

# Implementation of Strategic Policy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism Based on Ecotourism in Kutai Kartanegara Regency

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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses the problem of suboptimal implementation of Regional Regulation Number 19 of 2016 on the Tourism Development Master Plan in promoting sustainable ecotourism in Samboja and Muara Badak Districts. The objective of this research is to analyze the extent to which the regulation has been implemented and to identify the factors influencing its effectiveness in coastal tourism development. The study applies the Van Meter and Van Horn policy implementation model and Scott's institutional theory, with emphasis on the regulatory, normative, and cognitive pillars. A qualitative descriptive method was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with officials from the Tourism Office, sub-district governments, destination managers, and Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), as well as non-participant observation and documentation review of relevant regulations and planning documents. Data were analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The results indicate that the policy has clear objectives, including increasing tourist visits, promoting community empowerment through Pokdarwis, and ensuring environmental sustainability. However, implementation remains suboptimal due to the absence of derivative technical regulations, limited quantity and quality of human resources, fluctuating regional budgets, inadequate infrastructure, political dynamics, low environmental awareness, and geographical challenges such as coastal abrasion and land conflicts. From an institutional perspective, the regulatory, normative, and cognitive pillars are present but require strengthening, particularly to enhance community capacity and ensure policy consistency.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a potential sector that can be developed innovatively to enhance competitiveness [11], [14]. Since 1978, the government has consistently encouraged the

development of the tourism sector to increase foreign exchange earnings, expand employment opportunities, and showcase national cultural wealth. These development efforts have been carried out while continuing to prioritize the preservation of culture and national identity [1]. The development efforts are stipulated in Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism, Article 8 paragraph (1), which states that tourism development is carried out based on a tourism development master plan, consisting of the national tourism development master plan, provincial tourism development master plan, and regency or city tourism development master plan. Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 50 of 2011 concerning the National Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARNAS) for 2010–2025 states that tourism development planning is implemented in accordance with RIPPARNAS. Therefore, hierarchically, tourism development planning in Kutai Kartanegara Regency must automatically be carried out based on the East Kalimantan Provincial Tourism Development Master Plan, Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism, and Government Regulation Number 50 of 2011 concerning the National Tourism Development Master Plan as references. In following up on this national policy, Kutai Kartanegara Regency issued Regional Regulation Number 19 of 2016 concerning the Tourism Development Master Plan of Kutai Kartanegara Regency for 2016–2025 [24].

The implementation of the tourism policy based on the 2021–2026 strategic plan of the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Tourism Office explains that problems in the tourism sector generally focus on the development of tourist destinations that have not yet emphasized competitiveness, leaving them unprepared to compete with other destinations. Tourism marketing development remains ineffective and inefficient, requiring significant effort to make tourism in Kutai Kartanegara Regency more marketable and better known to tourists. In sustainable tourism development, human resources greatly influence its success, as they carry out the development process [18]. One of the factors inhibiting the implementation of tourism policy in Kutai Kartanegara Regency is the shortage of human resources.

The main problems outlined above are evident in the trend of performance targets set by the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Tourism Office from 2022 to 2024, particularly regarding tourist visit numbers. During this period, the annual performance targets for tourist visits continued to increase. However, the realization of tourist visits consistently fell short of predetermined targets. Although there was a slight improvement in realization in the second year, the overall trend did not show stable, significant growth. The following year, the realization again declined despite a substantially higher target. These conditions indicate that proportional achievements in actual tourist visits did not accompany the increase in performance targets. The gap between targets and realization each year reflects ongoing challenges in achieving the expected outcomes of tourism development policies [33], [17]. This situation suggests that the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Tourism Office has not optimally carried out its duties and functions in increasing tourist visits. This aligns with the 2023 Government Agency Performance Report of the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Tourism Office [6].

