



## Factors influencing ecotourism in Wasur national park Merauke regency

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Received: 30/10/2020 Revised: 14/11/2020 Accepted: 1/12/2020 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31559/IJHTS2020.1.2.5>

### Abstract:

*Government planning to promote tourism in Indonesia, including national parks, needs to be more serious to have a positive impact on the economic welfare of a region and the welfare of the community, the same things for Wasur National Park (TNW) in Merauke, Papua Province, Indonesia. This paper reports on the determinant factors of TNW's role in its management as ecotourism and conservation parks. This study uses qualitative methods, with semi-structured interviews and face-to-face. Interviews were conducted with the Department of Tourism, TNW managers, Non-Governmental Organizations, community leaders, religious leaders and researchers from Musamus University and field observers. This research results as follows: TNW has a tourist attraction in the form of a natural panorama consisting of several different spots, many tourists who are not recorded (do not pay entrance fees). Lodging and culinary facilities are still managed traditionally. Therefore, foreign tourists bring their own equipment and needs. In general, transportation to TNW is relatively expensive. The Local Government provides buses for transportation from Merauke Regency to TNW, but tourists prefer renting a car. Local wisdom has contributed so that the natural conditions of TNW are still well preserved and most are still natural. On the other hand, there has not been a serious effort to promote TNW and partnership cooperation with related industries to optimize the potential of TNW has not been done much. The results of this study are crucial for the Government, industry, and the community in a joint effort to optimize the potential of TNW ecotourism to obtain a positive impact on economic life, improve community welfare and conservation.*

**Keywords:** national park; ecotourism; conservation; local community; Wasur National Park (TNW).

## 1. Introduction

Conservation areas or protected areas are determined by the Government based on various criteria according to their interests. Various efforts to conserve biodiversity and its ecosystem in conservation forest areas are very important because of their functions and benefits as a life support system and conservation of biodiversity (Nandi, 2008), which in the implementation of this conservation involves the community around the location as the owner of customary rights over the forest (Gupta et al., 2020). This is also the case in many other developing countries as one of the main actors in its implementation. Conservation area management must be carried out carefully because mismanagement can have an impact that is difficult to recover from damage (Mudzengi, at all, 2020), considering that the large potential and uniqueness of conservation areas also indicates the area's vulnerability to disturbance. Indigenous people have local wisdom (Yarman, 2013) in managing natural resources such as protecting sacred places, preserving various customs related to traditional conservation of nature to maintain natural balance and protecting various types of wild animals related to totems (Rim-Rukeh, A.; Ilerhievwie, G.; Agbozu, 2013). It also engages the community and maintains a low visitor impact and provides socio-economic benefits to local communities (Cetin and Sevik 2016).

Forest conservation efforts must be implemented considering the total of land in Indonesia that is still covered by natural forest is 82 million hectares, 70% (seventy percent) of it is in Papua and Kalimantan Island. Papua Province is one of the buffer regions for the world's ecosystems dominated by natural forests, which

reach 29.4 million hectares (Purba et al., 2014). The island of Papua, home to about a third of Indonesia's remaining rainforest, provides habitat for biodiversity and livelihoods for villagers. Meanwhile, the results of FWI's analysis in 2014 showed that natural forests in Papua's Bioregion reached 83% of the land. Until 2017, there was a reduction in forest area (deforestation) covering 189.3 thousand hectares / year between 2013-2017. Practically, until 2017 the natural forest area in Papua was around 33.7 million hectares or 81% of the land (Margono et al., 2014). When traced in detail, the development of tourism in Papua, it is only visited by 41,425 foreign tourists and is still constrained in various ways, apart from that, there is a challenge that there is a stigma that transportation cost from Java to Papua is very expensive (Rumpaidus, 2019) for that, opportunity costs are needed. which explains that with this large cost, the tourists should enjoy a tourist attraction that is greater than the costs incurred. The development of tourism in TNW is not only subject to the Tourism Law, but also Law number 5 of 1990 concerning the Conservation of Living Natural Resources and Ecosystems which is the legal basis for regulating the protection of life support systems, the preservation of diversity of plant and animal species and their ecosystems has the main function of preserving the diversity of plants and animals and their ecosystems with the awareness that all natural resources including living natural resources must be utilized for the welfare of society and mankind in accordance with their capabilities and functions.

