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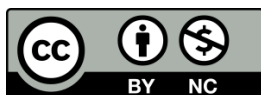
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Developing River-based Tourism in Indonesian Local Context: Towards an Agenda of Social Development Implications

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to revive the discussion on river-based tourism, highlighting its implications for sustainable social development. It is based on an analysis of various studies that have shown a focus on new patterns and strategies for sustainable development in river-based tourism. However, little attention has been given to further exploring these sustainability tools through achieving harmony between human and natural elements. The study adopts a case study approach, focusing on Temulus Village in Indonesia. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and field documentation. The research findings demonstrate that prioritizing the segmentation of river-based tourism development as a key agenda in social development holds intrinsic value as a new tool in transforming rural communities. The research successfully uncovers the harmonious relationship between human interests and nature, thereby contributing to sustainable development through river tourism. Consequently, this study contributes to leveraging local resources for sustainable development, introducing new local indicators that can serve as valuable lessons for future village development.

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Introduction

River-based tourism has garnered increasing attention from researchers in developing countries, such as Indonesia. Several case studies have delved into its potential within the realm of sustainable development studies (Prawira et al., 2021; Rahma, 2020; Susanto et al., 2022). Indonesia stands out as a country rich in river-based natural resources, with the World Wide Fund for Nature noting the presence of 550 rivers across the nation (WWF, 2023). This abundance has prompted scholars to investigate the significance of meticulous and comprehensive planning in tourism development, focusing on sustainability, environmental conservation, achieving a balance between human existence

and nature, and catering to tourists' preferences for natural activities that hold a unique appeal for each visitor (Aguirre et al., 2023; Font et al., 2023; Trisic et al., 2021). Additionally, studies emphasize the importance of strategic environmental analysis, consideration of both physical and non-physical aspects, and the engagement of local governments in fostering secure and sustainable river tourism (Dhami et al., 2017; Pereira et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2023). Nevertheless, researchers have observed a scarcity of studies that view rivers as a tool for sustainable tourism development through the mapping of assets, sustainability frameworks, and their socio-economic and socio-cultural repercussions. Building on this premise, this study introduces the core concept of empowering local Indonesian communities to leverage rivers as a focal point for sustainable tourism development.

Furthermore, the objective of this study is to identify local resources, assess sustainability, and analyze the impacts of river-based tourism on socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects. This aim is supported by two primary justifications. Firstly, Indonesia, known for its abundant rivers, is increasingly focusing on rural tourism development to attract global tourists to explore new destinations (Lindawati et al., 2021; Ristiawan et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2017). Secondly, existing research has predominantly concentrated on sustainable tourism, neglecting the exploration of the influence of river-based tourism on development, well-being, and other key indicators for sustainable tourism village initiatives (Fafurida et al., 2023; Izudin et al., 2022). Therefore, this study remains pertinent in providing a comprehensive analysis from the perspective of social development studies.

This study is grounded on the premise that fostering harmony between humans and nature in environmental protection and conservation can serve as a catalyst for creating alternative livelihood opportunities for local communities. This assertion is underpinned by sustainable development principles, suggesting that community advancement, achieved through the alignment of interests between governmental bodies and societal factions, can facilitate innovative approaches to the advancement of river-based tourism (Chatkaewnapanon & Kelly, 2019; Chilufya et al., 2019). For this reason, the primary objective of this study is to substantiate this claim through a case study conducted within the local context of Indonesia.

Developing River-Based Tourism: Review of Previous Literatures

River-based tourism development involves the strategic planning, administration, and promotion of tourist destinations that emphasize the rivers' potential as the primary attraction (Jackson et al., 2005). This encompasses a range of activities, including boat excursions, fishing expeditions, ecotourism, historical tourism, and cultural events that leverage the river and its surrounding environment (Du, 2024; Hardika & Nugraha, 2024). The objective of this development is to utilize natural river resources in a sustainable manner, enhance the local economy, and safeguard the river ecosystem. The introduction of river-based tourism not only holds the promise of drawing in tourists, thereby

stimulating socio-economic activities, but also fosters a shift in individuals' attitudes towards environmental conservation to promote a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature (Okwoche et al., 2021; Prawira et al., 2021 ; Susanto et al., 2022).

In the realm of literature development, scholars have identified crucial research in the advancement of river-based tourist villages. They acknowledge that the provision of adequate infrastructure and accessibility facilities is essential to ensure the comfort and safety of visitors (Fafurida et al., 2020; Indrayanti et al., 2019). Building on the findings of Saad et al. (2023), and Gascón (2013), it is emphasized that the development of river-based tourism necessitates the establishment of amenities such as docks, transportation networks, and supportive infrastructure to enhance convenience and accessibility for visitors. Concurrently, other studies highlight that environmental management represents a collaborative effort that demands skilled human intervention to establish a balance between nature and societal well-being (Gulo & Koestoer, 2024; Nekmahmud & Hassan, 2021). This involves the conservation and preservation of water quality to sustain river ecosystems, thereby ensuring that tourist activities in specific destinations do not harm the environment, while also addressing and mitigating risks of disasters like floods, landslides, and other natural calamities (Jaya & Izudin, 2023; Kausar et al., 2018). Through the insights provided by these scholars, researchers posit that the progress of river-based tourism necessitates collaboration among stakeholders to foster environmental harmony, promote sustainable ecosystem management, and prevent exploitation.

