



SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL SYNERGY IN COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF FATUMNASI AND EON BESI VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the synergy between social and ecological aspects in managing community-based tourism in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi Village, South Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. Although both destinations have significant potential through natural attractions such as the Ampupu Forest, natural bonsai, and savanna landscapes, along with traditional cultural practices, challenges remain in the distribution of economic benefits, community involvement, and limited digital marketing. This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method involving in-depth interviews, observations, documentation, and focus group discussions (FGD) with various informants, including tourism managers, residents, village government officials, and travel agents. The findings reveal that economic benefits from tourism have not been evenly distributed, and community participation remains limited. Additionally, destination marketing primarily relies on informal promotions, and cross-sector collaboration has not yet been optimized. However, environmental conservation efforts have started to be implemented through activities in protected natural areas. The contribution of this research lies in its recommendations to strengthen community involvement, develop digital marketing strategies, and enhance cooperation between communities, government, and the private sector to achieve sustainable tourism. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for the development of community-based tourism in other rural areas across Indonesia.

Keywords: a) Community Based Tourism, b) Social and Ecological Synergy, c) Digital Marketing, d) Cross-Sector Collaboration, e) Sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as a framework for tourism development emphasizes the role of local communities as critical actors in planning, managing, and evaluating tourism destinations (Strydom et al., 2019). CBT initiatives are community-driven efforts that aim to enhance local welfare while preserving the environment and cultural heritage. This approach goes beyond economic benefits, fostering social cohesion, maintaining cultural identity, and actively engaging communities (Zielinski, Kim, et al., 2020). Thus, CBT promotes a balanced social, economic, and ecological integration in tourism development.

CBT's social and economic dimensions include the equitable distribution of economic benefits and active community participation. Scholars emphasize that fair benefit-sharing is crucial for maintaining community support for tourism initiatives (Yanes et al., 2019; Zielinski, Jeong, et al., 2020). Concentrating benefits within a small group or family often leads to social



dissatisfaction, which can undermine community engagement and threaten the sustainability of tourism projects (Pintassilgo et al., 2016; Zielinski et al., 2021). In CBT, local participation is an economic contribution and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility toward the destination.

In destinations like Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, this study found that although some individuals have benefitted economically, many residents feel excluded from the process. Unequal distribution of benefits can lead to potential conflicts and undermine social cohesion within the community. Furthermore, environmental conservation plays a vital role in ensuring the sustainability of community-based tourism (Byrd, 2007). However, increasing tourist numbers can lead to environmental degradation, such as erosion, pollution, and pressure on natural resources without proper management. Experts argue that environmental conservation in CBT involves mitigating negative tourism impacts and raising community awareness about the importance of conservation (Chilufya et al., 2019; Choi & Murray, 2010).

Cross-sector collaboration is another essential element for achieving sustainability in CBT (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Unfortunately, this study found that cross-sector collaboration in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi remains limited. Local governments have not fully developed the destinations regarding infrastructure and human resources, while partnerships with the private sector remain sporadic. This lack of collaboration restricts the community's ability to expand marketing networks and access broader markets. Strong cross-sector collaboration enhances tourism ecosystems by ensuring active participation from all stakeholders and equitable benefit-sharing (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2018; Marín-González et al., 2022).

Based on these findings, several key challenges emerge in managing CBT in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi. These challenges include unequal economic benefit distribution, limited digital marketing, weak cross-sector collaboration, and the risk of environmental degradation due to increasing tourism activities. These challenges could hinder tourism development or even lead to failure without proper strategies. Therefore, the primary research question is: How can social and ecological synergies in community-based tourism management in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi support economic and environmental sustainability?

This study aims to analyze how social and ecological dimensions are integrated into managing community-based tourism in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi. Specifically, the study has four objectives. First, it seeks to identify the factors influencing the distribution of economic benefits in both destinations. Second, it examines the marketing strategies and their limitations in attracting tourists. Third, the study evaluates the role of cross-sector collaboration among communities, governments, and private sectors. Fourth, it investigates the environmental impacts of tourism activities and identifies relevant mitigation measures.