The more developed tourism activity today is ecotourism with an awareness of consistency with natural, social, and local community values and that promotes cultural and environmental interaction in authentic natural settings (Dorobantu, 2012). Ecotourism is a responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education with the condition that education is for staff and guests (TIES, 2015). Conservation and ecotourism can run parallel and become community-based ecotourism are two forms of participatory alternative tourism development planning approaches, which are used to describe forms of tourism that recognize important impacts on the environment, socio-culture, and economy, which is caused by tourism activities, especially tourism that is beneficial to local communities (Stronza et al., 2019). On the other hand, tourism is the third largest sector of international trade with 10.4% of the GDP and is responsible for 313 million jobs worldwide (del Río-Vázquez et al., 2019). The impact of ecotourism activities will increase various economic activities, such as lodging places, food stalls, transportation services, traveling services and so on, these activities will increase people's income and reduce the unemployment rate (Meei Lee & Chris Honda, 2016). Tourism sector not only touches on certain economic groups but also reaches the lower class of society (Ismail, 2020). Tourism in Indonesia is developed by the Government through a growth and economic equality approach for the welfare of the people, through Law Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism which is oriented towards regional development, community-based, and has the character of empowering the community which includes various aspects, such as human resources, marketing, destinations, science and technology, cross-sector linkages, cooperation between countries, empowerment of small businesses, and responsibility for exploiting natural and cultural resources. The process for increasing community income as in the objectives of tourism development can be achieved through the process of empowering the community around the park. This can be one of the main goals of handling that must be planned to determine the empowerment process by taking into account the bottom up model planning in which the community is involved starting from planning, implementation and evaluation by paying attention to human resource factors, natural resources, environment and participation (Phuk Tjilen et al., 2016).

TNW is a combination of the Wasur forest area and Rawa Biru nature reserve which was determined by the Decree of the Minister of Forestry No. 282 / Kpts-VI / 1997 concerning the appointment of 413,810 hectares of TNW located in Merauke Regency, Irian Jaya Province (Papua), and on March 16, 2006 TNW was included in the Ramsar Site list, a wetland conservation area in the world, namely the international agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, (The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat) ([Taman Nasional, n.d.](#)). TNW is designated as a natural conservation area that has an original ecosystem, managed by a zoning system that can be used for research, science, education, support for plant or potentially animal cultivation, tourism and recreation. TNW is one of the major conservation areas in Indonesia, having the uniqueness of the indigenous people who live in the area. The indigenous people as the owner of customary rights in TNW consist of the *Kanum*, the *Marori Men-Gey*, the *Marind* and the *Yeinan*, with patterns of interaction with natural resources in the area that have been going on for generations (Mulyawan, 2013). Managing TNW is an integral part of development in the field of National Tourism, most importantly for the Indonesian in supporting the continuity and success of development, especially in Merauke Regency which is very rich in flora and fauna as well as various wealth that have not been exposed to the community, the existence of TNW as one of the tourist destinations in Merauke Regency has not had a significant economic impact on Regional Original Income and also an increase in the welfare of the customary owner community, this is constrained on regulations that ensure the full participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in the designation and management of protected areas (Nandi, 2012). The current condition of TNW is now there are indications that the provision of facilities has not been optimal such as roads and other facilities, for conservation activities and as centre for information sources for the general public, so as to provide educational information

for the community and maximize the potential for recreation as a strategy to attract the attention of local communities and tourism in general (Mandic et al., 2018).

