

Ancient Sites, History and Local Wisdom: Tourism Boosting Reforms to Improve the Economy and Living Standard in the Province of Bengkulu, Indonesia



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ABSTRACT

Law No. 6/2014 on Villages provides for sustainable community empowerment at the village level through the development of ancient sites, and local wisdoms through the tourism village concept in Indonesia. Because a vast majority of its population depends on agriculture and tourism for sustenance, the regional government of the Bengkulu Province is making reforms to improve its large tourism sector consisting of numerous pristine ancient sites, culture and local wisdom. However, this sector, so vital to the region and beyond, has not been very productive for both the local government and more importantly the population of Bengkulu. Attempting the address the question as to how to design an ideal tourism boosting policy and regulations to improve the economy of Bengkulu Province, this research aims to identify and analyze the dynamics of village-related regulations dealing with the management of tourist attractions, including tourism village concept in Bengkulu Province. In so doing the study also seeks to analyze the arrangement and management of village wealth so that it can be developed into a tourist attraction based on local wisdom in the context of economic development that favors both the community and the local government in Bengkulu Province. This study reveals that the shortcoming in the management of touristic resources in the Bengkulu Province lies in several issues including the lack of regional policies and regulations that prioritize community participation, poor organization and management of the program, bad governance and the control of the program by thugs, hence eroding the possibility for accountability.

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Ever since independence, the Indonesian government had wanted to build Indonesia from the periphery by strengthening regions and villages within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This idea has been pursued by President Joko Widodo in his second term by encouraging investments in many vital sectors including the tourism sector at the village level (Kementerian Pariwisata. 2019, p. 45). In addition, the mandate of Law No. 6/2014 on Villages also provides guidance for the sustainability of community welfare at the village level through the development of tourism village (Huda N. 2015, p. 253). Tourism sector is designated as a leading sector because it can increase regional income and reduce poverty by creating employment, increase foreign exchange, and reduce the number of urbanization flows. The government views tourism as an important part of the national and regional developments (Direktorat Jenderal Pariwisata. 1988, p. 218).

One of the areas that has attracted the government's attention in the tourism sector is Bengkulu Province. This is because Bengkulu, especially *Bumi Rafflesia*, is known not only for its wonderful landscape and marine coasts but also for its rich history, cultural heritage and local wisdom that can be developed to attract more local and foreign tourists (Pemerintah Provinsi Bengkulu 2019, pp.4–7). This can be seen through Bengkulu Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA) document supported by the Regional Regulation No. 8/2019 on Bengkulu Province Tourism Development Master Plan for 2019–2024. However, despite its huge potential, Bengkulu tourism has not yet been able to boost the economy of the province due to poor management and ineffective local regulations and policies (Hadinoto K. 1996, p. 112). To remediate this problem, the government is turning its attention to the 'Tourism Village' (*Desa Wisata*) concept which focuses essentially on a culture and eco-friendly tourism whereby the natural beauty of villages/tourist sites and the local wisdom are the center of attraction, instead of touristic objects that do more harm to the environment and generate very little economic growth (Zakaria F., Suprihardjo R D. 2014, p. 246). In the Province of Bengkulu, two regencies are deemed suitable for the implementation of the tourism village concept due to the incredible beauty of their unexposed and unexplored nature and culture. These two locations are North Bengkulu Regency and Lebong Regency. This study seeks to investigate the challenges and legal authority of village and local governments in tourism management and how to formulate regulations and policies for a better and sustainable management of tourism in the Province of Bengkulu.

RESEARCH METHODS

This is a socio-legal research drawing on primary data consisting of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) between the researchers and 10–15 individuals in each location. Data were also gathered through face to face interviews with 05 Bengkulu local government officials, especially those at the Bengkulu Tourism Board and the Bengkulu Department of Tourism (Dinas Pariwisata Provinsi Bengkulu). Interviews were also held with 20 village authorities actively involved in each tourism village project in several villages including Curup, South Lebong, Taba Pananjung, Gading Cempaka, Selebar, Kepahyang, Pino, Tanah Hitam, Kemumu, Tebing Kandang, and Batu Layang, Rimbo Pengadang, Talang Ratu Village, and Air Putih. The reason for conducting face-to-face interviews is either to avoid misunderstanding of the questionnaires or the fear that they might not reach respondents considering the remoteness of the locations. Respondents were chosen based on purposive sampling, a type of sampling technique commonly used in scientific research to determine certain criteria. Purposive sampling (also referred to as an assessment or expert sample) is a type of nonprobability sample. Its main purpose is to produce a sample that can logically be considered representative of the population. This is often done by applying expert knowledge of the population to nonrandomly selecting a representative sample of the population cross-section. In probability sampling, each element in the population has a known non-zero chance of being selected through the use of a random selection procedure (Sugiyono, 2008). The study also draws on secondary data consisting of laws, regulations and policies dealing with regional autonomy and tourism both at the national and regional levels.

