

Village-based Tourism Development as a Strategy for Local Economic Empowerment in Bukit Lawang

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is believed to be one of the key drivers in enhancing the local economy, allowing the community around tourist destinations to not only act as spectators but also take part in tourism activities. In Bukit Lawang, one way to increase the contribution and benefits of tourism to the community is through the development of a tourism village. The concept of village-based local economic development is certainly a hope for improving the welfare of the local community in the Bukit Lawang area, but how and what steps can be taken to realize this hope can be answered through a strategic study. Therefore, this study aims to generate the necessary strategies for optimizing local economy through tourism villages in the Bukit Lawang area, which is known as one of the ecotourism centers. The research method used in this study is SWOT analysis, where data is collected through purposive sampling interviews with informants selected from the pentahelix elements (government, community, academia, media, and tourism business actors). The data is analyzed using the SWOT protocol by identifying internal and external factors, SWOT matrix, and ultimately generating alternative development strategies. One alternative strategy from the WT domain is the need for formulating an integrative roadmap for village-based local economic development to avoid overlapping tourism programs that are not targeted. In the future, further research with the same focus can involve additional analysis tools such as AHP or QSPM so that the resulting strategies can be ranked.

Keywords: *Development strategy, Local economy, Tourism villages, SWOT analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Langkat Regency is one of the prioritized sectors, where its development is expected to be integrated with the national development planned systematically and comprehensively (Claudia, 2018; Ginting & Veronica, 2019; Sudirman & Sitepu, 2019). As one of the tourism destinations, nationally through the Main Plan for Tourism Development (Ripparnas) 2010-2025, there are 50 National Tourism Destinations (DPN) and 88 National Strategic Tourism Areas (KSPN) (Peraturan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Nomor 50 Tahun 2011 Tentang Rencana Induk Pembangunan Kepariwisata Nasional Tahun 2010-2025, 2011). Langkat Regency falls into the Medan-Toba DPN category, and is also the location of the Tangkahan-Leuser National Strategic Tourism area (KSPN), as well as the Tangkahan-Leuser and Bukit Lawang National Tourism Development Areas (KPPN), as seen in Figure 1.

This shows the potential for tourism development in Langkat Regency, especially in the above-mentioned KPPN and KSPN, which are promising enough to become a national agenda. Bukit Lawang itself, as one of the main entrances to the Leuser area, has become a world-renowned ecotourism center in Langkat Regency (Syamsinar, 2020).

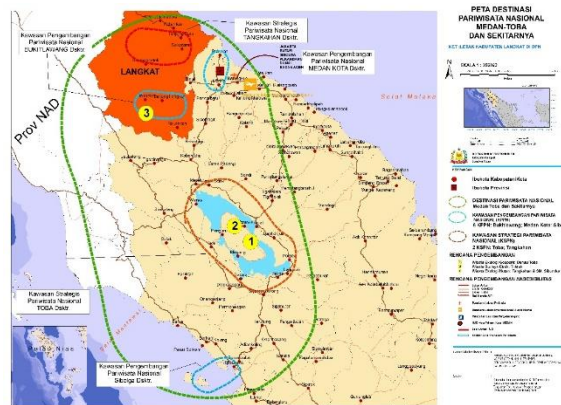


Figure 1. Map of Medan-Toba National Tourism Destinations and surrounding areas

So far, ecotourism and nature tourism concepts have been the main focus of development in the Bukit Lawang area (Lubis et al., 2007). Considering the diversity of target markets that come, developing tourist attractions is a necessity (Purwoko et al., 2022). In Bukit Lawang, the development of village tourism is one of the main focuses of tourism progress, which is expected to provide more benefits to the community from the tourism activities taking place around them (Denny et al., 2021; Sudirman & Sitepu, 2019). Village tourism aims to realize a combination of attractions, accommodation, and supporting facilities packaged in a pattern of community life that is integrated with existing customs and traditions, making the village a tourist destination (Hakim, 2020; Liyushiana et al., 2022).

The development of tourism with a village tourism approach has many dimensions that must be considered because it is directly related to local resources (Putra & Asrida, 2017). The development of village tourism is one tangible form of the concept of local economy (Prabowo & Pamurti, 2021). Therefore, tourism development must be carried out in a mature, structured, and participatory manner, so that the community plays a direct role as the main actor, not just as an observer (Abdillah & Suryawan, 2019; Ratnaningsih & Mahagangga, 2014; Sajiwo & Damayanti, 2016). Tourism development strategies, including the village tourism approach, can be defined as a comprehensive and integrated planning unit consisting of government, private sector, community, and academia to study obstacles, internal and external environmental conditions of tourist objects, so that they can become sustainable and highly competitive tourism destinations (Zaenal et al., 2016).

