

Local Community Participation in Tourism Planning around Conservation Areas

ABSTRACT

Taman Nasional Bali Barat (TNBB) is a nature conservation area in Indonesia. TNBB has been designated by the government as a nature tourism destination that admits development precedence because it is one of the national tourism strategic areas (NTSA). The sustainability of tourism in conservation areas is significantly determined by the level of local community participation in the tourism planning process. However, based on previous research, the level of local community participation in the tourism planning process in TNBB is low. This research aims to formulate a strategy for local community participation in the tourism planning process around the conservation area. The method employed to achieve this objective is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a qualitative approach in participatory tourism planning. Data is collected and analyzed by following the AI stages or 4D cycle. The results show that local communities participate in tourism decision-making. The level of dialogue that has been taking place so far shows a pattern of decision making or tourism planning process based on conservation areas. Starting from personal conversations in the context of friendship, then developing into organizational discourse, and later formulated as a shared vision and mission to optimize the function of conservation areas as tourism destinations. The involvement of local communities in the level of dialogue is a strategy for local community participation in the tourism planning process in TNBB.

Keywords: community participation, tourism planning, conservation area, dialogue level

1. INTRODUCTION

Conservation areas have become popular tourism destinations in many countries [1]; [2]; [3]; [4]. In Indonesia, the existence of conservation areas is also used for tourism functions, especially in nature conservation areas (NCA). Tourism development in conservation areas or conservation areas-based tourism is believed to be able to provide a balanced relationship between conservation efforts and local community development [5]; [6]; [7]; [8].

The benefits of conservation areas-based tourism are potential compensation for local communities who bear most of the costs due to restrictions on resource use due to the area's protected status [9]. In addition, the benefits of tourism in conservation areas act as a local incentive to support nature conservation efforts [10]. So that the benefits generated by conservation area-based tourism are more optimal, local community participation is needed in the tourism planning process in conservation areas [11]. Furthermore, effective local community participation in the tourism planning process in conservation areas can empower local communities economically, psychologically, socially, and politically [12] in synergizing tourism development and nature conservation.

However, the level of local community participation in the tourism planning process around conservation areas, especially in developing countries, is relatively limited [13]; [14]; [15]. The same phenomenon also occurs in Taman Nasional Bali Barat (TNBB). Based on previous research [16], the level of local community participation in the tourism planning process in TNBB is low. For this reason, research is needed that can promote the participation of communities in the tourism planning process in TNBB.

2. METHODS

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a participatory planning approach introduced by Cooperrider in 1986 [17]. AI carries a qualitative approach that is used to discover concepts or theories based on analysis of patterns, themes and general categories sourced from observational data. In a qualitative approach, researchers and participants collaborate in the research process to find appropriate solutions to social problems faced by local communities [18].

AI has been implemented as a methodology for organizational management and community-based planning [19]. Different from traditional approaches which are oriented towards identification, analysis and solving problems (problem-centric research), AI is based on the strengths (strength-based approach) of an organization or community to develop a positive planning approach in order to achieve the goals of the organization or community.

There are four steps in the AI approach which is often called the 4-D cycle: 1) discovery, appreciating and assessing the best of what exists; 2) dream, imagine success happening; 3) design, together discussing and constructing what should be; and 4) destiny, innovating and continuing what will happen. Data collection and analysis in this research used these steps, including the addition of a grounding phase by [18] before the discovery stage. 4-D modification is intended to build good relations (rapport) to learn and gain the trust of the local community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Conservation Area-Based Tourism (CABT)

Nature tourism is a travel activity or part of this activity carried out voluntarily and temporarily to enjoy the unique phenomena and beauty of nature in wildlife reserves, national parks, grand forest parks, and natural tourist parks [20]. The location of the activity is in a nature reserve area (NRA) or nature conservation area (NCA), then termed as conservation area-based tourism. So conservation area-based tourism is a variety of natural tourism activities in natural reserve areas or nature conservation areas and is supported by various facilities and services provided by the government, community, and private sectors.

TNBB as a natural conservation area that has a endemic ecosystem and is managed using a zoning system, has also been used as a conservation area-based tourism destination, especially in the Utilization Zone. The endemic ecosystems found in TNBB include rainforest, monsoon forest, savanna, coastal forest, mangrove forest and coral reef. This diversity of ecosystems is a special tourism resource for producing conservation area-based tourism products. Tourism products include activities, amenities, and accessibility, both provided by the Balai Taman Nasional Bali Barat (BTNBB) as a conservation area authority, local government, local communities, and natural tourism businesses [21].