Institutions play a crucial role in tourism development [28]. These institutions, both formal and informal, function as regulators, facilitators, and mediators in managing tourism

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resources, coordinating activities, and ensuring that tourism benefits are distributed fairly. Without effective institutions, sustainable tourism development may face various challenges, such as conflicts of interest, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequality [20], [25]. Institutional factors such as bureaucratic capacity, political support, and community participation can influence the success of policy implementation [35]. Sustainable tourism development in Kutai Kartanegara Regency must take ecotourism into account [22], [27], which becomes an important note for institutions involved in implementing such policies.

Therefore, this study examines policy implementation and the role of institutions in the development of sustainable tourism based on ecotourism, particularly in coastal ecotourism areas. Based on data from the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Tourism Office on event organization, these areas have received limited attention in event planning. The list of events or activities in Kutai Kartanegara Regency in 2024 shows that 32 activities were held in the regency, and only one was carried out in coastal or shoreline areas, namely the Coastal Sea Festival in Samboja District. Meanwhile, Regional Regulation Number 19 of 2016 concerning the Tourism Development Master Plan of Kutai Kartanegara Regency for 2016–2025 [24] stipulates that coastal ecotourism is one of the designated tourism development areas.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employs qualitative research, which is a method that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observed behaviors [19], [4]. This type of research is conducted in a natural setting and is essentially exploratory in nature [29], [9]. The benefits of qualitative research include its ability to understand the significance of behavior and its potential to uncover new theories that are relevant to the cultural context or the subjects under study [4]. The research was conducted in the Kutai Kartanegara area, including institutions responsible for tourism affairs, namely the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Tourism Office, related institutions, and coastal communities in Samboja and Muara Badak Districts. The data sources in this study include primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews in the form of words, written notes, and audio recordings from informants, including the Head/Acting Head of the Tourism Office, the Secretary of the Office, the Head of the Tourism Destination Division, the Head of the Creative Economy Division of Samboja District, the Head of Muara Badak District, the Village Head of Samboja Kuala, the Chairperson of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), members of the creative economy sector, and MSME actors in Samboja and Muara Badak Districts. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from the literature, including books, journals, research reports, articles, and internet writings related to tourism in Kutai Kartanegara Regency.

Data collection techniques included library research, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly observe the socialization process, the level of participant attendance, and various activities carried out by the organizers at the research sites. Interviews were conducted to explore informants' views, motivations, constraints, and experiences regarding the implementation of sustainable tourism development policies.

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Documentation was used to support the data through written and visual evidence. Furthermore, all data obtained were analyzed through stages of classification, reduction, and categorization to identify thematic patterns in accordance with the research focus. Data analysis techniques used the Interactive Analysis Model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of four iterative stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing [2]. At the collection stage, data were gathered from sources including interviews, observations, and documents. At the condensation stage, data were selected, simplified, and coded according to themes such as implementation forms, institutional roles, and inhibiting factors. Data display was conducted in the form of narratives and patterns of relationships among categories to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Conclusions were drawn after the data were assessed as consistent, robust, and capable of answering the research questions. To ensure data validity, this study applied four criteria of trustworthiness, namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and source triangulation.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Implementation of Strategic Policy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism Based on Ecotourism in Kutai Kartanegara Regency Policy Size and Objectives**

The policy size and objectives of Regional Regulation Number 19 of 2016 concerning the Tourism Development Master Plan of Kutai Kartanegara Regency for 2016–2025 [24] serve as the fundamental guideline in determining the direction of implementation in the field, as well as a benchmark for assessing the level of policy success or failure [33], [17]. The Kutai Kartanegara Regency Tourism Office, as one of the stakeholders involved, requires community members and other parties to participate in implementing this regional regulation. Substantively, this regulation aims to serve as a guideline for directing tourism sector development in Kutai Kartanegara Regency by developing tourism destinations based on local potential, enhancing tourism competitiveness, and involving communities as both a resource and the main actors in sustainable tourism development in the regency. The results of this study indicate that the objectives of tourism development policy in Kutai Kartanegara Regency focus on three main aspects:

1. Increasing tourist visits through the development of strategic areas and tourism events, such as the Kukar Kaya Festival.
2. Community empowerment through the establishment and training of Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) and the strengthening of local MSMEs.
3. Environmental conservation in the context of ecotourism, such as mangrove conservation, coral transplantation, and the management of endemic wildlife, for example, proboscis monkeys.

