

Social-Religious Dimensions of Sustainable Ecotourism: A Phenomenological Study of Sharia Economic Practices in Namu Tourism Village

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Abstract. Ecotourism development is an important strategy in encouraging sustainable regional economic development. However, ecotourism management often does not fully integrate religious values and economic justice relevant to the characteristics of local communities. This study aims to analyze ecotourism development strategies using a sharia economic approach in Southeast Sulawesi through a phenomenological study in Namu Tourism Village. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies with tourism village managers, village officials, religious leaders, MSMEs, local communities, and tourists. Data analysis was conducted thematically phenomenologically with the stages of bracketing, grouping meanings, and synthesizing the essence of informants' experiences. The results show that the people of Namu Tourism Village interpret ecotourism as an economic activity based on the values of justice, sustainability, and welfare. Sharia economic principles are applied contextually through deliberation, management transparency, fair benefit sharing, and concern for environmental conservation. Sharia-based ecotourism contributes to community economic empowerment and strengthening social solidarity, despite still facing challenges such as limited human resources, infrastructure, and policy support. This study concludes that ecotourism development using a sharia-based economic approach has the potential to become a model for sustainable tourism management that is equitable and contextualized with the religious values of local communities.

1 Introduction

Developing the tourism sector, particularly ecotourism, is a crucial strategy for driving sustainable regional economic growth. Ecotourism not only emphasizes the utilization of natural resources but also emphasizes environmental conservation, local community empowerment, and the preservation of social and cultural values [1]. In Southeast Sulawesi, various tourist villages are emerging, including Namu Tourism Village, which boasts natural

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resources and local wisdom that offer the potential for development as an ecotourism destination.

However, ecotourism development in Namu Tourism Village still faces various challenges, such as limited governance, suboptimal community participation, and a lack of development models that integrate economic, environmental, and religious values sustainably. Conventional tourism management patterns have the potential to ignore the principles of economic justice, equitable distribution of benefits, and environmental sustainability.

In the context of Southeast Sulawesi's predominantly Muslim population, a sharia economic approach is relevant for ecotourism development [2]. Sharia economic principles such as justice (*al-'adl*), balance (*tawazun*), sustainability (*istidamah*), transparency, and the common good (*maslahah*) can serve as an ethical foundation for managing tourist destinations [3]. This approach is believed to encourage tourism economic practices that are oriented not only toward profit but also toward blessings, community well-being, and environmental preservation as a divine mandate.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on ecotourism and Islamic economics, most of the research remains conceptual or focuses on the financial sector and the halal industry in general, for example: research on halal tourism in Kendari City[4] and Wakatobi islands [5]. Meanwhile, several halal tourism potentials such as Bokori Island, Toronipa Beach, Labengki Island and Al-Alam Mosque have not received scientific attention as halal tourism spots. Research that examines the real-life experiences of rural tourism communities in integrating Islamic economic principles into ecotourism development practices is still very limited, particularly in Southeast Sulawesi.

Therefore, this study uses a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences, understandings, and practices of the Namu Tourism Village community in developing sharia-based ecotourism. The results are expected to formulate ecotourism development strategies that are contextual, sustainable, and aligned with sharia values, while also contributing to the development of Islamic ecotourism models at the local and national levels.

The novelty of this research lies in the following aspects: 1) The integration of ecotourism and Islamic economics in the context of a tourist village, which is not merely normative-conceptual, but based on the empirical practices of local communities; 2) The use of a phenomenological approach to uncover the subjective experiences of the community, tourism managers, and local leaders in applying Islamic economic principles to ecotourism management; 3) The focus is on Namu Tourism Village in Southeast Sulawesi, a region with limited studies on Islamic-based ecotourism development; 4) The formulation of a contextual Islamic ecotourism development strategy, appropriate to the social, cultural, and religious conditions of rural communities; 5) The contribution to the development of a sustainable Islamic ecotourism model that can be replicated in other tourist villages with similar characteristics.

2 Method

This research was conducted qualitatively using a phenomenological approach[6]. This approach was chosen to deeply understand the experiences, perceptions, and meanings constructed by the Namu Tourism Village community in developing ecotourism based on a sharia-compliant economic approach. The main focus of this research is to explore the social phenomena directly experienced by tourism actors and the local community regarding ecotourism management practices based on sharia values.

The research was conducted in Namu Tourism Village, Southeast Sulawesi, which was purposively selected due to its nature-based and culturally diverse ecotourism potential and

the community's religious characteristics. The study lasted six months, encompassing preparation, field data collection, and data analysis.