Through this village tourism concept, many tourists come to Bukit Lawang just to see the main attraction, which is the orangutan. To see the orangutans, tourists need to trek, and of course, during this activity, they will be presented with a view of a pristine forest and cool air. In addition, if lucky, tourists will also meet other endemic animals in the Gunung Leuser National Park area. This experience will be enhanced if combined with interactions with social activities in the framework of village tourism. Given the importance of village tourism development in the Bukit Lawang area, this research focuses on describing how the economic development strategy of the Bukit Lawang area through the village tourism concept can be implemented using SWOT analysis methods.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used is a qualitative approach with a descriptive method (Jhon W. Creswell, n.d., 2007; John W. Creswell, 2018). Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and literature studies related to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Bukit Lawang. In the Bukit Lawang area, which is located in Bahorok district, there are six villages that are targeted to become tourist villages: Perkebunan Bukit Lawang Village, Sampe Raya Village, Timbang Jaya Village, Timbang Lawan Village, Batu Katak Village, and Batu Jongjong Village. In this research, the focus of the tourist village is Perkebunan Bukit Lawang Village, which is the main gateway to Leuser and the main tourist village that provides access to other attractions around Bukit Lawang. After collecting data, the author will analyze it using SWOT analysis to obtain the appropriate strategy in the development of Bukit Lawang Tourist Village.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. General Overview of Perkebunan Bukit Lawang Village

The village of Bukit Lawang is located in the Bohorok sub-district, Langkat regency, North Sumatra province. The area of Langkat regency is 6,263.29 km² or 626,329 hectares. The regency capital is Stabat, and Bohorok sub-district is one of the 23 sub-districts in Langkat regency. Bohorok sub-district has an area of 884.79 km² consisting of 19 villages and 125 hamlets. The Bukit Lawang plantation village covers an area of 1,926.60 hectares. The village is 11 km away from the sub-district capital and 88 km from the regency capital. It takes about 30 minutes to reach the Bohorok sub-district capital, while it takes 6 hours by public transportation to reach the regency capital. The nearest public facilities such as economy, health, and government centers can be reached in 10-15 minutes.

Bukit Lawang's history dates back to 1971, when it was first named Kepala Paret. In the period of 1986/1987, there were already two homestays in Bukit Lawang, namely Wisma Lauser Sibayak and Ecolodge. As of now, Bukit Lawang has developed significantly with the increase in accommodations and activities available (Claudia, 2018).

This has become one of the factors contributing to the development of the local economy in the Bukit Lawang area. The more tourists that visit, the more the local economy will grow. In this regard, both the government and local communities need to have strategies to maintain the natural beauty and main attraction of Bukit Lawang, which is the orangutan, while also maintaining a stable local economy.

B. SWOT Analysis

In this article, the author uses SWOT analysis to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Bukit Lawang area in terms of local economic development. To gather this data, the author conducted observations and interviews with community members and tourism operators in the Bukit Lawang area.

1. Internal Factor Analysis (Strengths & Weakness)

The first step in conducting a SWOT analysis is to identify the internal factors that consist of strengths and weaknesses. The identified internal factors for the development of local economy based on the tourism village in Bukit Lawang area are as follows:

Table 1. Internal Factor Analysis

Strengths	Weakness
The Bukit Lawang plantation village has pristine and well-preserved natural potential.	Improvement is needed in cleanliness, especially in the toilet facilities.
The Bukit Lawang Plantation Village is the main gateway to Gunung Leuser National Park, which is home to various wildlife such as orangutans, as well as other natural attractions such as caves and rivers.	Land use management is not yet optimal, with many unorganized selling locations.
The locals are friendly towards visiting tourists.	The nightlife along the river is not conducive to a peaceful environment, with loud music disturbing the tranquility.
There are various natural tourism activities available that can be chosen by tourists, such as trekking, rafting, and body rafting.	Lack of synergy among stakeholders in tourism development. Many activities initiated by the government, NGOs, and academics overlap and are not sustainable.
The local community is already actively involved in tourism activities, for example as local guides, initiators of Lubuk Larangan, and so on.	The variety of locally-made souvenirs produced by the community in Bukit Lawang is limited.
	The access to Bukit Lawang plantation village is still undergoing improvement.

2. External Factor Analysis (Opportunities & Threats)

The next step of the SWOT analysis is to analyze external factors which consist of opportunities and threats. The tabulation of external factors in the development of local economy based on village tourism in the Bukit Lawang area is as follows:

Table 2. Eksternal Factor Analysis

Opportunities	Threats
The trend of tourist visits has significantly increased, presenting a great opportunity for the local economy to thrive.	Bukit Lawang is susceptible to natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes.
Bukit Lawang offers a wide range of accommodation options, catering to the diverse needs of tourists.	Despite external support and assistance, there is still a risk of overlap and inefficiency in targeting the right areas for local economic development in Bukit Lawang.
The growing interest of entrepreneurs and private parties to invest in Bukit Lawang can bring about new business opportunities and boost the local economy.	