Tourism management needs to pay attention to special local sense and uniqueness of cultural heritage as well as environmental uniqueness (Scheyvens & Scheyvens, 2015); maintenance, protection, improvement of the quality of resources, development of additional tourist attractions on local cultural properties, services for cultural uniqueness and social environment, providing support and legitimacy for tourism development and development that can increase community income (Ursache, 2015). Other studies related to the development of tourism management, (1) economic aspects, indicators in the form of funds for community development, creating jobs, increasing local people's income (Holik, 2016); (2) social aspects, with indicators of increasing quality of life, increasing community pride, equitable distribution of roles between men and women, young and old generations, building strengthening community organizations (Mandic et al., 2018); (3) cultural aspects with indicators in the form of encouraging people to respect different cultures, fostering cultural exchanges, developing culture that is closely embedded in local culture (Zhuang et al., 2019); (4) environmental aspects with indicators studying the carrying capacity area, regulating waste disposal, increasing awareness of the need for conservation; This study analyses the factors that influence the tourism management of TNW in Merauke Regency. It needs to be researched in order to increase competitiveness to receive national and international tourist visits and according to the Government 's plan it will have an impact on economic growth and improvement of community welfare.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to find out the management of Wasur National Park (TNW) in attracting tourist, managing tourist facilities, managing environmental, economic, social, and cultural, promoting, partnering, and how does all those helps empower local people's economic and welfare.

## **2. Research Method**

This research is a descriptive qualitative research with the intention that the results of this study will provide a systematic, factual and accurate description of the object to be studied which is supported by in-depth interviews and field observations related to the components of the tourism attraction management mechanism, tourist facilities, accessibility, promotion, partnership and community empowerment.

### **• Research Design**

Data sources to support the depth of descriptive analysis of data obtained by interviewed officials in TNW Management Agency and Merauke Regency Tourism Office, traditional leaders, youth leaders, community leaders, religious leaders, who are in Wasur Village (purposive sampling).

Field observations are carried out to observe the physical condition of tourism objects and their surroundings by collecting data and identifying management aspects related to community management mechanisms including tourist attractions, facilities, accessibility, partnerships, promotion and community empowerment.

Documentation studies related to the description of village areas in the TNW area (location, area, climate, topography), population data, livelihoods, education, Government policies related to community-based ecotourism management, visitor number data and related literature.

Since this is a qualitative research, open ended questions were used in interview with primary questions prepared beforehand in each topic. Analyzing qualitative data were done by reading many transcripts looking for similarities or differences, and subsequently finding themes and developing categories.

### **• Research Site**

The research location was the TNW area, which is in Merauke Regency, Papua Province, which was studied including Wasur Village, Onggaya Village and Yanggandur Village, and Sota Village which directly borders with Papua New Guinea.

### **• Research Indicator**

In this study the research indicators are limited as follows: 1) Management of the TNW attractions, which include diversity, quality and uniqueness; 2) Management of the availability and completeness of the TNW facilities; 3) Management of transportation facilities and accessibility; 4) Environmental, economic and socio-cultural conditions; 5) Tourism promotion of TNW; 6) Partnership with communities and stakeholders, forms, duties and responsibilities as well as institutional regulations; 7) Community empowerment which includes, programs, companions and benefits for local community.

### 3. Finding and Discussion

#### • Management of Tourist Attractions in TNW

The results show that the domestic and local tourist attractions in TNW are interested in natural panoramas, the diversity of existing ecosystems, for foreign tourists and researchers have a greater interest in ecosystem diversity and community culture. TNW, which is located on the Trans Papua Axis Road, is an open national park, and there still many tourists are not recorded. The number of tourists recorded in 2019 was 354 people, except for foreign tourists who paid their entrance tickets and reported their arrival. The frequency of tourist visits consists of foreign tourists and domestic / local tourists as follows:

**Table (1):** Tourists from TNW Office in 2019

No.	Information	Total
1.	Local / Indonesian Tourists	324 people
2.	International Tourists *	30 people
	Total	354 people

\* Information: Australia, UK, Spain, Sweden, Netherlands, South Africa, USA, Italy, Belgium, France and South Korea