Further research has also validated the incorporation of river-based tourism development as a key component of social development agendas, which has been extensively discussed in various scholarly works. These discussions typically revolve around the conceptualization of tourism villages as instruments for community empowerment (Ali et al., 2019; Pandya et al., 2023). Scholars have explored the engagement of local communities in the management of river-based tourism, assuming diverse roles such as business operators, tour guides, artisans, among others (Eshun & Tichaawa, 2020; Izudin et al., 2024). Communities engaged in the administration of tourist villages are tasked with ensuring direct exposure to the impacts of tourism on economic and social activities. Additionally, managers of tourist villages are required to promote and market a variety of river tourist attractions that offer superior services to visitors. As highlighted by Phelan et al. (2020) and Alavi and Yasin (2000), the focus is on offering a range of activities and tourism packages that appeal to visitors from various societal segments, both domestic and international, with an emphasis on cultural tourism, water sports, and wildlife observation. In essence, the advancement of water-based tourism aims to strike a balance between economic pursuits, social activities, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation. This not only represents a sustainable asset but also holds implications for future generations in fostering an appreciation for the existing resources.

On the broader spectrum of topics and studies reflected in previous literature, researchers have identified several main themes. Firstly, scholars have expanded the concept and understanding of river-based tourism, which has been implemented in

various tourist village developments worldwide (Arif et al., 2022). There is a growing consensus that water tourism management should involve professionals who consider regulations, the roles of government and society, and sustainable governance models (Egberts & Hundstad, 2019; Hovelsrud et al., 2020). This underscores the importance of infrastructure development, accessibility, and the provision of adequate local transportation systems for visitors to easily reach tourist destinations. Additionally, researchers stress that strategies for river-based tourism development should prioritize disaster risk management in river areas to mitigate the impact of natural disasters (Khan et al., 2023). This underscores the importance of infrastructure development, accessibility, and the provision of adequate local transportation systems for visitors to easily reach tourist destinations. Additionally, researchers stress that strategies for river-based tourism development should prioritize disaster risk management in river areas to mitigate the impact of natural disasters (Bittar Rodrigues & Prideaux, 2018; Gulo & Koestoer, 2024). In this context, researchers emphasize the need for a clear conceptual framework, professional management, and a focus on environmental sustainability to address the social, economic, and environmental impacts of river-based tourism.

Based on an extensive review of the literature, researchers have incorporated the themes of assets, sustainability, and implications of tourist villages as foundational elements in the development of river-based tourism in Temulus Village, Kudus Regency, Indonesia. The integration of prior literature into the framework of current research demonstrates the theoretical and empirical approaches to managing tourist destinations. The researchers have theoretically applied the concept of sustainable tourism as a key factor in the practical implementation of social development. This theoretical framework, as advocated by McAreavey & McDonagh (2011), underscores the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. This relationship plays a crucial role in identifying the priorities of local assets and potentials that can be harnessed for rural development. For instance, ecological conservation aims to address potential conflicts between human activities and natural ecosystems, thereby benefiting local communities (Bhuiyan & Bhuiyan, 2023; Elgammal, 2022). The International Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism, based on a model that has gained prominence since the 1970s, have been instrumental in exploring the complexities of ecosystems (McCool & Mandic, 2024; Setiawan et al., 2017). This amalgamation of theoretical constructs aligns with the research focus on the development of river-based tourism villages, which is a primary concern for the community in Temulus Village.

In conclusion, the identification of local assets in the development of *Wisata Jerutan Seluna* (WJS) destinations presents an alternative approach to examining the enduring impact of tourism village management, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between the environment and human activities. A review of existing literature and theoretical frameworks cited by scholars underscores the need for further investigation into innovations in river tourism management and development. The themes discussed serve as a robust groundwork for comprehending river-based tourism dynamics in WJS attractions. Additionally, researchers highlight emerging research opportunities that

warrant more comprehensive exploration. This literature review centers on a specific case study in Dea Temulus, aiming to elucidate the factors contributing to the successful development of river-based tourism in the region.

