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Effectiveness of Ecotourism Sector-Based Economic Strengthening Models for Local Community Entrepreneurial Competencies

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Abstract

The economic injustice and the imbalance of natural resources resulting from tourism exploitation requires other alternatives in its management, such as ecotourism. However, this demand can only be realized if from the beginning, the community has been prepared to be a major player in the ecotourism management. The present study aimed at discussing a model of economic empowerment based on leading ecotourism sectors towards the competency of local community entrepreneurs. This study uses a pre-trial procedure by designing a group pretest-posttest. Samples were drawn from the jewelry, cultivation, culinary and souvenir ecotourism product business groups chosen purposively. The data were collected with project-based assessment and the analyzed comparatively. The new model consists of 5 (five) main components, namely: objectives, targets, materials, procedures, and evaluations. The products consist of: community economic improvement guidelines, ecotourism product development modules (crafts, culinary, aquaculture, and souvenirs), business development and marketing modules, and project production guides. The experiment shows that the ecotourism sector-based economic development model has proven to be effective in the formation of local community entrepreneurship competencies in producing ecotourism products. The implication is that it needs support from the policies makers and the importance of the extension of sustainable economy theory in tourism sector in the Indonesian context.

Keywords: Strengthening the Economy; Ecotourism; Entrepreneurial Competence.

JEL Classification: L83; Q56.

Introduction

In the last three decades, ecotourism has shown an extremely rapid development. Empirical evidences through reviews of study results show that ecotourism has gained a place as a tourism destination that is socially and economically fair, and a tourism destination that involves local communities and doesn't harm the environment. The involvement of local communities in the management of ecotourism has been proven to be able to improve the life quality of the people. However, the development of ecotourism, especially in Indonesia, is facing a problem that is the low quality of human resources in its management. Thus, community empowerment is a key to developing ecotourism. Certainly, characteristics of the communities in each country will provide unique contribution to its ecotourism management model. These characteristics can also have different implications on

the parameters of success of ecotourism. Therefore, the present study was also conducted to develop and to test the community economic strengthening model in the management of ecotourism based on the characteristics of the local communities in Indonesia, by using parameters of local community's entrepreneurship competency in producing ecotourism products and services.

1. Research Background

The development of ecotourism destinations has quite a large echo as an alternative to the conventional tourism development (Trofimenko and Djafarova 2011; Hill and Hill 2011; Satyanarayana *et al.* 2012; Stone and Wall 2004; Moreno 2005; Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail and Islam 2011). The development of ecotourism destinations is the answer to the exploitation of tourism which tends to produce economic inequality which is indicated by the extensively high regional poverty. For example, in West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia (a tourism exploitation area), the number of poor people reached 15.20% in 2018 with a poverty depth index reaching 3.07 and poverty severity index 0.92 (Central Bureau of Statistics of West Lombok Regency, 2019).

Thus, the development of ecotourism is the answer to these problems because it affects social, economic, and cultural-ecological aspects (Bhuiyan *et al.* 2011). In ecotourism, commonly there is an involvement of the local communities in its management, so that tourism becomes integrated with economic activities in the form of offering ecotourism products. Trofimenko and Djafarova's (2011) studies in Russia show that the role of the local communities is important in the development of ecotourism. Hill and Hill's (2011) study in Peru also shows that the success of ecotourism results from the support and participation of local communities. Likewise, Peter's (2005) studies done in several Latin American countries also support the thesis that the involvement of local communities strongly supports the strengthening of ecotourism as a tool for sustainable economic development. The emphasis on involving local people is a necessity because community relies heavily on the nature as Satyanarayana *et al.* (2012) found in the Gambia. The study of Bhuiyan *et al.* (2011) also ensured that the success of ecotourism was highly dependent on the participation or involvement of the local communities.

Other empirical evidence also proves that ecotourism is potential to provide opportunities to improve the quality of life of local communities and demonstrate their pride in their traditional culture (Fiorello and Bo 2012), and biodiversity conservation as well (Stone 2015). The study conducted by Lima, Kumble, Almeida, Chaveiro, Ferreira and Mota (2016) also reveals very positive impacts that are practiced and managed by the nature-based tourism by Kalunga people located in remote areas with weak economic systems. Thus, sufficient human resource capabilities are important in ecotourism management. A study conducted by Sangpikul and Batra study (2007) in Thailand shows that people who have adequate knowledge of ecotourism have a tendency to give positive responses to ecotourism and ownership of ecotourism experiences. Similarly, studies in Malaysia done by Bhuiyan *et al.* (2011) recommend the importance of human resource development in ecotourism management. The empirical evidence shows that the element of local community involvement becomes the most important variable in the development of ecotourism. Boruologo's (2004) study in Indonesia indicates that poverty alleviation efforts must be done starting from the triggering problem by creating families and communities that are oriented towards productive economics and quality human resources.

