



Toward Just Participation: Dynamics of Empowerment Communication in Tourism-Village Development

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism development requires community participation as local involvement contributes to community welfare as is the case in Sambirejo Village Tebing Breksi (Breksi Cliff) tourism. The study aims to: 1) explore and interpret the dynamics of empowerment communication in the development of the Sambirejo tourism village seen from the aspects of participation, utilization of community potential, and empowerment communication efforts that have been carried out; 2) the dynamics of empowerment communication from the perspective of sustainable tourism. This research employs a descriptive qualitative research design, with data collected through observation, interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentation. Informants were selected purposely, consisting of Village Heads, Village Secretaries, BUMDes (Village Owned Enterprises) managers, tourism actors, and community members. The results indicate that community participation in Sambirejo Village is quite high, but this involvement is not fair and equitable. Further efforts are needed to encourage broader and more inclusive participation Community Empowerment is carried out based on the principles of community-based tourism namely empowerment in economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental aspects.

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INTRODUCTION

Empowerment communication plays a significant role in all aspects of development, including tourism. It is a participatory, dialogical, and humanistic process that provides a space for communities to express their needs and involves them in all dimensions of development (Sulaiman & Ahmadi, 2020; Setyowati, 2019).

Tourism development is one of the government's key strategies to improve community welfare. The tourism industry can make a sizable and significant contribution by creating employment and business opportunities, so that it can alleviate poverty, especially in developing countries (Nurhayati, 2018; Novandi & Adi, 2021).

Similar trends have been observed in other countries. In China, for instance, a study conducted from 1999 to 2014 found that tourism contributed to poverty reduction (Zhao & Xin Xia, 2019). Likewise, in Thailand, research on the impact of tourism on poverty alleviation from 2009-2018 shows that tourism has had an impact on reducing poverty and inequality in society, although on the other hand, it harms the environment (Boonyasana & Chinnakum, 2021).

Tourism is a sector capable of improving community welfare. During the pandemic, tourist visits declined, but since 2022, tourism has rebounded. This

is evidenced by the increase in tourism foreign-exchange earnings, which rose from US\$0.49 billion to US\$4.26 billion, representing a 769.39% increase (Widi, 2022). For this reason, the government is currently encouraging tourism to increase, including village tourism. Sambirejo Village is a village that has many tourist attractions in each of its hamlets, although not all of its tourism potential has been optimized to attract tourists. Sambirejo Village consists of 8 hamlets, with several tourist attractions namely Taman Tebing Breksi, Watu Tapak, Watu Langit, Candi Ijo, and Candi Barong. However, not all of these sites have been fully developed; therefore, the village is working to create tourism that benefits not just one hamlet but all eight. The target is for the Sambirejo Village to develop its territory into a tourism village. Tourism villages encourage tourism development by paying attention to village culture and local wisdom, which is expected to drive the village economy towards sustainable tourism development.

Tourist villages are considered to encourage tourism development by emphasizing the village's culture and local wisdom, which is expected to drive the village economy towards sustainable tourism development. Sustainable tourism integrates economic, social, and environmental aspects to provide long-term benefits for communities. The



principles of sustainable tourism, in accordance with the WTO (World Tourism Organization), include: 1) utilizing the environment by maintaining local ecology and preserving nature; 2) respecting socio-cultural authenticity; and 3) long-term economic activities to reduce (UNWTO, 2004) (Prasetyo, 2020).

Efforts to achieve sustainable tourism development must be supported by all stakeholders, including village governments, communities, the private sector or investors, NGOs, relevant agencies, and district and provincial governments. Tourism itself is regarded as a dynamic activity that involves numerous stakeholders, revitalizes various business sectors, increases income, and serves as a symbolic icon for a region (Kurniawan & Setiyaningsih, 2023).

To achieve sustainable tourism development, tourism villages must encourage tourism development by taking into account local culture and wisdom, which is expected to drive the village economy toward sustainable tourism development.

