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### FUTURE COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM (CBET) DEVELOPMENT

*Mohd Noh, A. N., Razzaq, A. R. A., Mustafa, M. Z., Nordin, M. N., Ibrahim, B.*  
Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.  
*ahmadnahrilmohdnoh@gmail.com*  
*rasid@uthm.edu.my*

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#### ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism and is usually confused with natural and cultural tourism. CBET is fast becoming a popular biodiversity conservation tool that develops and benefits the local community. Based on the context of conservation theory and practice, Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) is a form of community-based natural resource management. However, a sustainable CBET development through Community Capacity Building (CCB) programs is not something that is easily achievable. Local community's capacity varies from one culture to another. It takes a high level of community participation, in order for it to come to a level where the community members themselves are motivated to participate and contribute to the development of the program. This fully qualitative research involved 15 respondents from the community of Kg. Selai, Bekok in Johor, Malaysia. The result shows there are five factors that sustained the ecotourism development based for Orang Asli Community in Kg. Selai, namely, existing CBET development, past CBET development, local community participation in planning stage of tourism, local participation in implementation stage of tourism and participation in nature conservation.

#### INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is travel into natural areas with responsibility to conserve the environment, and also the well being of the local community, and must include elements of education and interpretation. As interpreted by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2015). It is proven to help sustainably contribute positively towards the rural community development (Abdul Rasid et al., 2012), it can be purposefully developed in Malaysia. Furthermore, Malaysian government supports the development of ecotourism by listing 48 main areas to be developed as ecotourism sites in the National Ecotourism Plan (Kayat, 2011). Ecotourism's popularity shows in the statistic, when almost half of the 918,523 tourists who visited Sabah, named Kinabalu National Park as their main destination in 2001 and

there was a sudden rise of visitors to the Pahang National Park, from 56,121 in 2002, to 85,426 visitors in 2009 (Othman H., et al., 2018). Ecotourism and its status offer opportunities to spread the tourism benefits and burdens toward rural areas (Ibrahim & Razzaq, 2010). This could be a possible catalyst for a sustainable local community development in rural area, namely, areas near National Parks, which are reported to be the focal point for tourists coming into Malaysia looking for ecotourism products (Razzaq et al., 2011).

Aref (2010) suggests that Community Capacity Building (CCB) is the key for ecotourism development in the local community. Abdul Rasid et al., (2012) also proved that CCB could be successfully developed for sustainable tourism development, learning from the experience of the Miso Walai Homestay program in Kinabatangan, Sabah. Research further suggests that tourism development in local community could not work without participation of individuals; community leaders and residents of the community (Aref et al., 2010a). A level of participation that could be measured and high enough to truly empower the community towards a community-based tourism development (Arnstein, 1969). In addition, a research by Goh (2016) also highlighted that the past top-down approach towards tourism development and management is neither effective nor sustainable. Hence, there is a need to understand the effect of CCB for tourism development to create a more 'bottom-up' approach to tourism, where the local community has a high level of participation within the development.

## BACKGROUND RESEARCH

It is safe to say that tourism is still going to be a big industry in Malaysia in the near future. Nevertheless, as profitable as it may be, the mass tourism module and its top-down approach of management, negatively affect the environment and the local community within the tourism area. This will create a profitable but unsustainable practice of tourism that will lead to bigger problems in the future. Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) can benefit the community, environment and economy if built and operated sustainably, which is suitable for Orang Asli Hulu (Jakun) community in Kg. Selai, where tourism is a main industry in the area. However, if the local participation is limited, it would not benefit the community much.

The aboriginal community here is left out from tourism activities because they lack the capacity to operate tourism activity by themselves. This is mainly because of top-down management issues that limit their participation and incompetence in communication, especially in English. Unable to tap on tourism because of governance issues and their lack of capacity, the community is inept in generating better economic income, therefore, hindering their development as a community. Their neighboring Orang Asli Hulu (Jakun) community in Kg. Peta on the other hand, is already far ahead in the tourism industry. Tourism has taken off well there and they are currently able to produce English speaking Orang Asli guides, which is a valuable asset in today's ecotourism industry.