3.2 Local Community Participation In Tourism Planning

Tourism products provided by local communities around the TNBB area are created by government decisions through BTNBB in the form of community empowerment programs around conservation areas. The community empowerment agenda is coherent with conservation efforts and traditional businesses of local communities. Thus, local community participation in conservation area-based tourism planning is very dependent on BTNBB's political will. So far, BTNBB has carried out a series of efforts to encourage local community participation, including providing access to use of conservation spaces, issuing business permits for providing natural tourism services, mutually beneficial cooperation, increasing capacity and capability, and assisting in proposing ex-situ conservation permits. Apart from that, BTNBB also practices embedded assistance so that it can understand the needs of local communities in conservation areas. It is called embedded assistance because between the accompanying officers and the assisted community a personal and spatial bond is built within the framework of ecosystem preservation.

One of the accompanying officers stated, "Now the local communities are the strength of TNBB in carrying out its function as a protected area for life support systems, preserving the diversity of plant and animal species, as well as sustainable use of biological natural resources and their ecosystems." Being the strength means that the local community is an internal part of TNBB which plays an important role in the successful functioning of the nature conservation area. The current condition is very different from the previous situation which considered local communities as external parties who threatened the preservation of habitats and species. Now the principle is that local communities are 'friends of TNBB, not opponents of TNBB'. There appears to be a change in the way the TNBB conservation area is managed from initially being exclusive to being inclusive of local communities or in other words the community as the subject of managing natural conservation areas. Still based on the accompanying officer's explanation, "To approach and embrace the local community, first what is done is to build friendships." As a friend of the local community, the companion's position is to listen to the stories of the assisted community. There are no promises or programs delivered to the assisted communities, the accompanying officers are only listeners. "Based on this story, BTNBB then identified current issues in local communities and formulated them with local communities into ecosystem conservation strategies and programs." Through friendship, the relationships that are built are personal. Personal relationships are effective in dissolving formal boundaries resulting from the designation of TNBB as a state-protected area. The breakdown of relations between local communities and TNBB, represented by accompanying officers, has opened a channel for conveying aspirations for local communities. This is proven by the freedom of the local community to share their stories and experiences. Various stories and experiences from local communities form the basis for preparing programs that suit community needs. Local communities are not only involved in identifying issues but also during the formulation of strategies and action programs through to implementation, supervision, and evaluation of conservation areas-based tourism.

The sequential stages from identifying issues, formulating plans in the form of strategies and action programs, to implementing, supervising, and evaluating plans are called the conservation area-based tourism planning process. It can be said that the planning process and protecting the ecosystem in the TNBB conservation area occur at several dialogical levels: personal conversations, communal agreements, and institutional decisions.

- Personal conversations occur in communication between friends, where accompanying officers listen to the stories of various elements of society to identify local community-based issues.

- Communal (organizational) agreements in the form of annual activity plans for community groups
- Institutional decisions in the 2020-2029 Taman Nasional Bali Barat Management Plan Document. This institutional decision guides activities in the TNBB conservation area.

The results show that the level of dialogue that has been taking place so far indicates a pattern of decision-making or tourism planning process based on conservation areas. Starting from personal conversations in friendships, then developing into organizational discourse, and then formulated as a shared vision and mission in the context of optimizing the function of conservation areas. The involvement of local communities in decision-making is the way for local communities to participate in conservation area-based tourism planning in TNBB. However, it is important to understand that the three levels above imply that local communities do not have the power to make decisions on conservation area-based tourism in TNBB or at least receive delegation of power from the government as the conservation area authority (BTNBB). This condition makes the community vulnerable to being co-opted by the government. Local communities are not yet fully the subject of conservation area-based tourism development planning but are still the object of gaining legitimacy for the designation of TNBB as a conservation area.

4. CONCLUSION

Conservation area-based tourism in TNBB resulted from a series of dialogues between local communities and the government. The dialogue stage starting from embedded assistance to identify local community-based tourism issues until finally becomes a tourism development plan in the TNBB. Involvement in this dialogue is a strategy for local community participation in the tourism planning process.

The government's role in accommodating this series of dialogues has succeeded in creating tourism that meets the participation needs of local communities. For this reason, the government's political will is really needed to ensure the sustainability of participatory tourism.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author.

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UNDER PEER REVIEW