Source: 2019 TNW Processed Data

The diversity and location of this tourist spot is divided into 4 parts, namely the village Wasur as the gate; Yanggandur Village; Village Rawa Biru; and Kampung Sota. The location of the TNW spot can be explained as follows:

- Kampung Wasur as the gate is located 18 km from the Merauke City, the results of interviews and observations explain that the community is interested in seeing and taking pictures at the house of Musamus ants (ant nests from *Macrotermes* sp) and to the Biras Park spot to sit down and travel with your own meals on holidays. At Biras Park there are still natural forests and water reservoirs that were formed due to excavation soil. The community is interested in the condition of the forest and ponds that are well maintained and have prepared adequate *honai* (shelters) and public bathroom facilities. Attractions for natural beauty that attract local tourists in the Merauke City are Biras Park which is always visited by people of Merauke City every Sunday or holiday who can enjoy natural scenery and natural reservoirs with *honai* which are available for families, and in the rainy season, people can do swimming in the pool, although basically the pool is not prepared for sports or swimming.
- Yanggandur Village has become one of Mbaggu's independent tourism spots built by one of the community leaders Mr. Banggo with the assistance of a grant from the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia, in the form of an *honai* prepared for used as a seat with comfortable *honai* facilities so that people can rest and be creative around the area for tourists who are interested in traveling for holidays.
- Kampung Rawa Biru is a natural resource conservation area protected to protect groundwater resources as swamps / large reservoirs as supplying water needs in Merauke City. The tourist spots on the Rawa Biru are not open to the public even though the Rawa Biru is a place which is worthy of being a tourist attraction for its natural scenery or for researchers to study the activities of endemic birds and Birds of Paradise, as well as fish and other forest animals.
- Kampung Sota is the border area between the Republic of Indonesia with Papua New Guinea, is the spot most frequently visited by people, to enjoy travel via the Trans Papua Axis Road, to enjoy the State Borders.

The management of tourist attractions in the cultural element of interaction with foreign tourists is the main attraction for its management is still left to the community which is carried out independently who are truly still original and guided by the TNW (Ng et al., 2007). Another cultural attraction included in the culinary delights of the local community is sago sep (sago wrapped in bus tree bark and then burned in stone), and this is also still traditionally carried out and handed over to the community. Interesting attractions for foreign tourists are (Işik, 2011) nature tours to see endemic animals. Tourist activities for several days staying at the community's house, as well as following the community in hunting forest animals, such as kangaroos, deer or wild boar. Increased ecotourism visits by promoting conservation, having a low negative visitor impact, it is necessary to prepare for the active socio-economic involvement of local communities who have been trained to obtain optimal benefits (Arsić et al., 2017).

#### • Management of Tourist Facilities

The management of Biras Park which is in the national park area has provided facilities that are still local in the sense that it is used for users who will enjoy the Biras Park including well-maintained *honai* and public toilets, and in its management it is handed over to the community who owns the customary right in the area. In each of the villages that were the research areas, such as Wasur, Yanggandur and Rawa Biru, stalls were available which were managed by immigrant communities who lived and had become residents of those locations. In general, lodging facilities are not yet available, unless foreign tourists often bring tents to sleep in the protected forest

accompanied by the local community. In the management of tourism facilities, Local Government is open to opportunities for local communities to be involved in these activities, thus it is hoped that community participation will directly increase the economic income of the community (Bhuiyan et al., 2011).