This research is essential as it offers new insights into sustainable tourism management strategies by integrating social and ecological aspects, as suggested by previous studies (Bramwell & Lane, 2005; Schroeder & Sproule-Jones, 2012; 2020). The findings are expected to guide local governments and tourism managers in developing policies and strategies that support community-based tourism development. By doing so, this research aims to strengthen community involvement in tourism management while encouraging cross-sector collaboration to enhance destination competitiveness.

This study contributes to tourism literature by highlighting the synergy between social and ecological aspects in the context of community-based tourism management in Fatumnasi and



Eon Besi. Moreover, it offers practical and academic contributions. Practically, the findings provide recommendations to increase community involvement and expand cross-sector collaboration in CBT management. The study also offers insights into the importance of digital marketing in enhancing destination visibility and attracting more tourists. It enriches the understanding of the interplay between social and ecological dimensions in CBT and provides a tourism management model that can be applied in other rural areas across Indonesia.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the social and ecological synergy in community-based tourism management in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi Village (Burhan, 2019). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the meanings behind experiences, perspectives, and social dynamics that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods (Creswell, 2012). The case study method was selected as it focuses on a phenomenon within a specific context, aiming to understand the interconnections between various aspects in real-life situations (Yin, 2018). By examining these two locations, this study provides a comprehensive depiction of the challenges, opportunities, and dynamics in managing community-based tourism.

The research was conducted in two locations: Fatumnasi and Eon Besi Village, both situated in South Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). These regions were chosen because they have adopted Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as their tourism management strategy. Fatumnasi offers a variety of CBT-based destinations, including the Ampupu forest, bonsai tourism, and savanna landscapes. On the other hand, Eon Besi is known for its rich cultural heritage, often showcased through rituals and traditional art performances (Maak et al., 2022; Oematan et al., 2022). Both locations possess significant ecotourism potential but also face challenges in maintaining economic and environmental sustainability (Laiskodat, 2021).

This study involves a total of 14 informants, categorized based on their roles and relevance to tourism management in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi. The categories include destination managers, local residents, government representatives, village officials, and travel agents or tour operators. These informants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct involvement and comprehensive insights into the issues under investigation (Burhan, 2019). The breakdown of the informants is presented in the following table:

Table 1. List of Informants

No	Category of Informants	Number
1	Destination Managers	3
2	Local Residents	5
3	Representatives from Local Government	2
4	Village Officials	2
5	Travel Agents/Tour Operators	2
Total		14



The selection of informants in this study was based on four key considerations. First, destination managers and tourism operators were selected because they have direct knowledge of the challenges and daily practices involved in managing community-based tourism. Their insights are essential for understanding the field's operational dynamics and management strategies. Second, residents were chosen to provide perspectives on how economic benefits from tourism are distributed within the community. Their views also offer valuable insights into community involvement in tourism activities and the impact of tourism on social cohesion. Third, representatives from local government were included due to their role in formulating tourism policies and promoting local economic empowerment. They also act as facilitators of collaboration between communities and the private sector. Fourth, village officials were added as informants because they possess insights into the role of villages in supporting tourism and ensuring broad community participation. Village governments are crucial in facilitating communication and collaboration between local communities and external stakeholders. Fifth, travel agents and tour operators were selected to understand the private sector's role in supporting destination marketing and promotion. Their perspectives help reveal the opportunities and challenges in attracting tourists to rural areas. This selection aims to gather diverse and comprehensive data from multiple perspectives to create a well-rounded depiction of the situation.

Furthermore, data was collected through several methods, including in-depth interviews, participatory observation, documentation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) (Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect detailed information from key informants, covering topics such as the distribution of economic benefits, marketing strategies, community participation, and environmental conservation (Burhan, 2019).

