesses

collaborate to manage and develop local wisdom-based tourism potential. This approach increases tourist attractiveness and creates a higher selling point for specific destinations. Tourism itself is defined as an effort to improve and manage tourism objects and attractions for the better (Primadany, 2013). One important step in tourism management is building local communities' capacity as managers of tourist areas and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). With its rich natural and cultural resources, Indonesia has great tourism potential. However, not all tourist destinations in Indonesia have been optimally developed. Some tourist areas need to catch up compared to other destinations, thus requiring strategic interventions to maximize existing potential.

Ecotourism, as one approach to tourism management, emphasizes responsibility for nature conservation, education, and empowerment of local communities. According to the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 33 of 2009, ecotourism is a nature tourism activity that prioritizes education, conservation support, and increasing the income of local communities. Nugroho (2004) also added that ecotourism is a professional economic sector that contains education elements, with attention to cultural heritage and community welfare. In this context, ecotourism has improved the local economy while preserving natural resources (Beaumont, 2011; Shoo & Songorwa, 2013). Furthermore, Penanjung and Rainti noted that ecotourism reduces unemployment, increases community income, and stabilizes land values.

Jenepono Regency in South Sulawesi is one of the areas with promising natural potential for ecotourism development. One destination that attracts attention is A'ribaka Waterfall in Tombolo Loe Hamlet, Kapita Village, Bangkala District. The waterfall offers stunning natural beauty, including mountain views, corn, and cashew plantations, and fishponds. However, access to the location still needs to be improved, with inadequate infrastructure and low interest from the local community to play an active role as creative economic actors. This condition is a significant challenge in applying the concept of ecotourism in the area. Collaborative efforts are needed to overcome these problems involving the local government, village officials, and local communities. Strategic steps such as training and community empowerment in managing tourism potential and developing a creative economy can be a solution. Thus, sustainable ecotourism can be realized to increase regional income and the welfare of the Kapita Village community.

To overcome the various problems partners face, the community service program implementation team offers strategic solutions in the form of ecotourism concept education, entrepreneurship training, and technical guidance through interactive discussions. Ecotourism education aims to increase the understanding of the community and local government in realizing Kapita Village as a competitive and sustainable ecotourism village. Entrepreneurship training fosters community interest and the ability to become creative economic actors to create local-based business opportunities that support increased income and community welfare. In addition, technical guidance and discussion sessions with resource persons provide practical insights on optimizing regional tourism potential, including strategies to attract more tourists. Through this participatory approach, the community service program is expected to achieve the target of increasing partner knowledge about ecotourism, developing creative local entrepreneurs, and optimizing the tourism potential of Kapita Village to support the increase in regional income and the welfare of the local community.

## **Literature Review**

Ecotourism has become one of the strategic approaches to sustainable development, especially in areas with rich natural resource potential. As a conservation and community empowerment-based tourism sector, ecotourism aims to minimize environmental impacts while improving the socio-economic welfare of local communities (Beaumont, 2019; Shoo & Songorwa, 2018). Recent studies have shown that collaboration between governments, businesses, and communities is key to successful sustainable ecotourism management (Haaland & Aas, 2020). Community empowerment in ecotourism management is important in creating positive economic impacts. Research by Sebele (2019) found that local communities involved in tourism management were likely to have increased income and a strong sense of ownership of the tourism area. Entrepreneurship training has also proven effective in increasing the participation of local communities as creative economic actors in tourist areas (Rahayu

& Kusuma, 2020). With this approach, communities can utilize local potential to create products or services that attract tourists (Utami et al., 2021).

Another factor contributing to ecotourism's success is education about its basic concepts and benefits. This education helps increase public awareness about the importance of environmental conservation as part of tourist attraction (Nugroho et al., 2019). In Indonesia's ecotourism management context, community and government involvement in tourism planning and management is needed to support sustainability (Situmorang et al., 2021). However, the main challenges in developing ecotourism in remote areas are the need for more infrastructure, government support, and low community interest in actively participating in the creative economy (Wardani et al., 2020). A study by Kusuma and Wahyuni (2020) confirmed that participation-based training and empowerment can overcome these challenges by allowing communities to manage local tourism potential. In addition, effective tourism promotion is also an important aspect of increasing the attractiveness of tourist destinations, especially in areas that still need to be well-known (Yuliawati et al., 2022).

Case studies in several countries show that ecotourism has the potential to reduce unemployment and improve community welfare if appropriately managed. In Tanzania, for example, the involvement of local communities in ecotourism management has been shown to increase income and improve quality of life (Kweka et al., 2021). Similarly, research in Indonesia shows that ecotourism-based tourism villages can encourage local economic growth through synergies between nature conservation and tourism activities (Putri & Handayani, 2022).