Methods

The data utilized in this study provides a descriptive overview of the informants' experiences in exploring sustainable tourism development at the local context in Indonesia. This exploration employed Temulus Village as a case study approach to investigate changes towards more inclusive and participatory village governance in local tourism-based development. Based on the informants' experiences, the study adopts an interpretivist paradigm to critique the positivist perspective, which fails to thoroughly explain the norms of reality and social phenomena (Cabral & Dhar, 2020; Farsari, 2023). As a result, this study offers an extended explanation beyond the positivist view, which often struggles to generatively describe new social phenomena through quantitative facts.

Data were collected through two main methods. Firstly, observations were conducted closely with informants during fieldwork. This non-participant observation technique was employed to discover new facts and phenomena regarding sustainable tourism development issues (Jacobsen, 2011; Turley et al., 2016). The researchers chose this technique to facilitate access in recording all forms of informant activities, such as their behaviors and actions within a community. This type of observation aided the researchers in extracting all data in the form of field notes and observation records into research data. The researchers limited the fieldwork observation time to avoid potential bias in interpreting empirical data. To further confirm the data, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the informants after obtaining a comprehensive empirical overview from the observations.

Subsequently, sampling criteria were established for the interview process with informants. These criteria facilitated the researchers in mapping the interview data needs, which were clustered into five stakeholders: local government (LG), local community (LC), youth organizations (YO), tourism site managers (OW), and street vendors (SV). All informants in this study were anonymized to prevent conflicts of interest among them. This measure was taken to obtain deeper information, allowing informants to share openly and flexibly. Consent forms were also provided to the informants as a form of agreement to participate in the research. The researchers successfully interviewed 16 informants from all stakeholders. The interviews took place over three months, from August to October 2021. Each session lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. The interviews were conducted at the informants' homes, village offices, tourist sites, and informal meetings in cafés. All interview data were transcribed verbatim. This transcription helped the researchers capture and interpret the informants' experiences.

Thematic analysis was conducted to interpret the field data into a paper. This analysis resulted from coding the observation data and transcriptions (Cudjoe, 2023). After

completing the data coding, the researchers proceeded to draw conclusions. Direct quotations were presented in the paper as part of the data interpretation in the final research report. To ensure the rigor of the field data collection process, the researchers employed source triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was a crucial stage in this research to validate the data field and address redundancy, prompting the researchers to re-contact informants at other or additional times. For the validity of the final conclusions, the researchers also checked with all informants through the village head to ensure that every statement and statistical data demonstrated consistency and continuity.

Findings

Portrait of the Sustainability of Jerutan Seluna River Tourism (WjS)

Demographically, Temulus Village is situated in Mejobo District, Kudus Regency, Central Java Province. The village spans an area of approximately 415,232 hectares, which is segmented into various categories. Primarily, a significant portion of this land, totaling about 214,719 hectares, is utilized as productive agricultural land, predominantly for rice cultivation. Additionally, 61,400 hectares serve as residential land for community structures like village offices, while 9 hectares remain undeveloped and unused for economic or social purposes. Furthermore, 11,247 hectares are designated for residential purposes, accommodating a population of approximately 6,177 individuals as of 2020, with 3,133 being female and 3,044 male residents (Village Government, 2020). These demographic characteristics can be viewed as local assets and hold potential for the advancement of inclusive and sustainable tourism in the village.

The Temulus Village community has established a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) utilizing local resources, as outlined in village government regulation no. 06/141/III/2020. This regulation serves to engage the community in the management of the tourist village, with 52 active participants involved in the formation of Pokdarwis (Village Head Decree, 2020). The activities related to tourism village management have led to the development of regional facilities, with community members taking on various roles such as homestay managers, tourist attraction developers, promoters of tourism, culinary experts, artisans, providers of tourist accommodations, tour guides, artists, security personnel, and environmental coordinators. Through collective agreement, all Pokdarwis members actively contribute to the advancement of a tourist destination known as Seluna Exploration Tourism. This destination was officially launched on January 26, 2020, with a primary focus on the village's river-based tourist attraction.

Based on the observations recorded, researchers have identified persistent obstacles in accessing tourist attractions in Temulus Village. The hindrances stem from the lack of integrated transportation facilities, as the existing infrastructure primarily caters to public transportation needs. The government has predominantly focused on providing airports, trains, and buses to bolster economic endeavors in urban areas, neglecting the essential requirement for improved access to tourism sites. Despite being a river-based tourist

destination, the supporting infrastructure to facilitate travel to this region remains inadequate. This deficiency is exacerbated by regulatory constraints imposed by regional government policies, which impede the establishment of operational standards and interconnectivity between different areas. The regional authorities prioritize the enhancement of transportation networks to facilitate broader economic activities, such as economic redistribution and infrastructural development, rather than addressing the pressing need for improved access to tourist sites. Consequently, the lack of emphasis on accessibility as a pivotal factor in the development of tourist villages poses a significant challenge for the management of Temulus tourist villages. This predicament has been corroborated by insights shared by key informants.