CCB is recognized to have some level of impact within a developing community. Proven in education, agriculture and healthcare, CCB for tourism development however, is still a budding subject. However, its gaining traction as the global tourism industry is ever growing and the demand for more authentic and sustainable form of tourism is on the rise. CCB for tourism has demonstrated positive impact on which few cases were applied to, where further research on the subject is significant. This research is aimed to lessen the tourism gap between neighboring aboriginal communities. As a matter of fact, the CCB program recognized the problem and thus, intended the program to address the communication issue within the Orang Asli Hulu (Jakun) community in Kg. Selai. Moreover, English communication, specifically, related to the tourism activities seems to be one of the major barriers for tourism development within the local community there.

Additionally, the typical top-down approach for rural tourism development is not showing great effects. The community involved ends up as the lower ranks within the organization, suppressing and limiting their involvement within the tourism development similar to the case of Kg. Selai. The community members who are involved in tourism include lower ranking staff, part time worker or on call forest guides for TNJER.

CCB promotes the empowerment of local community by providing them with the right tools and exposure to develop themselves. Constructed on a more 'bottom-up' approach of tourism development, where the final goal is that the local community can operate and become owners of their community tourism businesses which could benefit them whilst ensuring sustainable use of the land by their rightful community. These are the principles to the problems stated in this research. Thus, this research intends to explore and understand the use of Community Capacity Building (CCB) for Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) development within the local community in the research site.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2014, it was reported by Mohsen, (2015) that the tourism industry in Malaysia ranked as the sixth largest contributor to the national income. The tourism industry also ranked the third largest foreign income earner in Malaysia after manufacturing and palm oil industry in 2016 (Misachi, 2017).

Revenue from tourism is the solid proof of this steady growth, generating RM46.07 billion in 2007, RM58.3 billion in 2011 and RM60.6 billion in 2012 (Kayat, 2011; Ministry of Tourism, 2013). By 2011, the number of tourist arrival had reached 24.71 million, which put Malaysia as the 9<sup>th</sup> most visited country of the UNWTO top-ten list of countries with the highest tourist arrivals (Ministry of Tourism, 2013). In 2013, tourism generated RM65.4 from tourist receipts (Tourism Malaysia, 2014). It was suggested that because of the heavy promotion of Visit Malaysia Year in 2014, a further 10% bump in 2014 to RM72.0 billion was reported by

Tourism Malaysia, (2015). However, it declined to RM69.1 billion in 2015 (Tourism Malaysia, 2016) together with the tourist traffic. This was suspected due to the MH370 incident in December 2014, security issues in Sabah and the global economy drop. In 2016 tourist receipts increased again to RM82.1 billion (Tourism Malaysia, 2017).

Studies indicated that economic growth could be significantly influenced by the amount of tourist receipts. Though it affects different levels of economic growth, and the progress varies from country to country (Vita and Kyaw, 2016), Engenio et al. (2004) concluded that tourist expenditure can stimulate both tourism development, as well as human capital, hence, stimulating positive economic growth. Another study by Du et. al, (2014) suggested a frequent cooperation between tourism stakeholders was needed in order to create more tourism products and attract tourist traffic to increase the national revenue.

A research was done by Puah et al. (2018) to study the impact of tourism towards the local economy in Malaysia. The paper with empirical results proved that tourist receipts and capital investment by tourism agencies do have significant positive impact on the local economy. Furthermore, the study added that there is an importance for human capital investment as tourism involves many types of human resources. Multiple skills are needed to work in the tourism industry including professional, managerial, cognitive and soft skills (Jolliffe and Baum, 2004; Formadi and Mayer, 2009). Tourism, being a service industry and naturally labor intensive, require a lot of work force to operate which provided Malaysia with almost two million jobs opportunities in 2012, which made up for 16.4% of total national employments (Ministry of Tourism, 2013).

Puah et al., (2018) highlighted that Malaysia is shifting towards a service-based economy from a resource-based economy with the Economic Transformation Program (ETP). So far tourism is the largest and fastest growing industry, and so will it be in the future. Thus, there is a need for more human resource investments in order to keep to the demand and quality of tourism. The invaluable importance of human skills in a service-based economy is clear and well justified. This research supports the findings of the literature and believes that with training programs or classes to improve the human resource capacity level specifically for tourism will improve the tourism industry, hence, supporting the growth of Malaysia's local economy.