The Republic of Indonesia is a large archipelago consisting of thousands of islands inhabited by hundreds of millions of people. Indonesia has a diversity of cultures and customs which are reflected in a single bond known as *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (diversity in unity). Due to its diverse population and complex geography, Indonesia has committed to the rule of law and the decentralization concept to strengthen the economy and protect the rights of the Indonesians as stated in the preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. This has led to the breaking down of the territories of the unitary republic of Indonesia or *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia* (NKRI) into several regions. To help carry out the constitutional mandate dealing with decentralization, and the organization of local governments, Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Government, which provides broad autonomy to regions. In connection with regional autonomy policies, Law No. 6/2014 on Villages was enacted, which provides genuine autonomy to villages and recognizes and protects the rights of traditional communities over their financial affairs, culture, local wisdom and natural resources based on customary law. Overall, the enactment of these two laws was meant to improve the welfare of the Indonesian people, especially the traditional communities. With the enactment of Law No. 6/2014, power has been granted to villages to manage their finance, allocate funds, elect their leaders, and design village development programs on their own. Under this law, villages now stand as legal entities, meaning that they can carry out legal actions in court against anyone that deprives them of their rights.

It is important to note that in nature, the type of autonomy that villages have under this law is very different from the autonomy granted to provinces, regencies and municipalities. The autonomy granted to villages is not a transfer of power from the government but rather a recognition of the nature of the villages as long-existing customary entities compared to provinces, regencies and municipalities, which are a mere administrative division of the country's territory. The idea behind such recognition is the preservation of diversity and human rights and dignity, genuine autonomy, community participation, and community empowerment.

However, it must always be remembered that there are no rights without obligations, no authority without responsibility and no freedom without limits. Therefore, village autonomy must be implemented according to the constitution and inseparably with the values of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. In other words, village autonomy must be carried out in a way that preserves the unity and diversity of the nation. That is why, since the enactment of Law No. 6/2014, villages are required to be more creative to optimize their potential in managing their natural resources independently to improve the welfare of community members. The fundamental change in Law No 6/2014 is related to the status of the village which has shifted from being limited to implementing assistance tasks to being an independent institution that has the authority to manage government at the lowest level (Enrico Simanjuntak, 2016, p. 645). This, however, does not mean that villages are kept out of the government's financial assistance. As argued above, rights delegated to the village include community empowerment and village development through various economic activities including tourism. This is what led to the establishment of the Tourism Village project in collaboration with the provincial government. The principle of a tourism village is to integrate tourist attractions (destinations) with accommodations, facilities, and arrangements that are in harmony with community life. This also includes establishing good communication between all the institutions and parties involved in the project i.e., the village government, provincial government, investors, and village community members.

TOURISM VILLAGE CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Tourism is both a cultural and economic activity that directly affects and engages community members. It significantly impacts the lives and the environment of the people where the activity is conducted as it creates employment and exposes the area to the rest of the world. It is undeniable that tourism creates economic growth and improves the living standard of the people (Yoeti, 2008). For a long time, regions in Indonesia have relied on a type of tourism that focuses on selling local handicraft items/souvenirs to tourists instead of championing an eco-friendly tourism that promotes the local wisdom, cultures and more importantly the natural beauty of the region/village. One tourism concept that embraces such approach is the tourism village. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics 2019 data, there are approximately 83,931 villages located in valleys and other

wonderful and pristine ancient locations throughout Indonesia. This constitutes a huge potential to explore for tourism purposes. The bureau also reports that as of the year 2018, 1,734 tourism villages were already operational. Of the many tourism villages, only a few have succeeded in becoming popular in Indonesia. These include *Pujon Kidul Village* in Malang, *Taman Sari Village* in Banyuwangi, *Madobak Village* on Mentawai island, *Waturaka Village* in Ende, and many more.