The research subjects were individuals directly involved in the management and development of ecotourism in Namu Tourism Village. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, using the following criteria: 1) Tourism village managers; 2) Village officials; 3) Religious and traditional leaders; 4) Tourism MSMEs; 5) Local communities involved in tourism activities; Tourists (as supporting informants). The number of informants was flexible and determined based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when the information obtained is repetitive and no significant new data is found.

Data collection was conducted using the following techniques: First, In-depth Interviews. Interviews were conducted semi-structured to explore the subjective experiences of informants regarding: a) Understanding of ecotourism and sharia economics; b) Tourism management practices based on sharia values; c) Forms of community participation and empowerment; d) Challenges and opportunities for developing sharia ecotourism. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Second, Participatory Observation. Researchers conducted direct observations of ecotourism activities, social interactions, economic management mechanisms, and religious practices related to tourism activities. Observations were conducted in a participatory manner to gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural context. Third, Documentation Study. Documents reviewed include: 1) Tourism village profile; 2) Village policy data; 4) Tourism activity archives; 5) Photos and activity records; 5) Simple financial documents (if available). Documentation is used to strengthen and validate data from interviews and observations.

Data analysis was conducted thematically and phenomenologically with the following stages: 1) Bracketing (Epoche). The researcher suspended personal assumptions and prior knowledge regarding ecotourism and sharia economics to fully understand the informants' experiences; 2) Data Horizontalization. All informant statements were treated equally and identified as significant; 3) Meaning Units. Significant statements were grouped into main themes, such as sharia values, environmental sustainability, economic empowerment, and tourism governance; 4) Textural Description. Descriptions of informants' experiences related to sharia-based ecotourism development; 5) Structural Description; 6) Analysis of how these experiences occurred within the social, cultural, and religious context of Namu Tourism Village; 7) Synthesis of Meaning and Essence. Drawing out the essence of the phenomenon that fully describes the sharia-based ecotourism development strategy.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Public Understanding of Sharia-Based Ecotourism

The findings show that the Namu Tourism Village community views ecotourism not merely as a tourist activity, but as an effort to preserve the natural environment and provide a halal and blessed livelihood. Sharia economic principles are understood as fair economic practices that do not harm others, and avoid elements of usury, gharar, and exploitation.

For the community, sharia ecotourism means: 1) Tourism management that does not damage the environment; 2) Transparent and honest economic transactions; 3) Equitable distribution of benefits among residents. This understanding is shaped by strong religious values and the role of religious leaders in providing moral reinforcement in tourism economic activities.

3.1.2 *The Practice of Applying Sharia Economic Principles in Ecotourism Management*

The research found that the implementation of Islamic economics in Namu Tourism Village is not yet formal, but is implemented culturally and practically, including: 1) The tourism financial management system is open and based on deliberation; 2) The distribution of tourism business profits is based on mutual agreement and the principle of justice; 3) Tourism MSME activities prioritize halal products and fair pricing; 4) Tourism management avoids excessive exploitation of nature. These practices reflect the application of the values of *al-'adl* (justice), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and *maslahah* (benefit) in ecotourism development.

3.1.3 *Empowering Local Community Economy through Sharia Ecotourism*

The research results show that ecotourism has a direct impact on improving the community's economy. Residents are involved as destination managers, tour guides, transportation service providers, homestay managers, and MSMEs.

The Sharia economic approach encourages: 1) Equal business opportunities for residents; 2) Increased family income; 3) Strengthening social solidarity and mutual cooperation; 4) The community feels that collective involvement in tourism management provides a greater sense of justice and togetherness than individualistic management.

3.1.4 *The Role of Religious Values and Local Wisdom in Ecotourism Sustainability*

Religious values and local wisdom are the main foundations for maintaining sustainable ecotourism. The community views nature as a gift from God that must be protected, so tourism activities are always balanced with environmental conservation efforts.

Concrete forms of this include: 1) Restrictions on tourism activities in certain areas; 2) Regular community service activities to clean tourist areas; 3) Customary prohibitions against environmental destruction. These values reinforce the concept of sustainable ecotourism, which aligns with Islamic economic principles.

3.1.5 *Challenges of Developing Ecotourism Based on Sharia Economics*

Despite its significant potential, the development of sharia-compliant ecotourism in Namu Tourism Village faces several challenges, including: 1) Limited human resources in tourism management; 2) The absence of formal regulations based on sharia economics; 3) Lack of promotional support and market access; 4) Limited tourism infrastructure and facilities. These challenges impact the optimization of the more systematic application of sharia-compliant economic concepts.