#### **Resources**

Tourism potential in Kutai Kartanegara Regency needs to be optimized in its management. Policy implementation is strongly influenced by the availability of human resources, budget, and infrastructure [33], [35]. This condition indicates that tourism

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institutions in the region lack adequate managerial and technical capacity to implement the principles of sustainable development [18]. Interview results indicate that the quality of human resources for managing sustainable tourism in Kutai Kartanegara Regency remains uneven. The government has conducted various capacity-building training programs for Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) and tourism actors; however, these programs have not reached all areas and are not yet comprehensive. From the budgetary perspective, although the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD) allocates a relatively large amount of funds, approximately IDR 150 billion per year, realization has declined due to efficiency measures and refocusing toward other priority sectors. This condition affects the limited implementation of destination development programs and tourism promotion.

Table 1. Number of Tourist Visits in Kutai Kartanegara Regency

Year	Wisnus	Wisman	Total	Growth(%)
2023	1.530.444	1.530	1.531.974	147.0
2024	1.215.549	3.803	1.219.352	79,59

Based on the table of tourist visits to tourism objects and attractions in Kutai Kartanegara Regency, the number of visits declined from 2023 to 2024. This condition aligns with the Tourism Office's declining budget absorption, which, in turn, affects the number of tourist visits. Meanwhile, the infrastructure sector, including road access, transportation, and tourism facilities, remains a major obstacle to increasing tourist attractiveness. Several areas, such as Muara Badak and Samboja, still lack accommodation facilities and public amenities. Maintenance of tourism-supporting facilities also constitutes a separate constraint on enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations. Overall, the availability of resources for sustainable tourism development in Kutai Kartanegara Regency is relatively adequate but not yet sustainable.

### Characteristics of Implementing Organizations

The characteristics of policy implementation organizations in Kutai Kartanegara Regency are multi-level and multi-actor, meaning they involve multiple elements, ranging from government and community to the private sector. The Tourism Office serves as the main coordinator and requires support from other Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD), such as the MSME Office, the Transportation Office, the Environmental Office, and the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda). At the local level, Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) and community-based creative economy committees serve as the direct implementers of field activities. Cross-sector collaboration among OPDs and active community participation in policy implementation indicate that the government does not solely apply a top-down instructional approach but also adopts a bottom-up approach that involves the community as the main actor.

The structure and characteristics of implementing organizations determine how a policy is translated into concrete actions in the field [26], [7]. Clarity of structure, cross-sector coordination, and institutional competence are key factors influencing the effectiveness of policy implementation [34]. Interview results indicate the existence of

communication and cross-sector collaboration among OPDs that mutually support policy implementation, such as the Public Works Office in infrastructure development and tourism accessibility, the Environmental Office in maintaining environmental sustainability, and the MSME Office in supporting tourism events and festivals. In addition, policy implementation also involves the community through Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) and sub-district-level Creative Economy Committees, which actively encourage community participation and develop creative economy subsectors to strengthen regional tourism attractiveness.

#### **d. Disposition of Implementers**

The results of the study show that the local government has a strong commitment to implementing Regional Regulation Number 19 of 2016 [24] concerning the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARKAB). This commitment is reflected in tangible programs such as the Kukar Kaya Festival, the establishment of Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), and capacity-building training for community-based tourism managers and creative economy actors, which have been implemented gradually.