According to Putra et.al., (2010), the development of a tourism village aims to involve the community in the management of tourist attractions to improve their living standard. It is also intended to prevent the community and its culture from being just mere touristic objects. It allows village community members to have a say in the management of their touristic assets such as culture, traditional clothes and typical foods, crafts, agricultural and social systems, pristine and well-preserved sites, etc. The existence of the original character of a healthy socio-cultural sight and life enjoyed by tourists is what differentiates village tourism from the tourism village concept. Village tourism is only touring villages or rural areas for sightseeing without actually staying. The problem of staying in this village is what makes the difference between village tourism and tourism village. Staying in a village is an important aspect, because the length of stay is a reference in measuring the success of a tourist attraction.

The development of a tourism village as a village development strategy has very wide economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits. Economically, it can increase the national, regional and local economy economies as it creates many jobs and increases sales, on the social level, it increases the contact between the local population and the visitors. This allows for more exchange of knowledge and skills as tourists share their experience with local communities while learning from theirs as well. Tourism village may be a good means of education for the locals in remote areas as they spend more time with tourists. It could help them speak better English, for example. From a socio-cultural viewpoint, tourism village can help preserve the culture as it becomes one of the main centers of attraction. Finally, from an environmental perspective, tourism village creates an eco-friendly tourism as it raises awareness of the protection of the environment in tourism not just for humans but also for animals. However, as pointed out earlier, for a successful and sustainable tourism village, basic tourism facilities such as accommodations (homestays), restaurants, and to some extent, shops must be built within villages or sites to make them more attractive and enjoyable to tourists. There must also be transportation, telecommunications, and health facilities.

In planning a tourism village, the first thing to consider is whether the location is compatible with the characteristics of a tourism village. This requires that the local community be actively involved throughout the process. The principle of self-sufficiency places the community as the main actor in the success of the project. The development of a tourism village is part of regional and national tourism development is just, fair, economic and eco-friendly. This shows that sustainable tourism development is not only related to environmental issues, but also democracy, human rights and the rule of law as it deals with sustainable and responsible use of natural resources, accommodating community goals and aspirations. Various approaches in the development of a tourism village can be realized through the existence of good governance which involves active and balanced participation of the government, private sector and community. To support the development of a sustainable tourism village oriented towards improving community welfare, local governments need to prepare and strengthen the institutional capacity of village communities. This can be achieved by increasing community self-reliance organizations and community groups. The government needs to encourage and promote village partnerships with third parties such as universities for research and scientific assistance.

TOURISM POTENTIALS AND TOURISM VILLAGE POLICIES IN BENGKULU PROVINCE

The current government of Bengkulu Province has labeled and mapped tourism village as a potential economy booster of the region. This is in line with the 2020–2024 Strategic Plan Module published by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, which emphasizes the need to support and improve tourism village. Bengkulu Province, known as the Land of Rafflesia (*Bumi Rafflesia*), has a pristine and beautiful nature, landscape, history, culture and local wisdom that can be developed and turned into a wonderful tourist attraction (Pemerintah Provinsi Bengkulu, 2019, p. 4). This can be seen from the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan for Bengkulu Province and 10 Regencies/Cities. The plan was backed by the enactment of Bengkulu Provincial Regulation No. 8/2019 on the Bengkulu Province Tourism Development Master Plan for 2019–2024.

Bengkulu has enormous and promising tourism potential made of land, coastal and marine areas. Moreover, the province also consists of rich and diverse cultural, historical, and culinary delights that can be turned into wonderful tourist attractions, not to mention the region's pristine ancient sites such as *Kaba Hill* in Curup, *Semaleko Sulfur Hill* in South Lebong, *Rafflesia Arnoldi Flower* in Taba Pananjung. Added to this list of wonders is the province's unspoiled beach recreation that includes *Panjang Nala* beach in Gading Cempaka, the white sand beach of *Baai Island* in Selebar, the lake in Selebar, *Tes* lake in South Lebong, *Pagar Gunung* nature reserve in Kepahyang, *Lubuk Tapi* nature reserve in Pino, and so on. As far as cultural tourism is concerned, the Province of Bengkulu has a lot to offer including *Tabot* art (**Figure 1**), *Enggano* folk dance (**Figure 2**), and *Besurek* cloth crafts (**Picture 3**). Historical tourism, on the other hand, consists of places such as President Soekarno's Exile House (**Picture 4**), *Malborough Fort* (**Picture 5**), *Thomas Par* monument in Segara Bay (**Picture 6**), *Jami'* Mosque (**Picture 7**), and *Rumah Ibu Fatimawati* (house of Indonesia post-independence First Lady (**Picture 8**)) (Pemerintah Provinsi Bengkulu, 2015, p. 38).