Participatory observation was conducted by the researcher engaging in tourism activities in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, such as agricultural practices and cultural performances. This approach provided firsthand insights into the field conditions, allowing the researcher to observe social interactions and conservation practices (Tümen Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021). Documentation involved gathering relevant materials, including activity reports, tourism policies, and local publications (Bowen, 2009).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which aims to identify key themes from the data (Majumdar, 2022). The analysis began with transcribing interview and observation data, followed by data coding to identify significant patterns. The emerging themes were further analyzed to explore the relationships between economic benefit distribution, digital marketing, cross-sector collaboration, and environmental conservation. This thematic analysis provided a systematic framework for exploring the connections between these themes and linking them to relevant theories, such as community participation theory and sustainable development theory (Lochmiller, 2021).

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applied method triangulation and member checking. Method triangulation involved comparing data from interviews, observations, documentation, and FGDs to ensure consistency in the findings and reduce bias (Yin, 2018). By cross-referencing multiple sources, the researcher was able to develop a more objective and comprehensive understanding of the situation. Additionally, member checking was used to



validate the interpretation of the data with the informants. Preliminary findings were shared with the informants to obtain feedback and clarification. This technique was essential for enhancing the accuracy of the results and ensuring that the findings genuinely reflect the experiences and perspectives of the informants.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study analyses the synergy between social and ecological aspects in managing community-based tourism (CBT) in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, two destinations with significant potential through natural attractions and local cultural heritage. Fatumnasi offers tourism experiences centred around the Ampupu Forest, natural bonsai, and savanna landscapes, while Eon Besi highlights its cultural richness through traditional rituals and arts. Although tourism management in both areas has provided economic benefits, the study reveals several persistent challenges related to community participation, the distribution of economic benefits, digital marketing, and environmental conservation. This section will present the key findings based on collected data, including interview excerpts from informants, analysis and interpretation of the results, and recommendations for sustainable tourism development.

Social-Ecological Synergy in Community-Based Tourism Management

Besi features cultural tourism through traditional rituals and local arts, reinforcing the community's identity and cultural diversity. Despite the economic benefits generated, findings indicate that community involvement remains limited, and the unequal distribution of economic benefits poses challenges to achieving social sustainability.

Interviews with informants confirm that the economic benefits from tourism are not yet distributed equitably. Dortia Oematan, a tourism entrepreneur involved in CBT in Eon Besi, remarked, *"There is significant tourism potential here, but the benefits are still concentrated among a few groups managing the activities, while other residents are not fully involved"* (Dortia Oematan, 14 September 2024). Similarly, Mateos Anin, a traditional leader and inn owner in Fatumnasi, stated, *"The community hopes for more opportunities to participate in tourism, especially in selling local products and providing guide services"* (Mateos Anin, 15 September 2024).

Nahemia Sanam, a community leader from Eon Besi, also emphasized, *"We feel that the economic benefits are not evenly distributed because not all residents have the necessary access or skills to be directly involved in tourism activities"* (Nahemia Sanam, 14 September 2024). These statements suggest that although initiatives to empower the community have begun, more focused efforts are needed to ensure that the entire community benefits economically from tourism. Additionally, Roby Selan, Head of the Tourism Office, remarked, *"We are committed to supporting tourism development in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, but cross-sector collaboration needs to be strengthened to ensure the benefits are shared more evenly"* (Roby Selan, 19 September 2024).



of social dissatisfaction and reduced community motivation to participate in tourism (Phanumat, 2015). Inequitable distribution of economic benefits can lead to community tensions, ultimately threatening tourism initiatives' sustainability. On the other hand, meaningful community participation enhances economic well-being and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility toward the destination (Tasci et al., 2014).

The synergy between social and ecological aspects in tourism management highlights the significant potential for achieving sustainability. However, limited community engagement and unequal economic benefits present significant challenges. Active involvement of the community is essential, as it strengthens local capacity and ensures that tourism initiatives align with the community's cultural and environmental values (Armstrong, 2012; Volić, 2023). Tourism management must prioritize inclusive empowerment strategies, such as skills training and the development of local products, to enable all community members to benefit economically from tourism.