Based on interview results, it can be concluded that the disposition variable of implementers demonstrates administrative compliance, collaborative spirit [33], social responsibility, as well as a relatively high awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism development, although several constraints remain, including:

1. Limited managerial capacity at the level of tourism business actors.
2. The lack of a digital-based promotion system.

#### **Interorganizational Communication**

The communication pattern among implementing organizations reflects the dynamics of policy implementation [33], [17]. Continuous intensity and consistency in communication are required to avoid distortion of policy messages [35]. Vertically, communication flows from the regency government through the Tourism Office to sub-district governments, village administrations, and the community. This communication is generally instructive in nature and is conveyed through circular letters, activity guidelines, and official dispositions from the head of the office as instruments to ensure alignment with the direction of sustainable tourism development. Horizontally, communication takes place among Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD), community institutions such as Tourism Awareness Groups, and creative economy actors. This communication is coordinative and participatory, in which the Tourism Office collaborates with other OPDs such as the Public Works Office, the Environmental Office, the MSME Office, and the Transportation Office. For example, the development of Tanjung Park is the result of cross-sector collaboration among the Public Works Office, the Environmental Office, and the Tourism Office. Based on interview results, interorganizational communication in Kutai Kartanegara Regency has been running relatively well, but it is not yet fully consistent and evenly implemented across all regions. Continuous, consistent communication is required to avoid distortion of policy messages; therefore, communication must be two-way and conducted regularly.

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## **Social, Economic, and Political Environment**

From a social perspective, the study's results indicate that community participation in tourism activities in Kutai Kartanegara has increased, although it is not yet evenly distributed across all regions. The Acting Head of the Tourism Office, Ariyanto, stated that community participation can be observed through involvement in festivals, cultural events, and training activities. Nevertheless, challenges remain in public awareness of cleanliness and environmental conservation.

Economic factors are a dominant influence on the success of policy implementation [5], [3]. Based on interview results, although the tourism sector is considered to have potential as a source of regional economic growth, government budget priorities are still more heavily directed toward other sectors, such as education and basic infrastructure. Budget allocation for the tourism sector is relatively fluctuating and often subject to adjustments due to budget efficiency measures. As a result, several destination development programs and tourism promotion activities cannot be implemented optimally.

Political and regulatory aspects are important determinants in the sustainability of policy implementation [13], [23]. The Regional Regulation Number 19 of 2016 remains the main guideline [24] for the preparation of agency work programs; however, this policy requires additional technical follow-up regulations to ensure more effective implementation.

### **3.2 The Role of Institutions in Sustainable Tourism Development in Kutai Kartanegara Regency**

#### **Regulatory Pillar**

Based on the research results, Regional Regulation Number 19 of 2016 serves as the main legal foundation [24]. The regulatory pillar concept is based on Scott's institutional theory [28]. This regulation serves as a long-term tourism development "grand design" that guides policy direction, destination spatial planning, and regional tourism human resource development priorities. This indicates that, formally, the legal framework for tourism in Kutai Kartanegara continues to function normatively; however, substantively, it faces challenges in renewal to align with developments in national policy and changes in the sustainable development paradigm. Although the regulatory pillar has been formally well established, the research results show that its effectiveness remains limited by several structural and substantive constraints, including: a) the absence of updates to regional regulations, b) the limited capacity of the regional bureaucracy, and c) suboptimal supervision and evaluation mechanisms.

#### **Normative Pillar**

The research results show that the value of collaboration has become a primary norm underlying institutional practices within the Kutai Kartanegara Tourism Office [28]. The Head of the Destination Division, Muh. Ridha Fatrianta stated that the main strategy for tourism development begins with strengthening internal institutional capacity, which is then synergized with other institutions, including village governments, the Naval Base Command (Danlanal), and companies in coastal areas. Another prominent value within the normative pillar is community empowerment. The local government, through the Tourism Office,

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actively involves community groups, particularly Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), in every stage of tourism destination development through training and capacity-building activities, which are considered part of the institution's moral responsibility [12], [21]. However, the research also identifies several normative challenges, including: a) disparities in capacity among actors, as not all tourism villages possess the same capabilities and human resources to carry out collaborative activities; b) suboptimal social and economic incentive mechanisms, as community involvement still requires sustainable support to maintain participation motivation; and c) dependence on government initiatives, as despite high participation values, many community groups remain active primarily due to agency-driven programs rather than pure grassroots initiatives.