However, the quality of community resources that manage the development ecotourism has been an obstacle, especially in Indonesia. Lack of knowledge and skills of the local people is an hindrance as Ramos and Prideaux (2014) report, especially if the lack of support from the local leaders has an impact on the weakness of the community in managing ecotourism businesses. In addition, the lack of support from NGOs and the private sectors further weakens the existence of the local communities in managing ecotourism (Ramos and Prideaux 2014). Therefore, strengthening the economy of the local communities in managing ecotourism (especially in providing products and ecotourism) has been an important part in the overall effort to develop ecotourism. Horton (2009) reports that the experience in the Costa Rican Osa Peninsula, which prioritizes the local communities over the presence of large companies, provides social and economic value. Ecotourism has offered new economic opportunities to the poor majority in Latin America (Horton 2009). The results of Lima *et al.* (2016) study indicates that the model of strengthening the economy based on the local uniqueness of the region is more effective in accelerating the economic improvement of the local community. The ethnic-entrepreneurial model becomes a tool to achieve a better standard of living through participatory and collaborative tourism (Lima *et al.* 2016).

Local characteristics of the Sekotong Ecotourism community (in Indonesia) also have social capital/local wisdom as found by Wildan, Sukardi and Syuaeb (2016). The uniqueness characterizes the management of

ecotourism, especially in the packaging of ecotourism products. The people of this region as written by Arzaky, Mandia, Abdul Muhiet Al-Lefaky, Fathurrahman and Mugiono (2001) have 'awig-awig' (shared norms) and if violated there will be customary, social, moral, and physical sanctions. Thus, the cultural perspective also signs the involvement of the Sekotong Indonesia community in managing ecotourism as reported by Liu, Vogt, Luo, He, Frank, and Liu (2012). Gurung and Scholz (2008) in their study suggested the importance of balancing the conservation of the nature and culture with modernization and economy in the management of tourism in developing countries, including Indonesia. One of the findings of Nugroho, Pramukanto, Negara, Purnomowati, and Wulandari (2016) is the need to develop entrepreneurship in managing tourism services, including managing ecotourism products and services. Therefore, their inclusion strategy is needed as an event organizer, their inclusion in a multi-level marketing network or Customer Service (Sobarna 2003). To realize, it can be started from small businesses and carried out by individuals (one man enterprise), then involves the family (family enterprise), develops to small scale companies, medium scale businesses, and big companies (big scale enterprise) as found by Zusmelia, Dasrizal, dan Yeni (2012).

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Types

This study employs a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental type with the one group pretest-posttest design (Borg and Gall 1983; Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh 2010). Before the process of strengthening the economy/training, each productive economic business group was given a pre-test and then a post-test was administered after the economic strengthening process. Both pre- and post- tests are given in the form of ecotourism product creation practices. This design has many weaknesses, such as the selection of samples is not random and does not control other variables that are thought to have an influence. However, to reduce the weaknesses, some adjustments were made, such as: the evaluation for all groups were carried out by the same people, the same tools and materials, and the same implementation time (Ary *et al.* 2010).