The informant, a local resident [LC1],

“highlighted transportation challenges in Jeratun Seluna. Despite the area's potential to attract tourists, accessibility remains a significant issue. The road leading to the village is narrow, rendering it impassable for cars. Although most parts of the road are paved, it becomes muddy and impassable for two-wheeled vehicles during the rainy season, increasing the risk of flooding. Furthermore, there are no direct public transport routes to Jeratun Seluna, forcing visitors to rely on private or rented vehicles, thereby escalating costs and complicating travel arrangements.”

The sustainability of tourist villages, as explored by researchers through empirical studies, demonstrates that WJS can be categorized into four primary indicators: accessibilities, amenities, ancillaries, and accommodations (see Table 1). These indicators align with the 4A concept, serving as a crucial tool in the development and management of tourist villages. Ensuring easy access to locations or destinations is vital for visitor satisfaction. Factors such as transportation, well-connected road infrastructure, and convenient location contribute positively to visitor satisfaction when exploring the tourist attractions in Temulus Village. These accessible features indirectly enhance service quality, the uniqueness of destination spots, and the availability of facilities. Consequently, sustainable tourism development indicators play a significant role in fostering inclusive community development and improving welfare.

No	The indicators of sustainable tourist villages	The types of tourist village services	Explanations
1	Accessibility	Train, City Bus, Village Road Access, River Basin Center (BBWS), and Airport.	Accessibility is available to support tourist village activities, making it easier for tourists through transportation facilities, complete addresses, road access, and ease of travel to tourist destinations.

No	The indicators of sustainable tourist villages	The types of tourist village services	Explanations
2	Anciliaries	Prayer room, mosque, access to ritualization of worship, people's market, halal tourism services, toilets, portable sinks, kaskus installation, adequate electricity provision, gate as tourist entrance, and parking area.	The types of services in village tourism destinations support activities for visitors or prospective tourists at river-based tourist locations. All types of support prioritize aspects of professionalism in managing tourist villages.
3	Amenities	Performances of the Reog Dance, Ketoprak, local songs (Turi-turi Putih, cublak-cublak suweng, lir-ilir, sluku-sluku bathok), popular village dances, and river canals.	The facilities available at WJS offer natural panoramas and cultural integration in organizing tourist villages. This type makes it easier for tourists to explore all existing destinations.
4	Accommodations	Boats, Karangjahe Beach, Traditional Culinary (Cilok, Aci Telor, Aci Gulung, Seblak, Sausage, Ice Cream, Siomay, Bakpau, Egg Crust), and Selfie Spot (Photo Zone).	The existence of tourist village accommodation makes it easier for tourists to enjoy a variety of local and traditional dishes at tourist locations.

Table 1. Indicators and Explanations in Sustainable Tourism Development. *Source:* Authors' elaboration.

The four indicators have emerged as crucial benchmarks for evaluating the progress of sustainable rural tourism. However, challenges arise in the implementation of tourism planning due to the changing landscape of river-based tourist sites, which experience annual increases in land contours caused by river sedimentation. The lack of measurements tracking the growth of land contours due to sedimentation complicates tourism planning efforts. In response, the community has established the River Basin Center (BBWS) to monitor soil erosion and assess sedimentation levels along the river surface, particularly in areas vulnerable to erosion. This development underscores the community's recognition of the sustainable impact on their livelihoods and the environment, prompting them to engage with the Temulus Village Government to address the issue. In February 2020, a group of approximately 10 individuals convened a forum to voice their concerns to the local government (Observation notes, 2022).

Based on the discussions that ensued from the inspiration and involvement of local residents, the BBWS has commenced active implementation of river area development in accordance with Minister of Public Works and Public Housing Regulation No. 20, 2016, which focuses on the management of water resources in river areas. This regulation encompasses the planning, execution, operation, and maintenance of construction projects with the aim of conserving and utilizing water resources. Furthermore, the

regulation aims to regulate the erosive potential of water in rivers, beaches, dams, lakes, reservoirs, and water basins used for irrigation, as well as enhance the management of urban and rural primary drainage systems. Consequently, the planning and management of river-based tourism development have integrated principles of sustainability and the harmonization of natural elements with human activities, emphasizing the interaction between the two.

Informant Statement of Local Government [LG1] on Deliberation:

“The discussion will primarily focus on the underlying causes of seasonal flooding. Key factors to be taken into account include the inadequate conditions of water channels, accumulation of debris in river currents, and the impact of climate change leading to heightened precipitation levels. Collaborative efforts between the BBWS and community leaders aim to identify issues and devise promptly implementable solutions. A proposed measure that garnered significant support was the enhancement and widening of water channels to augment their capacity to accommodate heavy rainfall. Additionally, deliberations encompassed the improvement of waste management initiatives and the promotion of reforestation activities in upstream river areas to mitigate water runoff. These deliberations yield not only technical remedies but also decisions that enhance public awareness and engagement in upholding environmental cleanliness.”