### **Cognitive Pillar**

According to Scott, the cognitive pillar is an institutional dimension that concerns the shared understanding, interpretation, and meaning collectively constructed by actors within a social system. The research results indicate a shift in the institutional paradigm at the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Tourism Office, from a previously dominant role as a program implementer to a facilitator and catalyst. The government is present, and the community is also present through Pokdarwis. The government no longer positions itself as the central controller, but rather as a facilitator that creates space for communities and the private sector to participate actively. This shift reflects the strengthening of the cognitive pillar, as institutional actors have internalized the belief that sustainable tourism development can only be achieved through participation and shared awareness.

From the community perspective, the cognitive pillar is reflected in how tourism is understood not merely as an economic activity, but as part of identity and social responsibility toward the environment. Communities have reached a relatively high level of ecological awareness, representing a concrete manifestation of an internalized cognitive pillar [16], [32]. Nevertheless, although the cognitive pillar has developed, the research results reveal several key challenges in the internalization process of sustainable tourism values, namely: a) uneven community understanding of tourism sustainability, and b) gaps in digital literacy for local tourism promotion.

### **3.3 Institutional Inhibiting Factors in Tourism Management in Kutai Kartanegara Regency**

Based on interviews with all informants, several institutional inhibiting factors were identified in the management of tourism in Kutai Kartanegara Regency, including limitations in human resources and budget, regulatory constraints, and social-political factors and natural conditions [33], [17].

Limited human resources constitute the most fundamental inhibiting factor within tourism institutions in Kutai Kartanegara Regency [18]. Empirically, interview results with Ariyanto (Acting Head of the Tourism Office) indicate that the number of technical personnel with expertise in tourism planning and promotion remains very limited. The gap between the need for professional personnel and the availability of competent officials often leads to strategic policies falling short of optimal outcomes. This condition indicates that

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tourism institutions in the region lack adequate managerial and technical capacity to implement the principles of sustainable development.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the overall analysis, the implementation of sustainable tourism development policies based on ecotourism in Kutai Kartanegara Regency has clear objectives and direction, but it has not been optimal. The main constraints include the absence of derivative technical regulations, limitations in human resources and infrastructure, budget fluctuations, and cross-sector coordination that has not been systematic. Although the commitment of implementers and community participation show positive developments, limited institutional capacity, political dynamics, and environmental and geographical challenges continue to affect policy sustainability. Therefore, regulatory strengthening, enhancement of implementer capacity, and long-term policy consistency are key factors in achieving sustainable tourism development.

From an institutional analysis perspective, it can be concluded that the regulatory, normative, and cognitive pillars in tourism development have been established but have not yet functioned optimally. The regulatory pillar remains weak due to the absence of follow-up technical regulations and limited bureaucratic capacity in supervision and evaluation. Within the normative pillar, values of collaboration and community empowerment have developed, yet they still face capacity disparities and low levels of independent community initiative. Meanwhile, the cognitive pillar shows a positive paradigm shift; however, understanding of sustainable tourism and digital literacy remains uneven.

The management of sustainable tourism in Kutai Kartanegara Regency is influenced by several inhibiting factors, primarily inadequate human resources in terms of both quality and quantity. Budgetary constraints also persist, as there are no alternative funding sources for managing core and supporting facilities for tourism development. In addition, the lack of derivative regulations from existing regional regulations, such as regulations or technical guidelines, further hampers effective implementation.

From the socio-political and environmental perspectives, frequent leadership changes often disrupt policy consistency. Destination management by individuals and land-use conflicts complicate coordination between the government and the community. Geographical factors, including coastal abrasion, ecosystem degradation, and complex accessibility, further exacerbate the challenges of policy implementation at the local level.

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