- **Management of Transportation Facilities**

The transportation management mechanism in question is divided into trips from Java to Merauke Regency and trips from Merauke to TNW. Travel from outside Merauke Regency can be done by plane or ship which of course still uses commercial flights which are generally considered to be very expensive when compared to trips from Jakarta or other big cities to transport abroad, in general return tickets from Jakarta to Merauke can cost around the price of Rp. 5,000,000 to Rp. 8,000,000 depending on the choice of airlines for the peak season or low season, which so far have 2 or 3 flights every day. The accessibility of the road suggestions following the route is connected to the Trans Papua Axis Road, so that all roads to each village are asphalt roads in good condition. The journey from Merauke to Wasur Village takes about 20 km, from Wasur to Yanggandur about 60 km and from Yanggandur to Rawa Biru about 5 km and from Yanggandur to Sota about 7 km. Travel means of transportation from Merauke Regency to the TNW can be done by bus transportation provided by the local Government, but the public / tourists prefer to use rental transportation facilities such as Innova and Avanza with Rp 600,000 to Rp 800,000 per day, thus making it easier for tourists to travel anytime. Transportation to get to the village of Rawa Biru to the middle of the swamp can only be done via a ketinting boat with a travel time of about 2 - 3 hours by circling the swamp which is the source of water in Merauke Regency as well as heading to the coconut island which is a highland "bevak". local agricultural activities for planting yams or hunting forest animals.

Observing the results of the research, it explains that aircraft transportation is still an obstacle because of the tendency for high costs to be incurred, this is in line (Baumeister, S., T. Onkila, 2018) that there is a tendency for the international community to prefer budget cost transportation. Local transportation within the Merauke City, is entirely affordable, because public transportation is available or if tourists still want privacy and comfort, they can choose a rental car at an affordable price.

- **Environmental, Economic, Social and Cultural Management**

Economic demands conditions can lead to several community behaviors that take shortcuts to take forest products legally and do not pay attention to sustainability, such as harvesting wood using chainsaws to be traded (Seguí-Amortegui et al., 2019). In addition, there is also illegal hunting of animals such as kangaroo, deer and others in order to meet the food needs of the surrounding community, although this number does not damage the natural conditions as a whole, but such conditions need to be regulated with good regulations so that the people's needs can still be fulfilled their economic needs and not destroy existing natural resources. Thus, the regulation will create conditions that can guarantee the survival of the existing ecosystem in the area.

Based on observations and interviews in the field, it is known that the natural environmental conditions in TNW are still well preserved and mostly still natural, and this can happen, due to the local wisdom of the community to maintain forests and other natural environments so that the National Park area becomes a conservation area that fulfills the law to protect the economy and ecosystems of living natural resources. The local community in the TNW area highly respects the forest as a place for their ancestors and spirits with this belief that the environmental conditions are environmental management and are still well preserved.

- **Promotion of TNW**

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it shows that the promotional strategy efforts have been implemented but have not been optimal. The results of the interviews show that local tourist visits are based on information obtained from friends or family who have visited TNW and there is no good and appropriate promotion strategy to introduce TNW to local, national and international communities. The income of the people who live in the area cannot be developed properly because the number of visits from tourism that does not appreciate and does not get enough multiplier effects to improve the economic condition of the community is also one of the reasons why there is illegal logging and illegal hunting (Mudzengi et al., 2020).

Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that the lack of human resources and the lack of involvement of Local and Central Government as well as the lack of involvement of the tourism industry. Management of broad promotion to tourists with considerations that need to be done are as follows:

- a) The need for promotion and cooperation between the Government and the private sector, in this case hotels and restaurants as a distribution network to help the community promote TNW;
- b) It is necessary to analyze and segment the market so that the tourists who come are segmented properly so that they can be caught, it will increase community income and help preserve the existing ecosystem environment, and

- c) The Government, private parties and NGOs can help educate the people who inhabit the area so that be a conservation actor as well as an example for tourists so as not to take actions that can damage the existing ecosystem.

- **Partnerships**

Increasing the capacity of the community in industry through business partnerships and the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. Development and management of the tourism industry is still dominated by immigrants from districts, while the community has not been much involved. It cannot be denied that this is also due to the very minimal capacity of the community to take advantage of opportunities, either by being involved in existing industries or starting their own businesses. Local Government must be able to capture and create business opportunities for the community through guidance and provision of enough knowledge. Currently, only the homestay business involves the role of the community; while other businesses such as tour organizers, guides, managers of food and drink stalls. Therefore, the concept of developing the tourism industry is directed at encouraging partnerships between tourism businesses and the community and / or community groups. In addition, the Government should encourage the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, particularly in various types of tourism support business services such as the handicraft industry, food, local transportation, rental of tourist equipment, and so on. This concept is expected to expand employment opportunities and increase community income; as well as increasing community capacity and public awareness on tourism development. In management, solidarity, synergy and cooperation from all stakeholders are needed to develop tourism products related to attractions, facilities and other supporting facilities as well as accessibility and the preparation of supporting human resources and promotion with the various parties should be involved.