Sadly however, the contribution of the exploitation of these wonders to the economy of Bengkulu Province is still low compared to the touristic potential it has. The number of both foreign and domestic tourists visiting Bengkulu remains very low. In fact, it is recorded that in the year 2019, on average, only 19 foreign tourists visited the whole province a day, while domestic tourists were estimated to be 175 a day. As argued earlier, the economic success of a tourism village mainly depends on the length of stay of the tourists. Foreign tourists stay on average only 1.69 days, while the national average is 2.93 days. Likewise, domestic guests stayed 1.83 days, much lower than the national average (2.10 days) (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah Provinsi Bengkulu, 2016, p. 13). This indicates that, so far, Bengkulu Province's tourism relies on the beauty of its nature, culture and local wisdom, which sometimes, leaves many problems in terms of tourism management. This has led to the assumption that even though tourism contributes to the economic growth, it causes the destruction of the environment, a shift in local culture and socio-economic disparities (Kusudianto Hadinoto, 1996, p. 112). This is why the Indonesian Government has adopted policies and regulations to shift from conventional tourism to eco-friendly tourism. One way to do so is the establishment of the tourism village, which has been embraced by the Regional Government of Bengkulu through various regulations and policies. The idea behind the tourism village is tourism should not only be about enjoying natural beauties and full tourist facilities but also the direct interaction of tourists with the environment and local communities (Faris Zakaria & Rima Dewi Suprihardjo, 2014).



Figure 1 Tabot Art and Festival.

Source: Bengkulu Office of Cultural and Tourism Affairs. <https://pariwisata.bengkuluprov.go.id/>.



Figure 2 Enggano Folk Dance.

Enggano soldiers in traditional war clothes and Ekajo spears from Bengkulu in the early 17th Century (Source: Bengkulu Office of Tourism). <https://pariwisataa.bengkuluprov.go.id/>.



Figure 3 Besurek cloth Craft.

Batik Besurek is Bengkulu batik, a combination of Arabic calligraphy motif and Rafflesia flower, which is the distinctive symbol of Bengkulu Province. *Batik Besurek* was introduced by Arab traders and workers from India in the 17th century to the people in Bengkulu (Source: Bengkulu Cooperative Office for the development of Besurek Batik craftsmen). (Source: Bengkulu Office of Cultural and Tourism Affairs). <https://pariwisataa.bengkuluprov.go.id/>.



Figure 4 President Soekarno's Exile House.

Bung Karno's exile house was first built in 1918 and owned by a Chinese who supplied staple goods for the Dutch East Indies colonial government in Bengkulu. In 1938 however, this house was turned into the exile house of Soekarno as a political prisoner at that time. Several history worthy items can be found in this building such as President Soekarno's old bicycle, paintings, love letters to his wife, and book collections (Source: Bengkulu Office of Cultural and Tourism Affairs). <https://pariwisataa.bengkuluprov.go.id/>.



Figure 5 Malborough Fort.

Fort Marlborough was built by the British *East India Company* (EIC) between 1713–1719 under the leadership of Joseph Collett. Bengkulu fell under the rule of the British *East India Company* in the 17th century. The company built this fort and began to rule the Bengkulu region (Source: Bengkulu Office of Cultural and Tourism Affairs). <https://pariwisata.bengkuluprov.go.id/>.



Figure 6 Thomas Parr monument in Segara Bay.

Thomas Parr Monument was built in memory of Thomas Parr, a British Resident of Bengkulu who was killed in 1807. Built a year after his death, the building is considered a cultural heritage. In 1805, Thomas Parr was appointed Resident of Bengkulu. The monument is also known locally as “Kuburan Bulek” (Grave of the White). (Source: Bengkulu Office of Cultural and Tourism Affairs). <https://pariwisata.bengkuluprov.go.id/>.



Figure 7 Jami' Mosque.

