



COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM SUCCESS IN NGLANGGERAN, GUNUNG KIDUL: LESSONS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Nglanggeran Ancient Volcano (Gunung Api Purba Nglanggeran) in Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta, represents one of Indonesia's most successful applications of Community-Based Tourism (CBT). Once a marginal agricultural area, the community transformed it into a globally recognized destination through participatory governance, cultural revitalization, and environmental stewardship. This article examines the strategies underpinning Nglanggeran's success, focusing on community participation, local entrepreneurship, asset mobilization, and sustainability practices. Using a qualitative case study approach informed by secondary literature and policy reports, the analysis highlights how CBT and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) principles enabled local actors to achieve social, economic, and environmental outcomes. Findings indicate that Nglanggeran not only improved household income and employment opportunities but also preserved cultural heritage and restored degraded landscapes. This study contributes to sustainable tourism discourse by demonstrating how CBT can be scaled and adapted in rural contexts, offering policy lessons for Indonesia and beyond.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Asset-Based Community Development, Sustainable Tourism, Nglanggeran, Gunung Kidul

1. Introduction

Tourism is widely recognized as a driver of economic development, cultural exchange, and environmental change (Lickorish & Jenkins, 2007). However, the rapid expansion of mass tourism has often produced unequal benefits, environmental degradation, and cultural commodification (Matarrita-Cascante, 2010). In response, alternative approaches such as Community-Based Tourism (CBT) have emerged, emphasizing community empowerment, equitable benefit-sharing, and sustainable practices (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a tourism model that prioritizes the active involvement of local residents in the planning, development, and management of tourism activities. The main objective is to empower communities by ensuring their participation in decision-making processes, the distribution of economic benefits, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Through CBT, visitors interact directly with local people, their traditions, and the surrounding environment, resulting in a more authentic and sustainable travel experience. This approach not only supports community development but also helps safeguard cultural identity while creating economic opportunities for local populations. By engaging with CBT initiatives, travelers contribute to the empowerment and overall well-being of host communities.

Community-based tourism highlights the importance of local communities taking an active role in the planning, development, and management of tourism. By positioning residents as key decision-makers, this approach ensures that tourism initiatives reflect their needs, values, and long-term goals. It is designed to cultivate a sense of ownership, pride, and accountability within the community, thereby supporting tourism practices that are both sustainable and fair (Iorio & Corsale, 2014).

In Indonesia, CBT initiatives have been applied in several rural destinations, though only a few have achieved international recognition. Among them, Nglanggeran Ancient Volcano in Gunung Kidul

Regency, Yogyakarta, stands out as a model of success. Once an underdeveloped agricultural village, Nglanggeran has been transformed into a vibrant tourism destination, becoming part of the UNESCO Global Geopark Network in 2015 and receiving recognition from ASEAN and UNWTO for sustainable tourism innovation (UNESCO, 2015; UNWTO, 2017).

The purpose of this article is to explore Nglanggeran as a case study of CBT success. It analyzes the strategies that enabled the community to transform their village into a sustainable tourism destination, explains how CBT and ABCD principles shaped this transformation, and identifies lessons for replicating CBT in other rural contexts

2. Literature Review

Sustainable tourism refers to the management of tourism activities and development in ways that safeguard natural, economic, and social integrity while ensuring the protection of cultural and environmental resources. Its principles and practices apply across all types of tourism, from mass tourism to niche segments. According to Jasinskis, many countries promote sustainable tourism as an economic activity, though its implementation often requires greater investment than conventional tourism. As a result, less economically developed nations face challenges in adopting sustainable tourism strategies. In many cases, the principles of sustainability are overlooked, as governments prioritize tourism primarily as a value-added industry rather than regulating its growth under sustainability guidelines.

The central mission of sustainable tourism is to manage resources in ways that balance economic, social, and developmental objectives with the preservation of cultural and ecological values. Like other industries, tourism sustainability rests on three interconnected dimensions: environmental, sociocultural, and economic. Sustainability implies long-term viability; therefore, sustainable tourism focuses on the efficient use of resources, conservation of biodiversity, and minimization of ecological, cultural, and social impacts, while simultaneously maximizing benefits for conservation and local communities. Panasiuk and Roman et al. also argue that sustainability in tourism must be addressed across these three pillars. Each dimension has specific goals that, when combined, contribute to the overall achievement of sustainable outcomes.