The synergy between social and ecological aspects in the tourism management of Fatumnasi and Eon Besi demonstrates the potential to achieve sustainable tourism. However, the limited community involvement and unequal distribution of economic benefits present vital challenges that need to be addressed. Tourism managers and local governments must develop more inclusive empowerment strategies, such as skills training and local product development, to ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are shared equitably across the community.

Distribution of Economic Benefits and Community Participation

The distribution of economic benefits and community involvement are crucial factors in ensuring the sustainability of community-based tourism (CBT). This study found that in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, economic benefits remain concentrated within a small group, while broader community participation has yet to be optimized. Such challenges risk generating social dissatisfaction and diminishing community motivation to engage in tourism management. Immediate efforts are needed to ensure that economic benefits are more widely distributed among residents, safeguarding tourism sustainability and enhancing community well-being.

Interviews with informants revealed that only a few individuals or groups enjoy most of the economic benefits in these destinations. Nahemia Sanam, a community leader in Eon Besi, noted, *"The economic benefits from tourism exist, but they are not evenly distributed. Many residents are not involved and feel they are not gaining direct benefits"* (Nahemia Sanam, 14 September 2024). Similarly, Mateos Anin, a traditional leader and local entrepreneur in Fatumnasi, pointed out the limited economic access for residents, stating, *"We see great opportunities in savanna and bonsai tourism, but many residents lack the skills to participate"* (Mateos Anin, 15 September 2024). This highlights the urgent need for training programs to empower the community to engage in tourism activities.

Meanwhile, Nurci Tune, a local guesthouse owner in Fatumnasi, emphasized the lack of synergy between business operators and tourism managers. She explained, *"We have tried selling local products to tourists, but there is no structured collaboration with tourism managers"*



(Nurci Tune, 14 September 2024). This limited collaboration reduces opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to benefit economically from tourism activities. Similarly, Yumeding Fobia, the village head of Bonleu, stressed the need to encourage greater community involvement, stating, *"Not all residents can directly participate in tourism management, but we hope for new programs that provide more opportunities"* (Yumeding Fobia, 16 September 2024).

Based on interviews and observations, the distribution of economic benefits in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi is still far from optimal. Few residents gain direct economic benefits, while many remain marginalized from tourism-related activities. These findings align with Blackman (2004), who argues that inequality in benefit distribution can lead to social dissatisfaction and weaken community motivation to participate in tourism management.

In the context of CBT, broad community involvement is essential to ensure the sustainability of tourism initiatives (Yanes et al., 2019). Such involvement strengthens the community's sense of ownership and reinforces their responsibility to preserve and develop tourism destinations (Mervelito et al., 2020). In Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, enhancing community participation could be achieved through tourism guide training, business skill development, and the creation of creative local products.

The findings indicate that the limited distribution of economic benefits and low levels of community involvement remain significant challenges in managing CBT in these destinations. Community participation is vital in ensuring sustainability and fostering a sense of belonging among residents. Without sufficient involvement, tourists face resistance from residents who feel excluded from its benefits (Bello et al., 2017; Byrd, 2007).

Digital Marketing and Cross-Sector Collaboration

Digital marketing has become a crucial component of the tourism industry, particularly in enhancing the attractiveness and accessibility of destinations (Murniati et al., 2023). However, this study reveals that Fatumnasi and Eon Besi face significant challenges. Promotion efforts in both locations still rely heavily on traditional methods, such as word-of-mouth and tourist social media posts. This reliance on informal promotion limits the visibility of the destinations and reduces their ability to attract more visitors from outside the region.

One of the primary challenges identified is the lack of a structured digital marketing strategy and collaboration with travel agencies and tourism platforms. Andi Kati, a travel agent, remarked, *"There is great tourism potential in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, but promotion is lacking because there is no well-integrated digital marketing strategy"* (Andi Kati, 19 September 2024). This limitation has made it difficult for the destinations to reach a wider audience effectively.