Alternative tourism is a type of tourism besides mass tourism. It is a generic term that encompasses a whole range of strategies to offer a more benign and 'true to life' alternative to mass tourism (Fennel, 1999). Alternative tourism can be further broken down to natural, cultural, event, and other forms of tourism (Newsome, et al., 2006). Tourism that focuses on the flora and fauna as an attraction, or includes activities within the natural area in order to appreciate and enjoy it, falls under the natural tourism type. Tourism that is based more on the culture, way of life and cultural events of the host country is known as cultural tourism. Hetzer (1965), acknowledged the need of a responsible type of tourism to enhance the impact of mass tourism. He identified four major pillars of responsible form of tourism;

- i) Minimum impact on environment

- ii) Minimum impact on – and maximum respect for – host cultures
- iii) Maximum economic benefits to the host country's grassroots
- iv) Maximum 'recreational' satisfaction to participating tourists.

The four pillars were identified to contribute to the evolution of a more specified term of ecotourism. It was first coined in the late 1980s and it was defined as, "Travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas" (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987: 13-14)

Fennel (1999) defined ecotourism as a natural resource-based tourism that is sustainable and ethically operated locally. He added that, it should also contain the element of community empowerment through control, benefits and scale as well as contributing to the conservation and preservation of the area and its local community. Diamantis (2004) managed to refine the definition as a tourism operation that occurs in natural settings while trying to increase benefits to the economy, society and environment through sustainable educational practices.

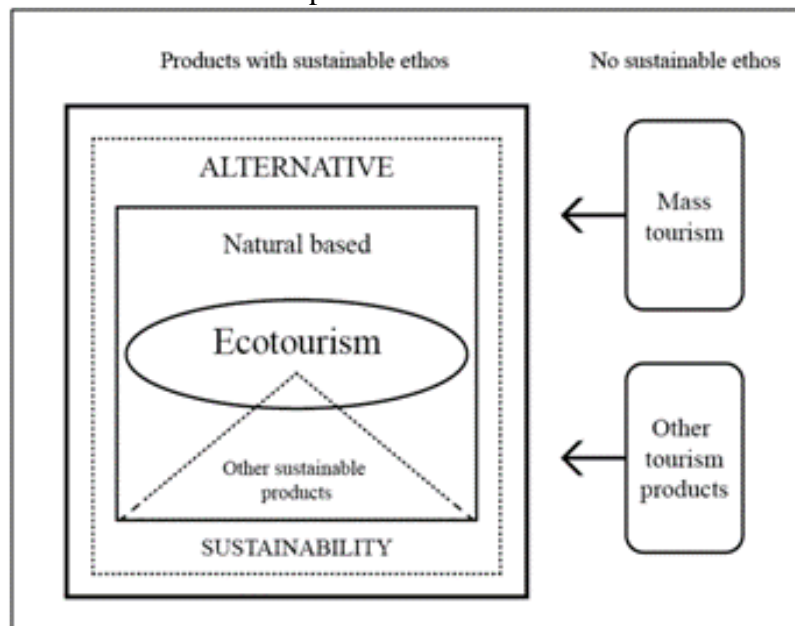


Figure 2.1. Position of ecotourism within the tourism product spectrum (Diamantis, 2004)

Diamantis, (2004) narrowed down the conceptual definitions of ecotourism to an alternative tourism with three (3) main components;

- i) Natural-based component
- ii) Educational component
- iii) Sustainability component
  - a. Social
  - b. Environment
  - c. Economy

Zaiton *et al.*, (2013) defined ecotourism as activities that involved restoration and conservation efforts, community and sustainable tourism visits. Five (5) vital aspects that must be pointed out in the definition of ecotourism include: (1) Having minimum and low impact on the environment and culture; (2) Covering both the nature and culture aspects; (3) Avoiding damage to the nature as best as possible; (4) Restoring efforts for unavoidable damage; (5) Benefiting the local community. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) updated their definition of ecotourism in 2015 as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). Ecotourism also involves uniting conservation, communities and sustainable tourism which means those who implement, participate in, and market ecotourism products should adhere to the following principles:

- i) Minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts.
- ii) Build environmental and cultural awareness, and respect.
- iii) Provide positive experience for both visitors and hosts.
- iv) Produce direct financial benefits for conservations.
- v) Generates financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
- vi) Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors to help raise sensitivity to the host countries’ political, environmental and social climates.
- vii) Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.
- viii) Recognize the rights and spiritual belief of the Indigenous People in the community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment. (TIES, 2015)

Ecotourism has many benefits that counter the negative effects of mass tourism, giving the term its popularity as the remedy to all tourism related issues in the late 1980s. Ecotourism is developing much more rapidly than other form of tourism (Zaiton *et al.*, 2013), including in Malaysia. Malaysian government supports the development of ecotourism by listing 48 main areas to be developed as an ecotourism site in the National Ecotourism Plan (Kayat, 2011). More currently, one benefit of an ecotourism in Malaysia comes from the implementation of the Malaysia Tourism Tax in August 2017. The tax is a compulsory tax on all accommodation services. A fixed tax rate, relative to the standards of the establishment, was presented at the parliament in April 2017. However, certain establishments, namely rural ‘homestays’, religious and educational accommodation facilities are exempted from the tax. Homestay is one facility related closely to ecotourism in Malaysia and this will add on to the tourism pull factor towards these ecotourism sites. Currently, National Parks have been a more popular choice for ecotourism. Almost half of the 918,523 tourists who visited Sabah, named Kinabalu National Park as their main destination in 2001 and there was a sudden rise of visitors at the Pahang National Park, from 56,121 in 2002 to 85, 426 visitors in 2009 (Othman *et al.*, 2018).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was chosen for this research because it involved a lot of variables from multiple parties and the topic needed to be explored in depth (Norazmi et al., 2020). An exploratory single case-study design, (Yin, 2003) dictated the framework of this research. It was found suitable and the rationale for choosing the design was discussed in this chapter. The details of the data collection procedure and the reasons for choosing semi-structured interview as the only source of evidence were also explained (Zaid et al., 2020).

Other specifics pertaining the research sites in Kg. Selai, Bekok was further discussed in this chapter. The rationale for participant sampling was clarified through a table showing details of selected participants. Finally, ethic consideration for this research was reviewed. This study involved 15 respondents.

## FINDINGS

### Future CBET Development

During the interview, participants were asked about their expectations and what they think was important for future CBET development in Kg. Selai. They were asked what if they could ask for anything from themselves or from other stakeholders. Subsequently, an array of suggestions was recorded from the interviews, from broad general suggestions that touched more than just tourism issues to specified need to develop specified Ecotourism activities. Themes representing what were vital for future sustainable CBET development emerged from mostly the local community side of participants, though both sides agreed upon certain agenda and suggestions.

### Assets and Facilities

The majority of the participants voiced that addition of assets and facilities were needed for further tourism development in the area. The quoted answers below proved that not only the governing bodies and related agencies, but also the community members realized the importance of having a centralized or specified hub for tourism activity in Kg. Selai itself. The suggestion was based on the Orang Asli Hulu's (Jakun) traditional and cultural design. Participants from the community even suggested the need for specific site for the 'Sumpit' activity and elephant or wild animals' watchtower. However, a main and general centre was found crucial as a hub for tourism, such as to house handicrafts for sale and a centre of promotion for their Orang Asli culture:

*“OK, so the villagers have to be prepared, it’s best that they can build a house for the tourists, a chalet for example, or homestay. Another one, sites and facilities for the activities, such as the sumpit activity” (P01)*

*“For example a traditional house. I want to make it with tree bark flooring, walls and leave roof. That house will be binded with rotan” (P03)*

The interviewed participants also revealed about a possible trekking route up to Tiong Mountain including one of the peaks within TNJER Selai, which was unique because it was accessible from the village itself.