2.2 Sampling Procedures

The trial sample in strengthening the economy consisted of 4 (four) community groups gathered in the form of a learning group, namely the seabed handicraft jewelry group, the Sekotong specialty culinary group, the fish and crab culture group, and the typical souvenir piece group. The subjects for the handicraft, cultivation, and souvenir groups came from children of primary and secondary education (7-18 years) who dropped out of school and/or did not continue their studies due to economic factors. The samples for culinary groups come from the illiterate community in Sekotong, Indonesia. All subjects were drawn with purposive sampling (Ary *et al.* 2010) using these criteria, such as: dropping out of school or not continuing studies, not yet having a permanent job, and below the poverty line.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected with project-based assessments to measure the entrepreneurship competencies of the local communities (specifically the ability to think creatively and innovative actions in creating ecotourism products and services). This project-based assessment consists of four elements (Bergh *et al.* 2006), namely: planning, implementation, results/products, and performance. Planning, including: readiness to follow education and master the functions and uses of materials and tools. Implementation includes: the ability to use practical tools, use materials, and the order in which ecotourism products are made. The results include: products produced according to the potential for local excellence, meet the elements of innovation, and meet the elements of neatness and cleanliness. Performance, including: collaboration during practice, activeness, and communication skills. The whole instrument was validated by the Education Research and Evaluation expert, while the reliability test was carried out through an assessment by two assessors as suggested by Grounlund and Waugh (2009) and the results were correlated to determine the consistency of the assessment instruments.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed comparatively using paired sample t-tests (t-test of faired observations), by comparing the results of practices before economic strengthening/training with the treatments after the training. Before the significance test was done, the normality of the research data is tested first.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The design of the economic strengthening model produced from this training consists of 5 (five) main components, namely: objectives, targets, materials, procedures, and evaluations. From the design, several model products were obtained, namely: guidelines for strengthening the community's economy, ecotourism product development modules (crafts, culinary, aquaculture, and souvenirs), business management and marketing modules, and project appraisal guidelines. The design and the product are collaborative results between the research team and the group of research subjects, particularly the local government, village government, the world of tourism, the ecotourism-aware group, and the Sekotong Region community.

Prior to the implementation of economic strengthening, some activities were done: determining the place of learning in the form of study groups, recruiting participants, preparing the tools (especially training/learning modules and guidelines), and the required infrastructure, recruiting facilitators/instructors, conducting simulations and negotiating perception with the instructor, preparing data collection instruments. All activities were carried out in 20 meetings with a duration of 4 (four) hours each day to complete the production process of ecotourism products. The last meeting was particularly used to conduct a practical test on the level of mastery of community entrepreneurial competencies/participants. The practical test in each group involves two assessors to ensure objectivity, besides the reliability of the instrument as suggested by Grounlund and Waugh (2009). The instrument reliability test results are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Instrument Reliability Test Results

Sample Group	N	Average Rating 1	Average Rating 2	correlation coefficient	Sig.	conclusion
craft	19	73.89	75.56	.823	.000	Reliable
culinary	22	79.44	80	.802	.000	Reliable
cultivation	25	77.78	78.29	.796	.000	Reliable
souvenir	18	75.28	76.7	.773	.000	Reliable

Source: Primary Data Processing

Furthermore, the results of economic strengthening were analyzed using paired sample t-tests. This test was carried out to determine differences in entrepreneurial competencies as reflected in the processes and products produced prior to the economic strengthening and afterwards (Table 2). But before the test, the analysis requirements test was done in the form of a normality test. The results of the normality test using the Kolmogorov Smirnov analysis in the craft group obtained a value of 73.12 with a probability of $0.47 > 0.05$, a culinary group with a value of 63.41 with a probability of $0.89 > 0.05$, the cultivation group obtained a value of 61.46 with a probability of $0.93 > 0.05$, and a souvenir group obtained a value of 75.60 with a probability of $0.421 > 0.05$. It can be concluded that the local community entrepreneurial competency data were normally distributed.

Table 2. T-Test Results of Entrepreneurship Competency Development Ecotourism Products Before and After Economic Strengthening

Group	Test	Average	Sd.	t value	Sig.
craft	Pre Test	55.972	2.855	-11.129	.000
	Post Tets	74.720	4.232		
culinary	Pre Test	56.249	3.539	17.842	.000
	Post Tets	79.723	2.633		
cultivation	Pre Test	57.290	2.977	-13.759	.000
	Post Tets	78.039	4.250		
souvenir	Pre Test	50.278	3.196	14.902	.000
	Post Tets	75.973	2.705		

Source: Primary Data Processing

Based on the data in Table 1, it can be explained as follows: First, for handicraft products, a t-count of -11.129 is obtained with a probability value of 0.000. Based on these results it can be concluded that there are differences in entrepreneurial competence in developing handicraft products between before economic strengthening and after, where the average value of competence after economic strengthening is greater than before; Second, for culinary products, the tcount is -17.842 with a probability value of 0.000. Based on these

results, there are differences in entrepreneurial competence in developing culinary products between before economic strengthening and after, where the average value of competence after economic strengthening is greater than before; Third, for cultivation products, the t-count is -13.759 with a probability value of 0.000. Based on these results, there are differences in entrepreneurial competence in developing aquaculture products between before economic strengthening and after, where the average value of entrepreneurial competence after economic strengthening is greater than before; and fourth, for culinary products, the tcount is -14.902 with a probability value of 0.000. Accordingly, there are differences in entrepreneurial competence in developing souvenir products between before economic strengthening and after, where the average value of entrepreneurial competence after economic strengthening is greater than before the strengthening. This difference can be understood because the content of economic reinforcement/ raining is tailored to the needs of participants and the learning process prioritizes interaction and collaboration combined with direct practice activities.