Similarly, Fransina Benu, a local entrepreneur around CBT in Eon Besi, acknowledged, *"We do not have formal partnerships with travel agents or tourism platforms, so our promotions are often not maximized"* (Fransina Benu, 14 September 2024). This indicates that no formal initiatives have been established to build cross-sector collaboration for strengthening destination marketing. Mateos Anin, a local entrepreneur in Fatumnasi, echoed similar concerns, stating,



"We hope for joint marketing programs that can showcase all the attractions here, but for now, we still rely on personal promotion" (Mateos Anin, 15 September 2024).

Yanti Banoet, a guesthouse owner in Eon Besi, further emphasized, *"Many tourists hear about us from previous visitors' social media posts, but without targeted promotion, it's difficult for us to grow"* (Yanti Banoet, 14 September 2024). This statement reflects that, despite the potential, the lack of digital marketing limits the growth of both destinations.

The findings indicate that the absence of integrated digital marketing and limited cross-sector collaboration hinder the development of Fatumnasi and Eon Besi as competitive tourism destinations (Dwiningwarni et al., 2021). In this context, village governments and tourism managers must proactively establish partnerships with travel agencies and digital platforms to maximize destination promotion (Kusumastuti et al., 2024).

The lack of structured marketing strategies also reduces the economic potential that these destinations could generate. In modern tourism, digital marketing is a promotional tool to build the destination's image and attract a broader audience (Sukaris et al., 2020; Volić, 2023). Therefore, innovative marketing approaches, such as thematic tour packages combining visits to the Ampupu Forest, bonsai gardens, and savanna landscapes, could increase tourist interest while offering diverse experiences.

Moreover, Ansell dan Gash (2008) emphasize the importance of cross-sector collaboration, arguing that the success of community-based tourism depends on the involvement of all stakeholders—local communities, governments, and the private sector. In Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, such collaboration remains limited, restricting the local community's access to broader tourism markets. Establishing cooperative forums or tourism cooperatives could enhance stakeholder coordination and ensure that marketing strategies are implemented effectively and sustainably (Ngo et al., 2018).

Digital marketing and cross-sector collaboration are essential to enhancing the tourism appeal of Fatumnasi and Eon Besi (Darubekti et al., 2022). This study highlights that both destinations still face challenges leveraging digital technology for promotion and building partnerships with travel agents and the private sector. Without effective marketing, the tourism potential of these locations cannot be fully realized, and the broader economic opportunities for local communities will remain untapped.

Environmental Conservation in Tourism Activities

Environmental conservation is crucial in managing tourism destinations, especially within community-based tourism (CBT). Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, with their rich natural resources, including the Ampupu Forest and vast savanna landscapes, face significant challenges in balancing growing tourist inflows with environmental preservation. Although these destinations have attracted visitors with their natural beauty and cultural heritage, integrating environmental conservation programs into tourism activities remains insufficient. This gap risks undermining the long-term benefits of tourism and threatens the sustainability of the local ecosystems.



Interviews with residents and stakeholders in Eon Besi and Fatumnasi highlighted the lack of environmental education and conservation efforts in tourism programs. Wati Suni, a resident near the CBT area in Eon Besi, stated, *"Tourists are attracted to the local culture and nature here, but there's still a lack of education on the importance of environmental preservation"* (Wati Suni, 17 September 2024). Despite awareness of environmental issues, this statement indicates that no concrete initiatives have been developed to incorporate environmental education into tourism activities.

Yumeding Fobia, a resident of Bonleu Village, stressed the importance of empowering local communities to participate in conservation efforts. He remarked, *"We hope for tourism programs that involve residents in environmental preservation activities, but so far, there have not been many initiatives like that"* (Yumeding Fobia, 16 September 2024). Without such participation, residents and tourists are less likely to fully understand the importance of preserving the ecosystems that serve as key attractions for the destinations.