Empowerment communication supports sustainable tourism development by necessitating community participation, as the involvement of local residents directly contributes to the well-being of the community (Widiati & Permatasari, 2022). As a form of participatory communication, empowerment communication emerged as a critique of linear, top-down development

communication models that function merely as one-way information dissemination. Aligning with Servaes (2019), this approach emphasizes dialogue, reciprocity, and bottom-up engagement. This is development communication, which emphasizes the importance of community participation and empowerment (Hinthorne & Schneider, 2012; Servaes & Lie, 2015; Yudarwati & Gregory, 2022) Thus, the community is positioned as an active subject rather than a passive object in rural tourism governance. Within the development of tourism villages, empowerment communication is manifested through dialogic interaction, inclusive decision-making, and community-initiated communication networks that strengthen social capital. Empowerment is interpreted not merely as physical involvement but as a multidimensional process. Consistent with the conceptual framework of Boley and McGehee (2014), empowerment communication enhances both the social and political empowerment of local communities. Beyond fostering pride in local culture and identity, it builds robust local networks that serve as essential social capital.

Therefore, implementing sustainable tourism requires the participation of all stakeholders and strong leadership to ensure that development aligns with shared commitments and is consistently monitored for sustainability (UNWTO, 2004; Budeanu et al., 2016). In addition to sustainable tourism, tourism



development must be based on inclusivity, namely the involvement and collaboration of all parties (Mia Fairuza, 2017; Indratno et al., 2022). Previous studies on empowerment communication, especially for CSR programmes in rural areas, have used qualitative approaches to design community-empowerment initiatives. The findings indicate that empowerment communication is participatory communication, and community empowerment is realized through the support of various stakeholders that is established via harmonious dialogic communication (Sugito et al., 2022).

Another study on empowerment communication models in addressing violence against children and women, using a qualitative approach, shows that the model for enhancing women's communicative empowerment in tackling violence against children and women is achieved through the commitment of multiple parties and the courage of women to convey their experiences to external actors (Setyowati & Sulistyowati, 2023).

The key difference between those studies and the present research lies in scope. Both previous studies concentrate on empowerment communication within specific programs, namely CSR initiatives and the protection of women and children, although both are situated in rural contexts. In contrast, the present study focuses on the development of a tourism village, a context that is considerably more complex, involving elements such

as UMKM, cultural conservation, environmental sustainability, village governance, and community interaction grounded in sustainable development principles.

The earlier studies primarily examine empowerment communication as a process for building trust and securing support among various stakeholders to achieve empowerment objectives. Meanwhile, this study places greater emphasis on communication as a driving mechanism for village transformation toward sustainable tourism development. Here, communication is not merely a conduit connecting actors but a system that shapes the flow of knowledge, negotiation processes, decision-making, and the formation of community critical consciousness for sustainable tourism.

The next study was conducted by Permatasari (2022) regarding "Community-Based Tourism Development Model in Realizing Sustainable Tourism in Bali." This research is an empirical legal study that concluded that the community-based tourism development model emphasizes the role or active participation of the community in developing tourism. One of the goals of this community-based tourism is to realize sustainable tourism development. Local communities, the government, regional governments, and tourism entrepreneurs have a very important role in realizing sustainable tourism (Permatasari, 2022). The main focus is on analyzing the roles of actors: the community, government, regional



governments, and business actors within the framework of tourism regulation and governance. Meanwhile, the focus of this research places empowerment communication as meaning not only looking at what actors do, but also how communication, dialogue processes, negotiations, and participation in building empowerment for the development of tourism

The review of the three studies indicates that research on tourism village development from a sustainable tourism perspective, with a specific focus on the dynamics of empowerment communication, remains relatively limited. Empowerment communication constitutes a critical analytical lens for realizing tourism villages within a sustainable tourism framework, as it positions local communities not as passive objects of development, but as active agents who participate, engage in dialogue, and communicate in an egalitarian and inclusive manner. This study offers a novel contribution by explicitly linking empowerment communication to the conceptual framework of sustainable tourism, a connection that has not been addressed in the previous studies reviewed. Sustainable tourism inherently requires a balance between community empowerment and the preservation of local resources; therefore, participatory and community-based empowerment communication becomes essential. The urgency of this research lies in the need to identify and understand the dynamics of community communication within

tourism village settings, so that the goals of both community and village empowerment can be effectively achieved. Community empowerment forms an integral component of sustainable tourism development principles. In this study, the dynamics of empowerment communication are examined through two key dimensions, namely community participation and community empowerment.