Based on the findings in the management field TNW has not been maximized, especially in managing tourist attractions, promotional facilities, and partnership mechanisms. Constraints faced in ecotourism management this is caused by the lack of human resources, especially local community resources, and the absence of cooperation between tourism stakeholders and village managers and lack of funds (Agrawal et al., 2017). Therefore, the management of TNW requires the following:

- a) Efforts to increase community participation and increase visits, these can be done in partnership with the community as stakeholders to get together with the community which includes the production and management of souvenir products, environmental management, homestay management and the management of community culture that can be sold to tourists;
- b) In binding partnerships, regulations and guarantees are required that cooperation with the private sector and the community will add economic value and there is a guarantee of financing for these activities;
- c) The existence of cooperation between the Government and the community is also carried out to do joint patrol supervision prevents the actions of tourists or the public destroy the natural environment and existing community culture;
- d) Easy management of filling in business contents is needed so that the atmosphere like hotels and travel agents can do business in TNW environment as well as the ease of conducting economic transactions that involve the local community;
- e) Cooperation between the Government and NGOs and education sector for the community manage the area and provide opportunities for the community to involved in research that produces enhancement recommendations of the ecosystem and improvement of the community economy as well maintenance of community culture

- **Empowerment**

The findings also explain that there is a need for the village empowerment program in the form of an increase in local economic institutions involving the TNW Government and NGOs associated with regular, there is still a growing overlap between existing regulations and how to improve the community economy without damaging the existing ecosystem. In this activity, a scheduled evaluation and monitoring program is needed so that the implementation of community empowerment activities can be carried out properly and sustainably. The realization of this form of tourism has various problems in empowerment who are faced with difficulties in managing funds with limited institutional capacity, management, limited knowledge resources; and high unemployment (Tjilen et al., 2018). The empowerment mode requires the formation of sustainable, beneficial relationships between local residents and tourists (Corrêa Cavalieri & Neves Almeida, 2019). The empowerment process (Tjilen et al., 2019) basically determined by community participation, both in providing input, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating, including the utilization of the results or products of the empowerment itself (Cara et al., 2019). The results of this process can be seen that the adoption of this approach that is not in line with the concept has generally not been successful in developing countries (Mafruhah et al., 2019), because if it is not managed properly it will produce the opposite, namely it will improve community welfare in general but local communities are the main source of economic inequality, social and ecological

conflicts (Rachmawati, 2018). Success must consider all the basic principles of ecotourism in planning, development, operation, and marketing.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

TNW has a tourist attraction in the form of a natural panorama consisting of several different spots, many tourists who are not recorded (do not pay entrance fees). Lodging and culinary facilities are still managed traditionally. Therefore, foreign tourists bring their own equipment and needs. In general, transportation to TNW is relatively expensive. The Local Government provides buses for transportation from Merauke Regency to TNW, but tourists prefer renting a car.

Good management of tourism will produce various beneficial effects for the local Government and the local community in Merauke Regency, which is a tourist attraction for conservation and ecotourism areas that are unique and have extraordinary natural, social and cultural ecological wealth.

There is a huge potential with the local wisdom of the indigenous tribes who live in the tourist area, it feels very strong, they participate in protecting and managing natural resources in it and managing natural resources, where this indigenous tribe is also a special attraction for tourists, especially foreign tourists.

Local wisdom has contributed so that the natural conditions of TNW are still well preserved and most are still natural. There has not been a serious effort to promote TNW and partnership cooperation with related industries to optimize the potential of TNW has not been done much. The management of TNW has not answered the Government's plan to improve economic welfare and increase the income of people involved with tourism.

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