Similarly, Mateos Anin, a traditional leader in Fatumnasi, noted that although local communities strive to protect the forest and savanna, increasing tourists without proper guidelines could threaten environmental sustainability. He explained, *"Tourists often don't understand the rules for respecting nature, and without proper education, the forest and savanna could be at risk"* (Mateos Anin, 15 September 2024). This highlights the need for clear environmental guidelines or regulations for visitors to ensure responsible tourism practices.

Kirenius Selan, a representative of the Tourism Office of South Central Timor, expressed the government's willingness to support environmental conservation initiatives but acknowledged the need for more muscular coordination with communities and tourism managers. He stated, *"We are ready to strengthen environmental conservation programs at tourism destinations, but closer collaboration with local communities and tourism managers is needed"* (Kirenius Selan, 19 September 2024). Government involvement in fostering cross-sector collaboration is crucial to creating a synergy between tourism development and environmental conservation.

The study's findings reveal that environmental conservation has not yet become a priority in the tourism management of Fatumnasi and Eon Besi. Moyle et al. (2014) argue that economic development, including tourism, must consider environmental sustainability to ensure that economic activities do not degrade ecosystems and remain viable for future generations. Although there is awareness of the importance of environmental preservation, concrete and structured steps to integrate environmental education into tourism programs are still lacking.

Community involvement in conservation efforts is essential to ensure that tourism activities do not harm the environment. Community participation in the planning and implementing of tourism activities strengthens residents' sense of ownership and responsibility for their destinations (Bello et al., 2017). In Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, encouraging residents to participate in conservation activities will help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism and maintain ecological balance.



Environmental conservation must become integral to tourism management in Fatumnasi and Eon Besi. Although there is already some awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability, concrete actions are needed to incorporate conservation efforts and environmental education into tourism programs. Collaboration between village governments, tourism managers, and local communities is essential to design tourism programs that are both environmentally friendly and educational.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the synergy between social and ecological aspects in the community-based tourism management of Fatumnasi and Eon Besi, focusing on economic and environmental sustainability. Using a qualitative approach and case study method, the research explored how economic benefit distribution, community participation, digital marketing, and environmental conservation contribute to tourism development in both villages. It also sought to identify challenges and opportunities for creating synergy among various stakeholders, including communities, governments, and the private sector.

The findings indicate that although efforts have been made to integrate social and ecological aspects into tourism management, several challenges hinder sustainability. In Fatumnasi, tourism destinations such as the Ampupu Forest, natural bonsai, and savanna landscapes have benefited some community members economically. However, the distribution of these benefits remains unequal, and community participation in tourism activities is limited to specific groups, which could lead to social dissatisfaction if left unaddressed. Additionally, tourism marketing relies heavily on informal promotion through social media and word-of-mouth recommendations, limiting the destinations' ability to compete with other tourism sites.

From an ecological perspective, conservation efforts have been initiated through natural conservation practices in the Ampupu Forest and savanna landscapes, but they are not yet fully integrated into tourism programs. Both tourists and residents have limited access to environmental education, which prevents the optimal use of natural tourism to raise awareness about the importance of conservation. The lack of cross-sector collaboration among government, communities, and the private sector also challenges strengthening marketing efforts and sustainable destination management.

This research has several limitations, including its focus on only two locations with specific social and ecological contexts, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other community-based tourism destinations in Indonesia. Furthermore, time and access constraints limited the number of interviews, which may not capture all relevant perspectives. The study's qualitative focus also does not provide a detailed quantitative analysis of the economic and environmental impacts.

Expanding the geographic scope to include more destinations would enhance the representativeness of the findings. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data would also provide a more comprehensive analysis of the



economic and environmental impacts. Future studies should further explore digital marketing strategies and how technology can be leveraged to promote destinations and support environmental conservation in community-based tourism.

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