Figure 1 illustrates the overflow of water in the Jerutan Seluna river, extending to the tourist destination area. In addressing this environmental issue, the River Basin Management Agency (*Balai Besar Wilayah Sungai* - BBWS) is tasked with overseeing river management, including the construction of embankments to mitigate water flow towards the riverbanks. While BBWS does not directly undertake the construction and management of embankments, the Temulus Village government has submitted a development request to the agency in response to the concerns of local residents. Consequently, BBWS responded to these requests by enhancing the river embankment and transforming it into a tourist attraction in June 2021. The construction of the embankment serves not only to avert disasters like floods and landslides but also to establish a new tourist spot for the local community. This development implies that improved water transportation access facilitates tourist visits and contributes to community advancement through river-based tourism management in Temulus Village.



Figure 1. Jerutan Seluna Tourist Area in Abundant Water. *Source:* Courtesy Photograph of Haris, 2023.

The Temulus Village government has shown a strong commitment to the development of river-based tourism, incorporating principles of sustainable development. This commitment reflects the community's awareness of the potential environmental risks that could adversely impact the social and economic well-being of Temulus residents. The focus on sustainability is evident in the active participation of residents and the supportive role played by the government. These collaborative efforts highlight the harmonious relationship between the government, responsible for regulation, and the community, essential for the advancement of river-based tourism in the village. By addressing environmental concerns, the successful maintenance and advancement of sustainability are evident, as indicated by the four key elements outlined in Table 1, since the inception of Temulus as a river tourism destination.

The WJS Destination: Economic and Cultural Implications

The presence of WJS has played a significant role in driving economic transformation within local communities. This is primarily attributed to the advancement of river-based tourism, which facilitates the establishment of governance structures and the creation of essential amenities. Through the governance process, Pokdarwis has initiated a transition from a passive to an active state. This transition serves as a key indicator of social progress, leading to tangible benefits for the well-being and social fabric of the community. Concurrently, the development of these amenities is evident in the enhancement of regional infrastructure along river canals, the establishment of selfie spots and photo

zones, as well as the organization of designated areas for street vendors at WJS destinations (see Figure 2). Consequently, WJS has generated positive outcomes for local communities by fostering engagement and coordination among participants in Pokdarwis and social groups within Temulus Village.



Figure 2.a. Selfie spot



Figure 2.b. Street Vendor Area



Figure 2.c. River Canal



Figure 2.d. Photo Zone

Source: Courtesy Photograph of Haris, 2023.

This is also confirmed by the statement of a local resident [LC3]:

“The Jeratun Seluna tourism has had a positive impact on the community in terms of economics, social interactions, and cultural aspects. This form of tourism has led to the creation of various new business opportunities, including food stalls, accommodations, and souvenir shops, which are operated by local residents. Consequently, it has significantly boosted local incomes and generated more employment opportunities than previously available. Additionally, this tourism has played a role in enhancing social relationships among the residents. Those involved in managing the Jeratun Seluna tourism often collaborate in different capacities, such as maintaining the cleanliness of the tourist sites and providing a welcoming atmosphere for visitors. Through this collaborative effort, mutual cooperation has fostered a greater sense of unity and solidarity among the residents.”

Table 2 delineates the various types and attributes of employment opportunities available to the residents of Temulus Village. The establishment of WJS as a river-centric tourist attraction has proven advantageous for the community. Approximately 69 individuals are currently engaged as laborers within the tourism sector of the village, a sector that has been fostered by the local government of Temulus Village. This underscores the community's ability to leverage natural resources for the creation of new sources of income. According to a testimonial, "the transformation of the river into a tourist spot, I struggled to secure stable employment; however, the government's infrastructure initiatives facilitated my entry into the tourism industry" [LC2]. This assertion underscores the broader implications of WJS for community advancement and empowerment, as well as its specific role in bolstering the revenue streams of village administrations. Notably, Temulus Village receives a tax equivalent to approximately 20% of the total monthly revenue, estimated at around IDR 70 million. Consequently, the presence of WJS not only enhances the economic pursuits of local residents but also underscores the effective utilization of various natural resources that have been strategically harnessed for the advancement of river-based tourism.

Occupations	Salary Rates (per day)	Total	Explanations
Street Vendors	IDR 50,000 – IDR 100,000	25	In general, Street Vendors work regularly by forming Paguyuban and following all management instruments in river-based tourism governance. They are coordinated by the Temulus Village Pokdarwis.
Craftspeople	IDR 70,000 – IDR 150,000	10	The type of work as a craftsman is traditional food production managed by the community. As per field data, researchers found around 8 units of Jenang Kudus craftsmen, 1 unit of Coconut Bath, 1 unit of Crowbar, 1 unit of Syrup, and 1 unit of Bamboo <i>Besek</i> .
Parking People	IDR 25,000 – IDR 50,000	7	The parking area at the research location is 12 meters wide which is managed directly by local youth and organized by Pokdarwis as an organizational coordinating channel.
Boat Operator	IDR 50,000 – IDR 150,000	12	The boat operators consist of 5 people serving tourists in the river tourist area, and 7 people working to take them downstream from one tourist location to another. They are responsible for ensuring the safety of visitors by providing life jackets and boat security.