The Jami' mosque, built in 1930, is a gift and a memento of President Soekarno. One of the unique things about this mosque is the combination of Chinese and Javanese culture as a sign of intercultural collaboration in building the mosque (Source: Bengkulu Office of Cultural and Tourism Affairs). <https://pariwisata.bengkuluprov.go.id/>.



Figure 8 Rumah Ibu Fatimawati.

This is the house of Indonesia's First Lady (Wife of President Sukarno). It was built in 1920 under the British occupation of Bengkulu. The house has ever since become a major tourist attraction not only for Bengkulu but also for Indonesia because Fatmawati was the one who sewn what is now the Indonesia flag known as the Indonesian flag or '*Bendera Pusaka Sang Saka Merah Putih*' which was flown for the first time at the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence in Jakarta on 17 August 1945 (Source: Bengkulu Office of Cultural and Tourism Affairs). <https://pariwisata.bengkuluprov.go.id/>.

TOURISM VILLAGE: AN ECOLOGICAL WEALTH

Tourism village is an eco-friendly tourist destination with a unique rural concept that can increase the economic independence of the village communities as they are directly involved. Turning this into reality would require the active participation of everyone. Ecological wealth is understood as the value of biodiversity or environmental resources used for economic purposes. According to the Directorate General of Government, tourist attraction is divided into three types, one of which is Natural Tourism Attraction, which includes natural resources used to attract visitors. The potential for natural tourism can be divided into 4 areas, namely: (1) flora and fauna, (2) uniqueness and peculiarities of ecosystems, for example coastal and mangrove forest ecosystems, (3) natural phenomena, such as craters, hot springs, waterfalls and lakes and (4) Agricultural tourism including rice fields, plantations, animal husbandry, fisheries business. According to Bagyono, ecological wealth is a tourism potential that includes sea, beaches, mountains, lakes, fauna, flora, protected areas, nature reserves, etc.

Bengkulu Province, which stretches along the West Coast of Sumatra, has a coastline of \pm 525 km, and is directly adjacent to the Indian Ocean in the west. The province consists of hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, swamps, lakes, beaches, lagoons / estuaries and oceans. In particular the marine waters of Bengkulu Province, there are also several small islands that include Enggano Island, Dua Island, Merbau Island, Bangkai Island, Satu Island, Karang Island, Tikus Island and Mega Island. The land area of Bengkulu Province is covered by tropical forests and rainforests with all kinds of flora and fauna, while the coastal and marine areas have forest and mangrove forests, seagrass and coral reef ecosystems with all kinds of biota.

As a region with a tropical climate, Bengkulu Province has considerable ecological wealth that provides various tourism potentials to be managed to improve community welfare. In 1988, the Directorate General of Tourism published a book containing a directory of tourism objects in 27 provinces throughout Indonesia. Despite its enormous touristic potential, this book, published as the "Guidelines for Domestic Tourism Travel" recorded only 22 touristic attractions in Bengkulu. These include 1) Long Beach, 2) Dendam Tak Sudah Lake, 3) Gedang Lake, 4) White Sand Beach, 5) Jakat Beach, 6) Sentot Alibasa Cemetery, 7) Chinese Village, 8) Fort Marlborough, 9) Parr Monument and Hamilton Monument, 10) Kites Nest Cave in Kedurang, 11) Muara Beach, 12) Mount Nanu'ua, 13) Muara Kedurang Beach, Padang Guci Beringin Bay and Linau Beach, 14) East Kaur, 15) Hot Spring Water, 16) Golden Lake, 17) Kaba Hill, 18) Bukit Daun Tourism Forest, 19) Curup Head Waterfall, 20) Tes Lake, 21) Gedang Seblat Hill, and 22) Semidang Bukit Kabu. However, with the advent of regional autonomy, Bengkulu's tourism sector has undergone a significant improvement and can now be labeled as an ideal place for a tourism village for reasons enumerated above.