### **CCB Programs to Increase Capacity**

Alongside the asset and facilities needed, the participants also suggested the need for more CCB programs to further increase their capacity for future sustainable CBET development. This supported past literatures and other findings in this research and also proved that CCB programs were necessary for a sustainable CBET development. Moreover, there was a need to increase their communication, knowledge and exposure in handling tourism in the area. This was not only voiced by both stakeholders but also by most of the community members;

*“ Like how they planned right, they wanted to do the English CCB program monthly right? That’s a very good pre-planning for tourism development. When their capacity to develop tourism is built, they’ll get motivated and more in to it” (P10)*

### **Cooperation and Collaborations Between Stakeholders**

Cooperation and collaborations between stakeholders were also prominent within the data. Data from earlier question in the interview protocol revealed that there was no such collaborations for tourism development in the area, and that the *“Alamak! Oh! My Tourism English”* was the first collaboration between the two. Hence, the researcher could assume that such relation was something new. This could partially be explained by the history of bad relationship between the Kg.Selai community and PTNJ from past promises that were not kept to the current tension between PTNJ and the local community, caused by miscommunications and unsettled issues. Participant no. 8 heavily noted that there was an urgent need for a proactive collaboration between the stakeholders in order to create a sustainable CBET development in the area.

Fortunately, participants from governing body and related agencies agreed that the pioneer CCB program was opening doors for them to reach the local community and a chance for the local community to realize a better future in tourism through consistent collaborations. Short quotes below show the needs that were expressed by the majority of the participants:

*“To me just support, support in the form of cooperation” (P07)*



*“We’ll see which inter-agency that can support from which aspect. So it won’t burden to only one agency.” (P10)*

*“We ask any information be sent to the Archive department, for example template, brochure, pictures. Besides that they can send pictures and videos of their village activities. We can help them archive it and make it as a reference.” (P12)*

*“If possible, outside party like MOTAC, they come and do more teaching programs” (P15)*

*“That’s what I said, from involvement of community and agency. Ahhh, so we need to cooperate. Between the community and the agencies” (P08)*

### **Financial Support**

Financial support or funding, to help to begin CBET in the area was also mentioned by participants being interviewed. Though not the most popular thing recorded from the interviews, it was obviously crucial as a starting capital to invest into the sustainable CBET development. The point was also shared and taken by one participant from the governing body and other related agency with the additional suggestion that a budget should be allocated for CBET development from the top management in order for them to pass it down to the local community because reportedly that rarely happened.

### **Tourists Traffic**

The interviewed participants reported that there was a need to divert the tourist traffic towards Kg. Selai, and asked for the help of MOTAC to do so by helping them to promote Kg.Selai as a cultural or Ecotourism destination. Currently, tourists were already passing by Kg.Selai in order to get into TNJER Selai. However, they usually just drove pass or parked their cars in front of the community hall in Kg. Selai. The local community interviewed mentioned that though they were very shy, they were quite frustrated that they had never been given a chance to meet the foreign tourists. They believed that they had much to offer, tourism wise. Their traditionally weaved handicrafts and other handmade goods were viable enough to be sold as authentic Orang Asli merchandise to the tourists which in turn, gave them the opportunity to earn some extra income from the incoming tourists.

### **Entrance Road**

The condition of the entrance road is far from satisfactory due to the remote location of Kg. Selai. Furthermore, it was not well maintained and quite inaccessible during the monsoon season. The participants in the interview confirmed these and added that it had been in that condition for quite some time. The entrance road played a vital role to both the related stakeholders. However, the community’s need was proven to be more

imperative. As the road was their lifeline to the outside world. In the case of emergencies such as like childbirth, the road played a more basic but crucial function. There was no future plan for the maintenance of the road but PTNJ was already planning on maintaining their private road at the national park's boundary. The local community interviewed was concerned about the amount of lorries hauling materials in and out, and the effect it would have on the already damaged road into Kg.Selai. There was a need for a serious future planning to repair and maintain the entrance road, as access was proven to be a vital key for any tourism development.