3.1.6 *Sharia-Based Ecotourism Development Strategy*

Based on a synthesis of the experiences and perspectives of informants, this study formulated several development strategies, namely: 1) Strengthening governance based on deliberation and Sharia justice; 2) Increasing human resource capacity through training in ecotourism management and Sharia economics; 3) Strengthening halal MSMEs as key supporters of ecotourism; 4) Environmental preservation based on religious values and local customs; 5) Collaboration with government and religious institutions to support the regulation and promotion of Sharia tourism. This strategy is considered capable of encouraging the development of ecotourism that is sustainable, equitable, and has religious value for the community.

3.1.7 The Essence of the Phenomenon of Sharia Ecotourism Development in Namu Tourism Village

The essence of the phenomenon discovered in this study is that sharia-based ecotourism in Namu Tourism Village is defined as a sustainable economic practice that combines religious values, environmental awareness, and local community empowerment. Ecotourism serves not only as an economic resource but also as a means of strengthening the community's spiritual and social values.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Sharia Ecotourism as a Social and Religious Construction of Village Communities

The research results show that ecotourism in Namu Tourism Village is understood as an economic practice imbued with religious values and social responsibility. From a phenomenological perspective, this understanding is shaped by the community's lived experiences, which combine human relationships with nature and religious beliefs. Ecotourism is not understood solely as a source of income, but as a form of devotion to upholding God's trust in the environment.

This finding aligns with the Islamic economic perspective, which positions economic activity as part of worship and a means of achieving *falah* (well-being in this world and the hereafter). Thus, the development of Islamic ecotourism in Namu Tourism Village demonstrates how religious values can function as social capital in promoting sustainable development[7].

3.2.2 Implementation of Sharia Economic Principles in Ecotourism Governance

The discussion of the research findings shows that Islamic economic principles are implemented contextually through the practice of deliberation, transparency, and fairness in tourism management. Although not yet institutionalized in formal regulations, these practices have established a participatory and inclusive governance system.

In the study of value-based governance theory, this practice demonstrates that management success is determined not only by structural aspects but also by the internalization of values within the community. This reinforces previous research findings that a community-based approach and local values can create more sustainable tourism governance[8].

3.2.3 Sharia Ecotourism and Local Community Economic Empowerment

The following discussion confirms that the development of sharia-based ecotourism has a significant impact on the economic empowerment of the Namu Tourism Village community. Community involvement in various tourism activities creates job opportunities and increases family income more equitably.

The sharia economic approach encourages the equitable distribution of benefits and avoids exploitative economic practices. This aligns with the goals of Islamic economics, which emphasize equitable prosperity and strengthening social solidarity. Thus, sharia ecotourism serves as an instrument for inclusive economic development based on religious values[9].

3.2.4 Integration of Religious Values, Local Wisdom, and Sustainability Principles

The research results show that the sustainability of ecotourism in Namu Tourism Village is largely determined by the integration of religious values and local wisdom. Customary norms and religious teachings serve as effective instruments of social control in maintaining environmental sustainability.

From the perspective of sustainable development theory, these findings demonstrate that an approach based on local and religious values can strengthen the social and ecological dimensions of development. This integration is a strategic advantage in developing ecotourism based on sharia economics, as it balances economic, environmental, and spiritual interests[10].

4 Conclusion

This study concludes that the ecotourism development strategy in Namu Tourism Village, Southeast Sulawesi, is built on the integration of natural resources, community participation, and the internalization of Sharia economic values. Through a phenomenological approach, it was found that the community interprets ecotourism not merely as a tourism activity, but as a sustainable economic practice that embodies the values of justice, trustworthiness, and welfare. The Sharia economic approach is implemented contextually through deliberation-based governance, transparent management, equitable benefit sharing, and concern for environmental preservation. Religious values and local wisdom play a vital role in maintaining the sustainability of ecotourism and strengthening community social solidarity. The strategy for developing ecotourism based on sharia economics has been proven to encourage economic empowerment of local communities through active community involvement in destination management and the development of halal MSMEs. However, this study also identified various challenges, such as limited human resources and supporting infrastructure, and the lack of optimal policy support specifically regulating the development of sharia ecotourism. Therefore, this study recommends strengthening tourism village institutions, increasing human resource capacity, and multi-stakeholder collaboration between the government, community, and religious institutions to realize sustainable, equitable, and replicable sharia-based ecotourism development in other tourism villages in Southeast Sulawesi.

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