TOURISM VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT POLICY: DIFFICULTIES IN THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY AND THE BENGKULU LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The results of the research conducted in several areas in Bengkulu Province reveal that two locations qualify as the ideal tourist destination and therefore have the potential of becoming

successful tourism villages. These locations include North Bengkulu Regency and Lebong Regency for their unspoiled and unexploited natural beauty, unique culture and local wisdom. In fact, there are at least 5 villages in North Bengkulu Regency that are suitable for implementing this concept. These include Curup Hamlet, Tanah Hitam Village, Kemumu Village, Tebing Kandang Village, and Batu Layang Village. While in Lebong Regency at least 4 villages qualify for the concept. These include Rimbo Pengadang Village with Telaga Putri Tujuh Colors, Talang Ratu Village with its Lebong Rafting Tour challenges, Air Putih Village with its white water tourist destinations, and Lake Tesnya. It is important to note that the idea to turn villages into tourist villages was initiated by the National Program for Community Empowerment or *Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat* (PNPM) in 2005 with the promulgation of Law No. 6/2014 on Villages.

According to the Head of the Tourism Development Division of the Tourism, Youth and Sports Office of Lebong Regency, the development of a tourism village is one of the development strategies implemented to increase local revenue for both the community and the local government. However, despite the awareness and the existence of regulations, the tourist village idea has not yet been able to meet expectations for lack of community awareness and participation. Instead of becoming an actual tourist village, the concept has remained trapped behind the idea of village tourism. This situation was admitted by the Head of the Regional Development Planning Agency of Lebong Regency himself, who argues that Lebong Regency has no villages that really meet the standard criteria for the tourism village concept. Departing from this fact, to restore the essence of tourism villages and to direct the development of tourism villages correctly and effectively, the local government needs to evaluate the determination of tourism village status based on certain criteria established through regional regulations. For villages that submit proposals for designation as tourism villages, the local government needs to make sure that interested villages fully understand the concept and that certain operational standards are met prior to allocating funds.

Active community support is the key to the success of a tourist village, as they act as the host and actors in the program. They provide security, comfort, peace, tranquility, and the cleanliness of the environment. The lack of public awareness of tourism village has also been reported in Lebong Regency. The role of the community in preserving the uniqueness of socio-cultural life is also not optimal. The style and way of life of rural communities today are no different from urban communities that tend to be pragmatic and individualistic, so that they no longer describe the unique social life typical of the village as in the past. In some villages, homestays have been developed. However, the existing homestay concept is not integrated with the real life of the family in the existing village. The existing homestay is more of a cottage separated from the daily activities of the owner's family members who should be a part of the attraction in the concept itself.

The development of the tourism village concept is based on a participatory approach where the community is actively involved in the planning and supervision through community institutions. This demands the readiness and ability of the village community to organize themselves. This capacity needs improvement because the management has been mostly handled by a few groups of village leaders, or certain groups of thugs, as pointed out by the Head of the Lebong Regency Tourism Office.

CONCLUSION

The post enactment of Law No. 6/2014 on Village governance provides opportunities as well as relatively large challenges for both the local government and villages. Under this law the authority of villages over the management of their natural resources has shifted from passive to active agents of development through various socio-economic programs including tourism. Based on the decentralization law, regions are granted the authority to manage their natural resources as they see fit. Although this seems to benefit regions, it put them under pressure as they are required by the government to come up with innovative, sustainable and eco-friendly ideas to make incomes from the management of their natural resources to improve the living standard of their population. One way to achieve this goal is through the establishment and development of a community-based tourist concept known as the tourist village that operates on a collaborative principle in the management of not the villages' touristic sites and objects but also their history, culture and local wisdoms for touristic purposes.

The idea behind the tourism village is that tourism should not only be about enjoying the beauty of nature and tourist facilities but also the direct interaction of tourists with the environment and local communities. It is also intended for the use of natural resources responsibly in empowering rural communities to generate their own sources of income. Tourism village is a government idea backed by Law No. 6/2014 on Villages that provides guidance for the sustainability of community welfare at the village level for community empowerment purpose. However, as the concept gains momentum, provinces have started to enact policies and regulations for a better and productive management.

One province deemed suitable for the tourism village concept is Bengkulu Province for its unique yet beautiful culture and local wisdom, and for its wonderful yet pristine nature that makes it the ideal tourist destination on the Sumatra Island. Sadly, however, the management of tourism village in the Province of Bengkulu has not been able to match its enormous potential. In other words, tourism village has not yet been able to improve the economy of Bengkulu despite its immense touristic potential. This shortcoming lies in several issues including lack of regional policies and regulations that prioritize community participation, poor organization and management of the program in some locations, bad governance and the control of the program by thugs, hence eroding the possibility for accountability.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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