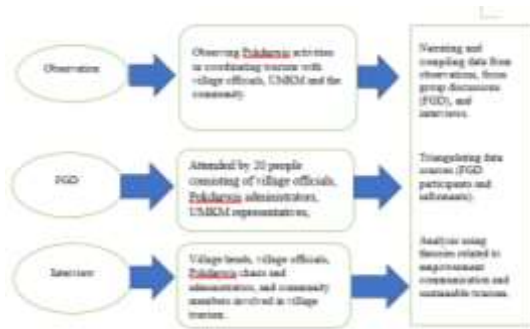
METHODOLOGY

This research is a descriptive qualitative study. Qualitative research aims to explain phenomena through in-depth data collection (Kriyantoro, 2014). The present study seeks to identify the dynamics of empowerment communication in tourism village development from a sustainable tourism perspective. *Its purpose is to accurately describe the characteristics of, and relationships among, social phenomena linked to those dynamics, with particular emphasis on specific aspects.* The data in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data consist of places and events related to the dynamics of empowerment communication in tourism-village development from a sustainable-tourism perspective in Sambirejo Village, Prambanan, Sleman. Data were gathered through observation and interviews (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021). The field-work steps were: (1) prepare interview, observation, and focus-group-discussion (FGD) guides; (2) conduct systematic observations; (3) hold FGDs followed by in-depth



interviews with selected informants; (4) perform informant and methodological triangulation. The research stages in the field can be described as follows:

Figure1: Research FloDiagram



Source: processed by researchers

Observations served to identify issues emerging in empowerment-communication dynamics for tourism-village development in Sambirejo. Interviews and FGDs were conducted with informants who possessed relevant information. Respondents were selected purposively: the village head, Pokdarwis managers, MSME actors and community members. After data collection, data reduction, presentation, and analysis were carried out based on theories and concepts related to the dynamics of empowerment communication, tourism villages, and sustainable tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Dynamics of empowerment communication.

Dynamics is often interpreted as something that is constantly moving, developing, and adapting, so when it is related to the context of communication,

the dynamics of communication is a communication effort that is dynamic, moving, developing and always adapting to the circumstances or context of the communication itself (Susanta et al., 2020) (Nuzuli & Ivan Sunata, 2022). Similarly, the dynamics of communication refer to continuous communication activities that bring about changes in the order of people's lives. This process occurs when individuals use symbols to create and interpret meaning in their environment (Sumarjo & Atwar Bajari, 2017).

The dynamics of empowerment communication in tourism-village development can be understood as a communication process aimed at empowering village communities, one of which is by prioritising local wisdom. A tourism-communication model based on local wisdom conveys information that offers a region-specific atmosphere and is grounded in science and technology for tourism renewal (Andri & Dunan, 2023).

Community empowerment is a non-instantaneous, sustainable process that requires good communication between program initiators and the community, as well as among community members themselves (Setyowati, 2019). The concept originates from community empowerment communication which is a study of communication in development activities with an emphasis on the importance of community involvement or community participation, so that communication

processes in community empowerment are not linear, but focus on transactional and interactive communication processes.

Empowerment communication talks about development messages for the community whose messages are conveyed through a community empowerment approach (Indardi, 2016). In empowerment communication, it is vital that the community as recipients of empowerment messages perceives the communicator not as an outsider, but as part of the community itself. So there are two important aspects, namely community participation and empowerment. Therefore, the dynamics of empowerment communication in tourism-village development can be viewed from two aspects: (1) community participation and (2) community empowerment.