3. Matrix SWOT

After formulating the internal and external factors, a SWOT matrix is developed to create strategies that can be used for the development of local economy based on tourism in Bukit Lawang, while considering the external factors and adjusting to the internal factors. The SWOT matrix in this research is described as follows:

Table 3. Matrix SWOT

<p>Opportunities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The trend of tourist visits has significantly increased, presenting a great opportunity for the local economy to thrive. 2. Bukit Lawang offers a wide range of accommodation options, catering to the diverse needs of tourists. 3. The growing interest of entrepreneurs and private parties to invest in Bukit Lawang can bring about new business opportunities and boost the local economy. 	<p>Strengths:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Bukit Lawang plantation village has pristine and well-preserved natural potential. 2. The Bukit Lawang Plantation Village is the main gateway to Gunung Leuser National Park, which is home to various wildlife such as orangutans, as well as other natural attractions such as caves and rivers. 3. The locals are friendly towards visiting tourists. 4. There are various natural tourism activities available that can be chosen by tourists, such as trekking, rafting, and body rafting. 5. The local community is already actively involved in tourism activities, for example as local guides, initiators of Lubuk Larangan, and so on. 	<p>Weakness:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improvement is needed in cleanliness, especially in the toilet facilities. 2. Land use management is not yet optimal, with many unorganized selling locations. 3. The nightlife along the river is not conducive to a peaceful environment, with loud music disturbing the tranquility. 4. Lack of synergy among stakeholders in tourism development. Many activities initiated by the government, NGOs, and academics overlap and are not sustainable. 5. The variety of locally-made souvenirs produced by the community in Bukit Lawang is limited. 6. The access to Bukit Lawang plantation village is still undergoing improvement.
<p>Threats (Ancaman):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bukit Lawang is susceptible to natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. 2. Despite external support and assistance, there is still a risk of overlap and inefficiency in targeting the right areas for local economic development in Bukit Lawang. 	<p>SO:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promoting Bukit Lawang's charm through its natural and authentic beauty. 2. Increasing the role of stakeholders in developing Bukit Lawang by highlighting its main attractions. 	<p>WO:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raising community awareness of the tourism potential in the Bukit Lawang area. 2. Enhancing the creativity of the local community in managing their micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
<p>WT:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing a roadmap/development plan for local economy based on village tourism, involving relevant stakeholders. 	<p>ST:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anticipating natural disasters such as floods by preserving the surrounding environment. 2. Optimizing the level of safety in trekking and rafting activities. 	<p>WT:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing a roadmap/development plan for local economy based on village tourism, involving relevant stakeholders.

From the matrix above, several alternative strategies can be formulated for the development of local economy through the concept of a tourist village in the Bukit Lawang area. These strategies include:

- a.) Strengths Opportunities (SO) Strategy
 1. Promoting Bukit Lawang's charm through its natural and authentic beauty.
 2. Increasing the role of stakeholders in developing Bukit Lawang by highlighting its main attractions.
- b.) Weakness Opportunities (WO) Strategy
 1. Raising community awareness of the tourism potential in the Bukit Lawang area.
 2. Enhancing the creativity of the local community in managing their micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- c.) Strengths Threat (ST) Strategy
 1. Anticipating natural disasters such as floods by preserving the surrounding environment.
 2. Optimizing the level of safety in trekking and rafting activities
- d.) Weakness Threat (WT) Strategy

Developing a roadmap/development plan for local economy based on village tourism, involving relevant stakeholders

From the formulation above, it can be seen that the SO strategy focuses on promoting and increasing stakeholder involvement in local economic development. The WO strategy focuses on empowering communities to raise awareness and increase creativity in managing MSMEs. The ST strategy focuses on safety and security aspects, with mitigation plans and optimizing the level of security when carrying out tourism activities. Meanwhile, the WT strategy focuses on creating a roadmap for developing a village-based local economy that involves all stakeholders in an integrated and sustainable manner.

CONCLUSION

Local economic development is one way to improve the welfare of the community and tap into existing potential. Through the concept of a tourism village, it is hoped that the local community can be more creative in managing local products and crafts. The development is based on a SWOT analysis, where strategies are used to leverage opportunities and strengths while minimizing weaknesses and threats. Several strategies have been developed, indicating the need for collaboration to optimize the local economic potential in Bukit Lawang.

In the future, similar studies can integrate other analysis tools such as QSPM, AHP, Micmac, and others to determine the prioritization and practicality of the chosen strategies. This would be useful as a reference for many stakeholders, especially the local government overseeing the Bukit Lawang area.

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