### **Challenges and Barriers for Tourism Development**

Challenges and barriers that were observed by the researcher from the interviews differed for the two sides of the stakeholders. On the one hand, the governing body and related agency pointed out the lack of capacity for the local community to truly establish a sustainable CBET establishment in the area. Their capacity level could set whether they were ready to change their conventional way of life into a more sustainable one as CBET was not something that could easily be established, moreover, when they still lacked crucial capacities such as participation and leadership.

On the other hand, the local community reported the lack of cooperation, collaboration or effort in general to approach them and work together towards a better future for all parties involved including the nature, which they treasured dearly and was taking the toll for development. From the interview and observations during the CCB program, it was safe to say that the local community was actually eager to participate in any tourism development. However, they felt that they had been given enough fair chances to involve and participate in any tourism development in the area, rather, they were either pushed aside driven and passed by or only called when their expertise were needed.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the findings in Chapter 4, it was suggested there was an urgent need for development of assets and facilities specifically for tourism purposes such as a cultural/tourist hub, an animal watch tower or a '*Sumpit*' or blow pipe shooting range. Participants interviewed also called out for financial supports in order to have a starting capital for investment towards a sustainable CBET development. More importantly, both stakeholders saw the need for more cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders. That could ensure a long-lasting good relationship to promote a smooth sustainable CBET development in the area.

Other more general matter, such as the condition of the entrance road was a matter of concern. It needed urgent attention for the sake of all stakeholders involved. Moreover, the local community who relied on the road for their most basic needs such as going for child labor and sending their children to school. As for the topic of entrance routes, it would be optimum for a sustainable CBET development if the tourist traffic were diverted to stop by Kg. Selai, rather than just being driven pass by the

village and straight into the national park that was observed and reported to be happening at present. On the good side of the findings, both of the stakeholders agreed on the need to build up the level of certain CCB dimensions through more CCB programs in the future. The stakeholders wanted more CCB programs to increase their capacity for tourism development. Proving that the CCB program had also opened their eyes on the importance of developing their capacity in order to have a proper sustainable CBET development in the area. Some participants from the local community side of the stakeholder gave good suggestions for future CCB programs. Governing body and related agency could take these suggestions into consideration to improve the effectiveness of the CCB program in the future. In order to be fair, there might be other ways to better develop a sustainable CBET in the area for the future, but currently, CCB seemed to be the best way to develop a sustainable CBET within an Orang Asli community in Kg.Selai.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A lot of knowledge was gained and learned from this research, given that the results from the interview gave such rich insight and point of views, from both the stakeholder sides. Though some factors were included or overlapped with other general aspects not pertaining tourism development, they can be linked together for the need to increase a community's capacity to change or enhance themselves to face changes in the future.

The findings of a new related dimension to study CCB is something exciting and can be applied to other studies on a sustainable CBET development in an Orang Asli community in Malaysia. This exposure or dimension seems to play a crucial part in any type of development in an Orang Asli community. Perhaps it is because Orang Asli communities are usually the most rural and less accessible community in Malaysia, they are observed to be under expose on the latest trend and development happening in the country, in comparison to communities in the city, which fall under the opposite extreme of the rural scale. The city communities are well aware, highly receptive and well exposed to any current development, thus, able to adapt to any new changes. Hopefully, with a better understanding on the exposure level of tourism towards the Orang Asli community, indigenous tourism can be developed as a sustainable trend in Malaysia.

The suggestions provided by the researcher are merely based on the findings and analysis of this master's research. Further investigations and probes need to be done in order to make use of CCB for a sustainable CBET as a proper model to develop a tourism development in an Orang Asli community. Other suggestions can be looked further into as the researcher believes, from this thesis point of view, that the suggestions are viable and legitimate.

In a nutshell, the research can conclude confidently that CCB is a well accepted and an overall good approach to develop a sustainable

CBET within the Orang Asli Hulu (Jakun) community in Kg. Selai. It is not only suitable to develop a sustainable CBET at the research site but it can also be applied nationally, as a push towards a more sustainable and community minded tourism, resulting in a more productive industry, without the cost of nature and social degradations. However, since there has been any other approach established towards tourism development in the area, there is still room for future research on any other viable approaches for tourism development in the area.

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