Participation Aspect

One important aspect of the communication dynamics of tourism village development is community participation. Communities play a significant role in decision-making, particularly regarding the direction of tourism. They can even participate fully and provide input into the tourism planning process. Local community participation in the planning process enables them to identify various tourism impacts and then formulate strategies aimed at minimizing the negative impacts caused by tourism (Adikampa, 2017) (Permatasari, 2022). Community participation involves the community in

developing tourism villages, starting with identifying problems, identifying potential and needs, and providing proposals for decision-making as alternative solutions (Wahyuni & Manaf, 2016); (Wibowo & Belia, 2023). The typology of community participation in tourism is divided into three types: spontaneous participation, coercive participation, and induced participation (Tosun, 1999) (Agow et al., 2017).

Community participation in sustainable tourism development was initiated by the Pokdarwis (Tourism Awareness Group), established in 2015 under the name Tlatar Seneng. Pokdarwis aims to increase community awareness of the importance of the seven charms in managing tourism in Sambirejo village. Its activities include: (1) promoting a safe and orderly environment; (2) maintaining a clean and beautiful environment; (3) fostering a friendly attitude; and (4) providing memorable souvenirs such as batik, stone carvings, or culinary delights. The management of tourist attractions is managed by the Pokdarwis (Tourism Awareness Group), which consists of both male and female residents of the village. As stated by the Pokdarwis secretary:

"Women's involvement in the tourism sector in Sambirejo Village has been facilitated, but it has not yet become widespread. Women's involvement in Pokdarwis management does exist, but not all female



administrators are active in policy-making; decision-making is still dominated by men."

This indicates that women's involvement in decision-making is still limited. Male dominance within the Pokdarwis structure indicates unequal communication practices. Yet women's participation in organizational decision-making is a crucial dimension of empowerment. Thus, participation—understood as comprehensive community involvement that includes both women and men—is not yet optimal. This factor arises from cultural influences, where women are frequently positioned within the private or domestic sphere and perceived as second-class citizens. Conversely, men occupy the public sphere as first-class citizens, a dichotomy that gives rise to gender inequality (Yanti Dwi Astuti, 2016).

Schyvens (2000) identifies four dimensions that influence women's involvement in tourism: economic, social, psychological, and political empowerment. These four dimensions are interconnected and multidimensional and must be considered in sustainable tourism management. Therefore, women's participation is not limited to the economic sector; more importantly, women are involved in decision-making, according to the following concept:

Female empowerment in tourism, therefore, involves women making decisions and acting on them by exercising creativity (power to), acquiring new capital, skills, and creating one's personal space (Annes &

Wright, 2015) (Movono & Dahles, 2017).

In contrast, women's participation in culinary and craft MSMEs is quite high. As stated by a Pokdarwis administrator:

"The majority of MSMEs in the culinary sector are run by women, and they are quite active in promoting their businesses

It can be said that women's participation is quite strong in the economic sector, especially through the growth of culinary and craft UMKM. Women's participation in the UMKM sector is part of their involvement in sharing responsibility for fulfilling family welfare. This aligns with the concept that women's participation in micro-economic activities in tourist destinations is often used to meet household economic needs; therefore, such activities are largely run by women (Sopar et al., 2023). Thus, participation in Sambirejo is segmented: women play a significant role in the economy, but not in planning and policy-making. Sambirejo Village aims to establish a tourist village called Dewi Sambu.

There are 14 strategies to be implemented: 1) Prepare human resources; 2) Collaborate with the Independent Campus; 3) Develop potential by transforming stone quarries into a source of income; 4) Maximizing BUMKals Sambimulyo; 5) Guidance of Community Groups from Pokdarwis to empowering the community to build homestays; 6) Development of UMKM Forkom; 7) Establishing cooperation and



partnerships with various elements, for example with the private sector; 8) Providing encouragement to business actors; 9) Mapping regional potential; 10) Preparing a tourist village master plan.