Occupations	Salary Rates (per day)	Total	Explanations
Tour Guide	IDR 50,000 – IDR 100,000	15	They work full time to accompany the tour location, so that all visitors can be served optimally.

Table 2. Types of Employment Characteristics. *Source:* Authors' elaboration.

In addition to the economic implications, the presence of WJS also plays a role in enhancing local community awareness regarding environmental conservation. Initially, a group of farmers who owned land surrounding the river as a tourist spot demonstrated their dedication to environmental preservation. The issue arose when the river became infested with water hyacinth plants, leading to the proliferation of rat pests that posed a threat to young rice seeds. If left uncontrolled, these rat pests could result in significant losses in rice production. To address this challenge, local farmers opted to eradicate the water hyacinth infestation along the riverbank. They noted that water hyacinth served as a shelter and breeding ground for rodents. Furthermore, the farmers collaborated to cleanse the river of water hyacinth and other debris. Consequently, the once polluted and water hyacinth-infested river transformed into a clean and thriving environment, thereby reducing the menace of rat pests that had been troubling the farmers. Nevertheless, an ongoing issue pertains to the irresponsible disposal of waste by individuals. WJS management highlighted the persistently low public awareness regarding proper waste disposal practices. Evidence of this is the continued dumping of both organic and non-organic waste along roadsides, rivers, drains, and agricultural areas. Notably, the public waste disposal site is merely 200 meters away from the WJS tourist spot. To address this concern, WJS management implemented measures such as distributing garbage bags at various locations to raise tourists' consciousness about appropriate waste disposal practices.

Informant statement (LG2):

“Community participation in cleaning water hyacinth and rubbish in rivers is crucial for maintaining environmental cleanliness and river sustainability. The informant noted a high level of enthusiasm among local residents, particularly when they recognize the benefits of having clean river conditions, such as flood prevention and improved water quality.”

Ather informant's statement by Local Resident [LC3]:

“The significance of rivers in sustaining life is well understood by many of us, motivating our active involvement in river cleaning initiatives. By clearing water hyacinth that obstructs river flow, we aim to facilitate smoother water flow, thereby preventing floods and minimizing damage to the surrounding environment. Additionally, our efforts in removing rubbish from rivers contribute to reducing pollution levels that can adversely impact river ecosystems.”

The cleaning activities at the WJS tourist attraction are conducted collaboratively by the management and affiliated parties involved in its operations. As stated by one of the WJS managers, this sanitation initiative is unprecedented, highlighting the necessity of such efforts in environmental preservation. The scheduled cleaning sessions are set to take place every Sunday morning. Despite a decline in visitor numbers due to the pandemic, the management remains dedicated to maintaining the cleanliness of the tourist site. The motivation behind these efforts stems from the personal commitment of each manager, prioritizing the creation of a pristine, aesthetically pleasing, and litter-free environment over monetary incentives. The primary environmental concern for residents in the vicinity of WJS is the escalating air pollution attributed to the high volume of motorized vehicles, including motorcycles, cars, and trucks traversing the area. A local resident noted that prior to the establishment of the tourist attraction, the roads were less congested, and vehicular traffic was minimal. However, the introduction of the new tourist site has led to a surge in air pollution levels. The accumulation of dust on household surfaces serves as a visible indicator of the worsening air quality resulting from vehicle emissions. Residents fear that the continued rise in air pollution may lead to health issues such as asthma, coughs, and throat irritations. Consequently, it is imperative for the WJS management to demonstrate accountability and responsiveness by engaging in social initiatives to address this pressing environmental challenge.

Discussion

This study has successfully confirmed that the development of river-based tourism in Temulus Village aligns with the arguments presented in previous research. The local communities have demonstrated an increased awareness of the potential and resources that can be utilized to enhance their income and well-being. This heightened public awareness is evident in the public hearings organized by the village government to discuss and deliberate on improving transportation infrastructure to water tourism destinations. Scholars such as Croes & Rivera (2017) and Jaya et al. (2022) have also emphasized that leveraging local resources and assets can expedite community development, provided that the community collectively acknowledges and engages with relevant stakeholders for the enhancement of village tourism facilities. The success of the community in solidifying and promoting their awareness through collective action is further exemplified in the village regulations of Temulus Village, which prioritize environmental protection. These regulations play a crucial role in promoting Pokdarwis activities and serve as a fundamental framework for implementing tourism planning and development based on the 4A principles (accessibility, support, accommodation, and amenities) (Adnyani, 2021; Büscher & Fletcher, 2017; Farsari, 2023). The collaborative efforts and agreements between village governments and local communities in developing infrastructure and essential facilities at WJS demonstrate a coordinated and mutually beneficial approach (Bittar Rodrigues & Prideaux, 2018; Caffyn, 2022; Dagdag, 2021).