3.2 Discussion

The test results above once again confirm the study of Westlund and Gawell (2012) that strengthening community economy in a participatory manner stimulates the development and growth of various economic sectors. The Boruologo's (2004) study also concluded that eradication and poverty reduction can only be realized through solving the root of the problem through strengthening the economy and involving the community in managing productive economic resources. To be able to manage economic resources, it absolutely requires competent human beings who have the skills to process and manage these resources. Therefore, their involvement in developing ecotourism products and services, controlling the market, competing in capturing consumers or their customers are some of the intended engagement strategies (Sobarna 2003). Of course, in realizing it, people do not directly become managers or directly have large companies, but rather start from small things or develop businesses in small scale and certain scope. To realize, it can be started from small businesses and carried out by individuals as found by Zusmelia *et al.* (2012).

One of the advantages of this economic strengthening model is that the objectives and content of economic reinforcement are explored and sourced from the leading sectors of the Sekotong community, so that education/economic reinforcement provided is truly contextual and relevant to the practice of community life, and prioritizes the uniqueness of the local culture. Leading sectors become important points in strengthening the economy or education (Sukardi, Wildan and Fahrurrozi 2019). Empirical evidence also shows that the development of superior commodity-based ecotourism products is proven to exist in the midst of competition in the tourism industry. The results of the study by Abdul Razzaq, Tan, Mustafa, and Bokhari (2017) prove that the services of providing Miso Walai Homestay in the Sabah Ecotourism area of Sabah Malaysia have impacted on increasing the income of the regional community. This condition occurs because the implementation of ecotourism management principles, such as: involvement and participation of local communities in ecotourism management, such as the provision of products and services needed by ecotourists. The results of Ramele, Juchi, Ibrahim, Isnin, and Safiee's (2017) research also prove that ecotourism products in managing homestays have also succeeded in increasing economic returns. Community participation and involvement is the key to the success of Homestay development as the intended ecotourism product. This is relevant to Scheyvens's (2007) thesis that empowering or strengthening the community's economy will correlate with the progress and economic benefits of the community, including correlating with improving social order and environmental conservation. In addition to leading sectors, a cultural perspective signs the Sekotong community's involvement in managing ecotourism including in providing ecotourism products and services as found by Liu *et al.* (2012). Culture is the main asset in development that gives regional economic value, besides, of course, to strengthen and maintain the preservation of culture itself (Hatta 2004). Ardika (2003) has also written that the existence of culture is life for economic activities in the tourism sector.

Another advantage of this economic strengthening model is that education is packaged interactively and through direct practice. Sukardi Study (2017); Sukardi, Ismail, and Novi Suryanti (2014) emphasized that learning through direct interaction and practice proved to be effective in increasing student competency. Practice is carried out with craftsmen (instructors) on how to produce. In addition, the management plan for economic strengthening in the form of a learning group is another advantage. This model is based on the concept that the superior sector of the Sekotong Region is an environment-based learning resource that can be utilized by students as Vigotsky thought (Sthapornnanon, Sakulbumrungsil, Theeraroungchaisri and Watcharadamrongkun, 2009). Thus, strengthening the economy in the form of a learning forum provides greater opportunities for the attainment of knowledge and skills through engaging in the real world.

Conclusion

Strengthening the community economy based on superior ecotourism sector has proven to be effective in increasing the entrepreneurial competence of local communities. The test results on 4 (four) target groups (crafts, souvenirs, cultivation, and culinary) obtained competency achievement scores above the standard. Statistical test results show that there are differences in entrepreneurial competency scores in developing ecotourism products between before economic strengthening and afterwards. By looking at the average value of achieving entrepreneurial competencies in ecotourism product development after strengthening/training is higher, the resulting model is effective and feasible to be used to strengthen the economy of the Sekotong ecotourism community in Indonesia. The practical implication is that to accelerate the economic strengthening of local communities through the development of ecotourism products and services, it is necessary to support from policy makers, such as: the amount of investment, training of trainers (TOT) for ecotourism actors, advocacy/assistance for ecotourism actors and others. The theoretical implication is the relevance of expanding the ecotourism sector's sustainable economic theory in the context of Indonesia.

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