Community Development Aspect

One of the principles of tourism management is empowering local communities, *as stipulated* in Article 5 of Law No 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism. The explanation of the law, specifically in Article 5, defines local communities as those residing within the tourism destination area and prioritized for the benefits of tourism activities there (Kepariwisata, 2009).

Sustainable tourism development is essentially concerned with ensuring that the natural, social, and cultural resources utilized for tourism development can continue to be enjoyed by future generations. Sustainable tourism development can be defined as an integrated and organized effort to improve the quality of life by sustainably regulating the provision, development, utilization, and maintenance of resources (Perwirawati et al., 2022). Article 5 of Law No 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism states that one of the principles of tourism management is empowering local communities.

To enhance the potential of each hamlet, Sambirejo Village has divided the region into four areas: 1) Gunungsari and Plengkung hamlets for mass tourism; 2) Kikis and Gedang hamlets, empowering UMKM; 3) Sumberwatu

and Dayangsari hamlets for segmented tourism; and 4) Mlakan and Gunung Cilik hamlets for segmented tourism and UMKM.

Empowerment also reflects ongoing societal change, where individuals recognise their potential, have opportunities to develop it, actively participate in every community process, and are able to use public spaces to express their ideas. All of this can be seen in societal change, characterized by community independence and empowerment in daily life. Everything must be communicated effectively, so that the dynamics of communication can be seen to determine whether the communication process can be considered dynamic and constructive, leading to a more empowered and independent community. According to Garrod, there are two approaches to the application of tourism planning principles: 1) An approach that tends towards a non-formal planning system that emphasizes tourism profits alone, and 2) An approach that emphasizes community and community participation planning by prioritizing sensitivity to the surrounding environment, often referred to as community-based tourism (Garrod, 2003; Menghayati et al., 2021).

The perspective of sustainable tourism can be seen from the community-based tourism development model, which emphasizes the role or participation of the community in developing tourism. There are five aspects in community-based tourism development: social, economic, cultural,



environmental, and political aspects (Suansri, 2003). One of the goals of community-based tourism is to realize sustainable tourism development. Local communities play a crucial role in realizing sustainable tourism.

The active role of the community, which is the embodiment of the community-based tourism development model, also requires the participation of all stakeholders, namely the central government, local governments, and tourism entrepreneurs, is also essential to realizing sustainable tourism. Community-based tourism development is also a powerful solution to address all challenges in sustainable tourism development (Dhimas Setyo Nugroho, 2018). Active community involvement demonstrates community empowerment efforts. Therefore, sustainable tourism development can be considered a manifestation of empowerment communication within tourism development.

The empowerment communication implemented by Sambirejo Village encompasses various efforts to involve community participation in tourism village development. This includes encouraging community participation in building homestays, maintaining cleanliness at tourist sites, and providing excellent service to tourists. Efforts to address waste from tourist attractions include establishing integrated waste management, encouraging the community to sort waste, and implementing the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse,

and Recycle). This waste management is carried out through a Waste Bank.

Considering the various efforts to leverage village potential through empowerment communication towards sustainable tourism, Sambirejo Village aligns with the principles of community-based tourism, conceptualized as follows:

“Recognize, support and promote community ownership of tourism, involve community members from the start in every aspect, promote community pride, Improve the quality of life, Ensure environmental sustainability, preserve the unique character and culture of the local area, foster cross-cultural learning, respect cultural differences and human dignity, distribute benefits fairly among community members, and contribute a fixed percentage of income to community projects” (Suansri, 2003).

Tourism development in Sambirejo demonstrates increased community empowerment. For example, through developing each hamlet’s potential, managing homestays locally, supporting MSMEs, and training tourism human resources, these efforts aim to maximise economic benefits for the local community. However, several aspects are considered less than optimal: 1) Politically, community involvement is still limited in influencing strategic decisions; 2) Culturally, cultural preservation has not been ey driver in village tourism policies; 3)



Environmentally, waste management is ongoing but not yet integrated and comprehensive in village tourism.

The following tools can be used to identify whether tourism activities align with the principles of community-based tourism.