Through an agreement reached by local stakeholders, WJS has emerged as a new destination in Temulus Village that effectively integrates sustainability objectives with the principles of social development. The recognition of the importance of environmental conservation in harnessing potential resources serves to foster a harmonious relationship between human society and the natural environment (Artanto et al., 2023; Samal & Dash, 2023). This progress is exemplified by the rapid advancements spearheaded by the Temulus Village administration in collaboration with BBWS, a key governmental body, aimed at bolstering the infrastructure for river-based tourism. Such a transformation signifies a pivotal shift in the mindset of WJS managers, who now view the government as a regulatory partner emphasizing the significance of environmental consciousness (Asteria et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022; Zoysa, 2022). For this reason, the alignment of disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies with the development blueprints for the tourism village stands as a crucial element in the strategic planning of sustainable tourism management (Berno et al., 2022; Jaya & Izudin, 2023).

Moreover, the strategic planning involved in the development of river-based tourist destinations as an alternative approach to community empowerment has led to the creation of diverse employment opportunities, as illustrated in Table 2. The access of the community to new job opportunities within tourist villages has significant implications for the sustainability of livelihoods (Daskon & Binns, 2010; Gyapong, 2021; Luo & Bao, 2019). Similarly, Izudin et al. (2024) have underscored that leveraging local potential as a strategy for fostering sustainable livelihoods represents a viable approach by preserving local socio-cultural elements. This assertion is supported by the community's practice of prioritizing local values and social norms in their interactions with visitors, thereby leaving a positive impression on each guest (Agustina, 2020; Alahakoon & Udunuwara, 2022; Xiao et al., 2024). Furthermore, the alignment between the economic and cultural domains serves to reinforce the concept of sustainable and integrated social development, leading to the expansion of productive economic sectors (Ashworth, 2013; Dahles et al., 2020; Lindawati et al., 2021). Consequently, the implications for economic and cultural advancement hold significant value in the discourse surrounding river-based tourism studies, thereby urging other stakeholders to consider these aspects attentively.

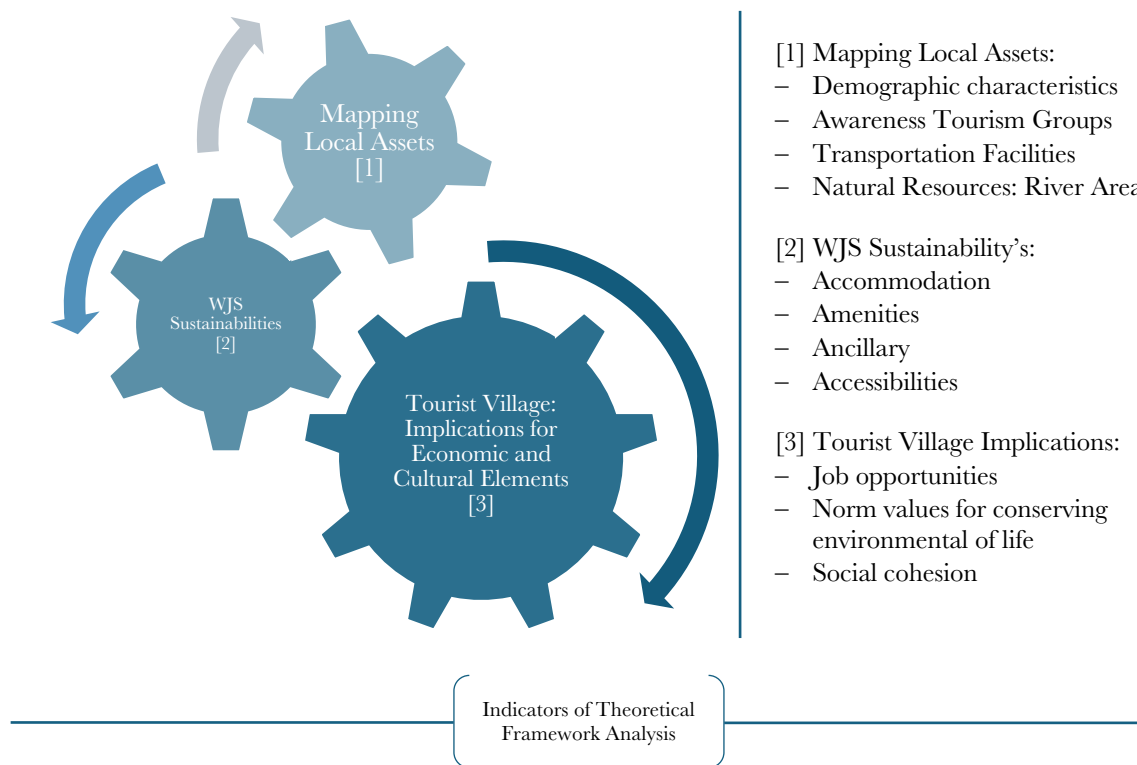


Figure 3. Theoretical considerations in improving social development. *Source:* Authors' elaboration