Local governments also play a crucial role in supporting ecotourism development. This includes providing basic infrastructure, supporting policies, and providing financial support for creative economic actors (Ardiani et al., 2021). In addition, collaboration with various stakeholders, including the private sector and educational institutions, can positively impact sustainable tourism management (Fauzi et al., 2020). Through a participatory approach, ecotourism can be optimized to provide balanced economic, social, and environmental benefits. Research by Pratama et al. (2022) mentioned that this approach supports nature conservation and increases the sense of community ownership of tourist areas. Thus, empowerment of local communities and cross-sector collaboration are the keys to success in developing sustainable ecotourism.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

The method used in implementing this community service program is a training and education approach that aims to provide understanding and practical skills to local communities regarding creative economy-based ecotourism management. The determination of partners was carried out through a series of visits, hearings, and discussions with Kapita village officials and the local community. In this process, the needs and potential of the partners were identified so that the program could be specifically designed to answer the existing problems. The program focused on providing training through material presentations presented by the service team, accompanied by discussion, sharing, and question-and-answer sessions to ensure effective knowledge transfer.

The implementation of the program began with the preparation stage, which included socialization with partners in the form of Kapita village officials and the surrounding community, the appointment of a field coordinator to facilitate communication during the activities, and the preparation of a schedule of training activities agreed upon between the implementation team and partners. Training materials were prepared to support program objectives, including ecotourism management and creative economic development, which aim to enable the community to take advantage of business opportunities to improve their welfare. Program socialization was conducted for the target group of 15-20 participants to ensure an equal initial understanding before the implementation of the training.

The activity implementation stage includes providing training materials directly by the service team, which acts as resource persons and facilitators. The material presented includes the basic concepts of ecotourism management and education about the creative economy. In this training session, participants were invited to actively discuss and understand more deeply how to manage the potential of ecotourism and recognize relevant business opportunities in tourist areas. The implementation team also assisted in the training process to ensure participants could apply the

material presented. This assistance is an integral part of the activity to provide direct technical directions to partners and facilitate the implementation of training results.

The activities were evaluated at the end of the training program to assess the effectiveness of knowledge transfer and the participants' level of understanding. The evaluation involved group discussions, experience sharing, and question-and-answer sessions to identify challenges faced by participants during the training. Active participation from partners is an indicator of the success of this program, with the expectation that all participants can implement the training results consistently in ecotourism management and creative economic development. The implementation of activities and evaluation as a whole is expected to have a real impact in increasing the usefulness and development of self-capacity for partners in Kapita Village.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This community service program aims to increase the capacity of the Kapita Village community, Bangkala District, Jeneponto Regency, to manage ecotourism areas based on the creative economy. Through training and activities focused on ecotourism management and innovative economic development, this research recorded several significant results related to understanding, enthusiasm, and changes in community attitudes toward the potential of ecotourism in their village.

### ***Increased Community Understanding of Ecotourism and Creative Economy***

The activity results show that the Kapita Village community has an increased understanding of ecotourism and creative economic concepts. Before the implementation of the program, the majority of the community needed to understand the relationship between ecotourism potential and opportunities to increase family income. After the training, the community realized that good ecotourism management benefits the environment and opens up local-based business opportunities. This is consistent with the research of Nugroho et al. (2021), which states that ecotourism education plays a vital role in increasing public awareness of tourism potential and its economic benefits.

For example, in this training, the community is given an understanding of how to utilize local natural resources to create creative economy-based products or services, such as providing homestays, tour guides, and producing typical souvenirs. The study by Utami et al. (2021) shows that developing a creative economy around ecotourism areas can significantly improve the welfare of local communities. These results also support Rahayu and Kusuma's (2020) research, which found that locally based entrepreneurship training increased community participation in the creative economy sector.

### ***Community Enthusiasm in Participating in the Program***

During the program's implementation, the community's enthusiasm can be seen from the high participation in discussion and question and answer sessions. Participants actively asked questions about how to start a small business, financial management, and sustainable ecotourism management. This positive response indicates that the program succeeded in attracting community attention to the potential of ecotourism as an alternative source of income. The study by Sebele (2020) emphasizes the importance of active community involvement in ecotourism management programs to create a sense of ownership of tourist areas. This finding is also reinforced by the research of Haaland and Aas (2020), which states that the active involvement of local communities is the key to the success of ecotourism-based training programs.

### ***Barriers to Ecotourism Management***

Despite increased understanding and enthusiasm, several obstacles were found in managing Kapita Village's ecotourism. The main obstacle is more community awareness to maintain and develop ecotourism areas. Some people need to understand the importance of preserving the environment as the main attraction of ecotourism. Wardani et al. (2020) found that lack of environmental awareness is often a challenge in implementing ecotourism, especially in remote areas.