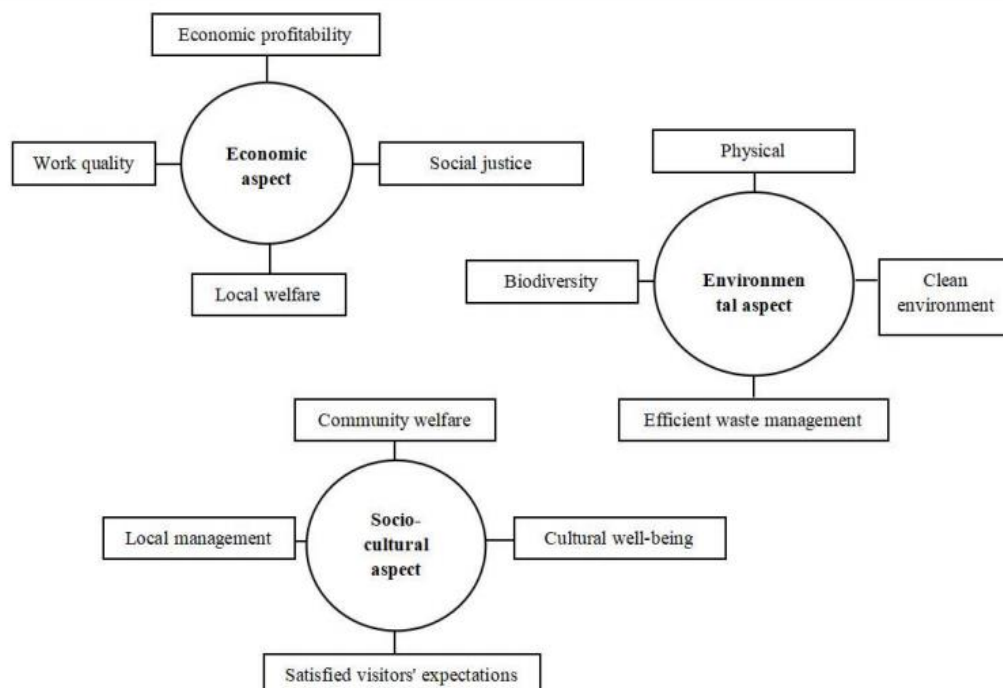


Figure 1: Objectives of sustainable tourism in economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects.
(Based on Roman et al. and Panasiuk)

Sustainable tourism seeks to balance economic viability, sociocultural integrity, and environmental protection (Swarbrooke, 1999; UNWTO, 2005). Destinations that adopt this model aim to preserve resources for future generations while providing immediate benefits for local communities. Achieving sustainability requires careful planning, effective visitor management, and active participation from local actors (Bramwell & Lane, 2010).

Community-Based Tourism represents one practical approach to sustainable tourism. Defined as tourism that is owned and managed by local communities, CBT ensures that the benefits of tourism are distributed fairly while also safeguarding cultural heritage (Asker et al., 2010). Previous research has demonstrated that CBT enhances empowerment, creates employment opportunities, and strengthens social cohesion (Baniya et al., 2018). Nevertheless, CBT faces challenges such as elite capture, dependency on external markets, and difficulties in scaling (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

Complementing CBT, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach offers a useful framework for understanding how communities can mobilize their strengths to achieve sustainability. Developed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), ABCD emphasizes the identification and mobilization of local assets whether natural, cultural, social, or human rather than focusing on deficiencies. By encouraging communities to recognize their potential, asset mapping fosters greater resilience and autonomy (Beaulieu, 2002). In the context of tourism, ABCD ensures that development is grounded in the strengths of the community itself (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model is an increasingly recognized approach to community development. Introduced by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), it highlights the importance of individual skills and the contributions of local associations in building resilient and dynamic communities. At its core, ABCD focuses on strengthening networks and relationships among community members as a foundation for sustainable development.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) define Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) as a community-building process that begins by identifying the assets, skills, and capacities of local residents, citizen associations, and institutions. In a similar vein, Bergdall (2003) characterizes ABCD as an approach that emphasizes the strengths and resources of a community rather than its deficiencies. Haines and Green (2012) further describe it as a deliberate effort to develop assets that enhance residents' capacity to improve their quality of life. Mathie and Cunningham (2003) expand this perspective by framing ABCD both as an approach and as a set of methods for mobilizing communities. They argue that it draws on the community's collective strengths and shared successes as a foundation for change, making it a strategy for fostering sustainable, community-driven development.

Together, CBT and ABCD form the conceptual framework for this study. The integration of these approaches enables a nuanced understanding of how Nglanggeran leveraged its geological heritage, agricultural traditions, cultural identity, and social networks to become a successful sustainable tourism destination..

3. Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2018), focusing on Nglanggeran as a single case that exemplifies CBT success in Indonesia. Data were collected from secondary literature, including academic studies on CBT in Nglanggeran (Adiyoso & Kanegae, 2015; Rahayu & Purbasari, 2019), policy reports from UNESCO and UNWTO, and comparative research on community-based tourism in Southeast Asia (Rindrasih, 2019; Suwena & Widyatmaja, 2017).

The data were analyzed thematically, with codes structured around the three pillars of sustainable tourism—environmental, economic, and sociocultural—while also examining governance and institutional frameworks. The integration of CBT and ABCD provided a lens for interpreting the findings, particularly regarding how asset mobilization and participatory governance shaped outcomes.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1. Findings

The transformation of Nglanggeran demonstrates the potential of CBT when communities mobilize their assets effectively. From an environmental perspective, the community prioritized conservation by establishing the Embung Nglanggeran reservoir, which not only supports agriculture but also serves as a tourist attraction. Reforestation programs have rehabilitated degraded hillsides, while local youth groups have taken a leading role in organizing waste management campaigns and environmental education initiatives (Fitriani et al., 2020).

Nglanggeran's development emphasized conservation. Initiatives include:

- a. Embung Nglanggeran: an artificial lake for water conservation and tourism.
- b. Reforestation of degraded hillsides.
- c. Waste management campaigns led by youth groups (Fitriani et al., 2020).



Figure 2. Preservation.

Source: Internet

Economically, tourism has diversified local livelihoods. Revenues generated from entrance fees and tourism activities are managed collectively through the local Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) and reinvested in community infrastructure and education. Homestay programs allow families to host visitors, providing an additional income stream, while local entrepreneurs have developed cacao-based products under the “Kampung Coklat” brand. These initiatives, supported by training programs, have particularly benefited women and youth, who now play an active role in tourism enterprises (Rahayu & Purbasari, 2019).

Tourism revenues are managed collectively through **Pokdarwis** (Tourism Awareness Group) and reinvested in infrastructure and education. Economic diversification includes:

- a. Homestay programs.
- b. Local cacao production (“Kampung Coklat”).
- c. Small-scale businesses run by women and youth (Rahayu & Purbasari, 2019).



Figure 3. Economy activity.
Source: Internet

Socioculturally, tourism has revitalized traditional practices and strengthened community pride. Cultural events such as Javanese dance, wayang performances, and traditional culinary festivals are now integrated into the tourism experience, allowing younger generations to engage with their heritage (Nuryanti, 2019). Local identity has been reinforced, and tourism has become a means of intergenerational knowledge transfer rather than cultural erosion.



Figure 4. Sociocultural conservation.
Source: Internet

Governance has also been central to Nglanggeran’s success. Decisions are made collectively through Pokdarwis, which operates transparently and inclusively. Partnerships with universities, NGOs, and government agencies have provided technical expertise and financial support, but community ownership remains the cornerstone of decision-making (Suwena & Widyatmaja, 2017).

4.2. Discussion

The case of Nglanggeran confirms theoretical insights that CBT can generate significant social, economic, and environmental benefits when communities retain ownership and control over tourism

development (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). The integration of ABCD principles has strengthened these outcomes by encouraging the community to recognize and mobilize its natural, cultural, and social assets. This internal strength has reduced dependency on external actors and enhanced local resilience.

At the same time, the Nglanggeran case highlights several challenges that are common in CBT contexts. The increasing number of visitors has raised concerns about over-commercialization and environmental pressure. Ensuring inclusivity in decision-making remains an ongoing task, as not all community members are equally represented in leadership structures. Nevertheless, compared to other CBT projects in Indonesia that have struggled with sustainability, Nglanggeran illustrates how youth leadership, asset diversification, and transparent governance can create long-term resilience (Rindrasih, 2019).

5. Conclusion

Nglanggeran Ancient Volcano represents a model of successful community-based tourism in Indonesia. Its achievements can be attributed to strong community participation, the mobilization of local assets, diversification of tourism products, and an enduring commitment to sustainability. The case provides valuable lessons for rural destinations seeking to replicate CBT practices.

Policy recommendations include the need to integrate ABCD principles into tourism planning, particularly in rural areas with untapped natural and cultural resources. Training programs for youth and women should be expanded to build local capacities in tourism management and entrepreneurship. Partnerships with universities and NGOs should continue, but external involvement must respect and reinforce community ownership. Ensuring inclusivity and transparency in governance will be critical for sustaining trust and equitable benefit distribution.

While this study demonstrates the success of Nglanggeran, its findings are limited to a single case. Future research could compare Nglanggeran with other CBT destinations in Indonesia and ASEAN to assess the scalability of its practices and the long-term resilience of community-driven tourism.

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