Based on the significant information presented above, as cited from Matiku et al. (2021), this study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research addresses a knowledge gap indicating that the topic of river-based tourism is currently underexplored in terms of its long-term impact on sustainable society and the environment (Caffyn, 2022; Sriharini et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the findings illustrating the local assets and potential for sustainable social development validate the alignment between prior research and current studies. This aids in advancing theoretical understanding of the critical aspects in the sustainability dimensions of rural tourism. These aspects are delineated through the identification of local assets, sustainable development practices, and the effects of river-based tourism villages on economic activities and the environment (see Table 2). Consequently, the indicators that researchers have successfully interpreted hold practical implications for the theoretical advancement within the realm of sustainable tourism.

In the realm of implications, this study serves as a potential tool for the management of river-based tourism in developing countries worldwide. These alternative facilities prioritize the participatory values of local communities to address the lack of transportation facilities to tourist destinations. Such supporting facilities can enhance comfort and friendliness, thereby attracting potential tourists in regions across Indonesia and globally (Eshun & Tichaawa, 2020; Gascón, 2013; Saad et al., 2023). Additionally,

the implications extend to policy reformulation, emphasizing the importance of developing tourist villages by considering institutional elements like BBWS that are responsive to local community needs. This underscores the necessity for state institutions at the ministry level to endorse grassroots programs that focus on local assets and potential identified and mapped by tourism awareness groups in villages throughout Indonesia (Azizan et al., 2023; Støvring, 2012). These values, beneficial for both tourism village managers and policy planners, can serve as a foundation for consolidating efforts in managing new destinations across diverse locations.

This study serves as a comprehensive analysis in the advancement of river-based tourism, an area that has historically overlooked the importance of balancing human and environmental interactions (Wong, 2022; Yayota & Doi, 2020). Scholars note that the concept of sustainable development (Boadu et al., 2021; Magni, 2017; Matiku et al., 2021), which emphasizes the engagement of various stakeholders (including local communities, village administrations, and governmental bodies), has become a fundamental principle in the growth and management strategies of water-based tourism. Nevertheless, the researchers acknowledge that the current discussion has certain limitations in terms of field data exploration. They recognize that methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, and the range of information sources utilized impose constraints on the research. To address this, the researchers propose that future studies on river-based tourism should delve into the themes of social involvement and safety measures within the planning processes of tourism villages. This recommendation stems from the insufficient exploration of data, which necessitates a more thorough and extensive analysis in the realms of sustainable tourism and community empowerment. Such an approach could offer a broader perspective for identifying new indicators in social development aimed at enhancing the well-being of local communities.

Conclusion

This study presents an exploratory narrative on the development of river-based tourism, emphasizing the importance of community involvement in identifying local assets and potential, as well as the necessity of government and private sector support for managing tourist villages. The study highlights the significance of local residents' awareness in advocating for improved transportation facilities to the village government, a crucial element in sensitizing policymakers to implement sustainable tourism development programs. Demographic factors, assets, potential, and available resources play key roles in accelerating the development of WJS in Temulus Village. Taking into account these elements, the researcher posits that the tourism village development program, when implemented in various locations with similar characteristics as indicated in this research, contributes to the governance process and strategic initiatives in social development based on tourist destinations. Consequently, the researchers recommend further research to map out a program that encompasses a broader scope of river-based tourism. This could

involve social mapping analysis using survey methods to gather feedback and responses from respondents, who serve as the primary data source, offering diverse subjective perspectives. In addition to suggesting alternative methodological approaches, the study underscores the importance of enhancing the capacity of river tourism managers, an essential agenda that stakeholders must prioritize. Therefore, establishing more specific indicators in the implementation of social development programs as a strategic agenda to enhance income and welfare can be achieved across different locations or settings.

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Author's Declaration

We are Ahmad Kharis (Author 1/A1) and Sukree Langputeh (Author 2/A2) hereby declare that the manuscript has been prepared, written, read and approved to submit to this journal by us. All sources used in researching and writing it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified based on research data we have conducted. A1 contributed to create a research design and developed the theoretical framework. A2 added empirical data and together with A1 categorized the results. A1 carried out the processing data, performing data analysis and interpretation of research results. A1 wrote of the draft manuscript preparation, A1 and A2 wrote the final manuscript with input from us. A1 and A2 discussed and reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials

All data are available from the authors.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

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