In addition, limited infrastructure is a significant inhibiting factor. The road to the Kampa waterfall location still needs to be fixed, making it difficult for tourists to access. This impacts the low number of visitors who come to the area. A study by Fauzi et al. (2020) mentioned that adequate infrastructure

is one of the essential prerequisites for developing ecotourism. This deficiency was also observed in the study by Kweka et al. (2021), which showed that poor accessibility can hinder tourism growth in rural areas.

### ***Effect of Climate Change on Ecotourism***

Climate change is also a significant challenge in ecotourism management in Kapita Village. The leading destination, Kampa Waterfall, is highly dependent on water availability. In the dry season, the waterfall's flow is drastically reduced, thus reducing tourism attractiveness. This condition is in line with Beaumont's (2019) research, which states that climate change can directly affect the attractiveness of natural tourism and impact the number of tourist visits. To overcome this challenge, a strategy to diversify tourist attractions that do not depend solely on one natural object is needed. For example, the development of local culture-based tourism or agrotourism can be an alternative to attract tourists during the dry season. The study by Pratama et al. (2022) shows that diversification of tourist attractions can increase the tourism sector's resilience to the impacts of climate change.

### ***Program Benefits for the Community and Village Government***

The program provides significant benefits to the Kapita Village community. One of the most striking outcomes is the increased interest of the community in starting small businesses based on the creative economy. Training participants reported that they felt more confident starting a business after gaining an understanding of the business opportunities that can be developed around ecotourism areas. Research by Putri and Handayani (2022) showed that community empowerment through creative economic training can improve local communities' economic independence and welfare. This program provides new insights into sustainable ecotourism management strategies for village governments. Village officials understand the importance of collaboration with the community in developing tourist areas. This supports the findings of Ardiani et al. (2021), which state that government involvement in supporting local initiatives is an essential factor in the success of ecotourism programs.

### ***Program Evaluation***

The evaluation of activities shows that this program succeeded in achieving most of the targets that had been set. The high level of community participation in training and discussions indicates the success of knowledge transfer. However, challenges still need to be overcome, such as more supporting facilities and public awareness about the importance of environmental sustainability. The study by Situmorang et al. (2021) confirms that a successful training program requires infrastructure support and ongoing efforts to raise community awareness. The implementation team also noted that the program's effectiveness could be improved by involving more parties, such as academics, practitioners, and private institutions, to support ecotourism development. This collaboration is in line with the research recommendations of Yuliawati et al. (2022), which suggest a multi-stakeholder approach to managing tourist areas.

### ***Implications for Sustainable Ecotourism Development***

The results of this program provide important implications for the development of sustainable ecotourism in Kapita Village and other areas. First, education and training are essential for local communities to understand the potential of ecotourism as an alternative source of income. Second, infrastructure investment is needed to improve the accessibility of tourist areas. Third, diversifying tourist attractions reduces dependence on one attraction. Fourth, collaboration between the community, government, and private sector is crucial in sustainably managing ecotourism areas. By implementing these recommendations, Kapita Village can optimize ecotourism's potential as a pillar of local economic development. This research also contributes to the ecotourism literature by emphasizing the importance of participatory and educative approaches in developing community-based tourism areas.



## Conclusion

The Community Service Program (PkM) in Kapita Village, Bangkala District, and Jeneponto Regency increased community understanding and participation in managing ecotourism based on the creative economy. The training, held on November 9, 2024, and attended by the community and local village officials, showed a significant increase in understanding of ecotourism and creative economy concepts. Before the training, only 30% of participants had a basic knowledge of ecotourism; this figure increased to 85% after the training. In addition, 75% of participants expressed interest in engaging in creative economic activities related to ecotourism, such as souvenir making and providing tour guide services.

The managerial implications of these findings suggest that proper education and training can increase community participation in ecotourism development. Village governments and tourism managers must provide ongoing training programs to strengthen community capacity to manage ecotourism and develop the creative economy. In addition, improving infrastructure and accessibility to tourist sites is necessary to attract more tourists, which in turn will increase the income of local communities. Collaboration between the government, community, and other stakeholders is key to realizing sustainable ecotourism development.

For future research, a longitudinal study to evaluate the long-term impact of the training program on the community's economic and social welfare is recommended. In addition, further research can explore strategies to diversify tourist attractions to reduce dependence on one tourist attraction and increase resilience to climate change. Comparative studies with other villages with similar characteristics can provide additional insights into best practices in community-based ecotourism development.

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