Figure 2: Adaptation from Community-based



Source: Suansri, 2003

From the principles outlined above, tourism development in Sambirejo Village can be identified as follows: Economic aspect: the development of MSMEs owned by residents—including culinary businesses and unique Sambirejo souvenirs such as Sambirejo Batik—has created jobs and increased income.

There are also homestays with BNSP certification and tourism-support activities such as parking services and photography. All of these activities were initiated and carried out by the residents of Sambirejo village and were able to create jobs and increase income. 2) Social aspect: although not yet optimal, women's involvement in tourism

management—especially through Pokdarwis—is evident. Sustainable-tourism socialisation is carried out in schools, and many MSMEs are led by women, encouraging their participation in the family economy and in professional tourism management. These efforts aim to improve residents' quality of life, foster pride in local tourism, promote gender equality, and strengthen professional tourism management. 3) Cultural aspect: tolerance among villagers, preserving local culture by carrying out several activities, such as *Merti Desa*, Cultural Festival, promoting Sambirejo as a multi-cultural village by developing houses of worship as tourism support facilities, increasing citizen digital literacy to support tourism promotion, developing people's attitudes towards tourism-aware society (friendliness with the 3S motto: *senyum, salam, sapa* (smile, regards, greeting). 4) Environmental aspect: tourism management in Sambirejo Village always maintains the sustainability of cultural sites and nature reserves, integrated waste management by initiating a Waste Bank even though the process is not comprehensive and is still gradual.

There is awareness among residents to protect the environment in the tourism area of Sambirejo Village, for example not to scribble on rocks on Tebing Breksi Cliff, temples and others. This shows that tourism in this area as nature-oriented tourism is really being preserved for its sustainability. 5)

Political aspect: tourism management is driven by regulations from the village and village facilitation including by seeking the Simpeldesa application as well as waste management and environmental preservation.

With the implementation of above CBT principles, it can be said that the development of a tourism village in the perspective of sustainable tourism includes many aspects. The concept is taken from the concept of sustainable development, which can be interpreted that the sustainable development of tourism villages can be carried out with the target of meeting current tourism needs, but also must encourage the availability of opportunities for future generations. Alignment with the empowerment of local communities is also very strong that can be seen from the concept of CBT. All aspects of the local community, both economic, social, cultural, environmental and political must be managed in such a way that tourism sustainability can be achieved. In this case the dynamics of empowerment communication can be seen, because in each of these aspects, communication plays an important role.

From the above description, it can be concluded that Sambirejo tourism development, from an economic perspective, has begun to grow strongly, but still requires equity. From a social perspective, inclusivity and gender equality need to be strengthened. Meanwhile, the cultural aspect is progressing well, but the environmental aspect is beginning to raise public

awareness, but remains partial. From a political perspective, village regulations are in place, but political participation among villagers is uneven. This indicates that the development of Sambirejo tourism village aligns with the concept of sustainable tourism development. However, to achieve optimal sustainability, empowerment communication must be further enhanced, leading to substantive and inclusive participation.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of empowerment communication play a central role in transforming Sambirejo Village into a sustainable tourism-based tourism village. Dialogic and participatory communication is the primary mechanism that mobilizes community involvement in tourism development, through economic, social, cultural, and environmental empowerment.

Communication serves not only as a medium for conveying information but also as a space for negotiation, critical-awareness building, and collaboration among the village government, Pokdarwis, MSMEs, and the community. Sambirejo Village is on the right track in encouraging sustainable tourism development, but it needs strengthening of participatory communication, the role of women, and expanding political deliberative space to achieve optimal sustainability. The development of Sambirejo tourism village reflects that the success of sustainable tourism is highly dependent



on the quality of empowerment communication, namely communication that allows the community not only to be involved, but to be truly empowered and equal.

CREDIT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Yuli Setyowati: Writing Conceptual Draft, Methodology, Data curation, **Fadjarini Sulistyowati:** Writing compilation, Draft Compilation, Investigation, Methodology, editing, **Habib Muhsin:** Data curation, Supervisions, Reviewing and Editing.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organizations related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

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