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Optimizing the Tourist Attraction of Buntu Kepa' Mamasa Regency Based on Local Potential

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Abstract

Buntu Kepa' Tourism is a mountain-based natural destination in Mamasa Regency that holds great potential but has not been optimally managed. This article aims to analyze the general overview, development achievements, and formulate strategies to optimize the attraction of Buntu Kepa' tourism based on local potential. The method used is descriptive qualitative through field observations, focus group discussions, and analysis of management aspects (input, process, output). Observation results indicate that the development of this area relies entirely on private self-funding and local labor without government budget support. Although the structuring is carried out gradually without formal documents, this initiative has successfully created a new destination that increases tourist visits and triggers the growth of micro-businesses around the location. The main challenges faced include limited capital and access to promotion. The sustainability of this area requires strengthening governance through the formation of Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), diversification of attractions based on local wisdom, and digitalization of promotions to expand market reach.

Introduction

Mamasa Regency is one of the regencies in West Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, characterized by mountainous landscapes, rolling hills, deep valleys, and a relatively cool climate. Its geographical and topographical characteristics provide considerable potential for the development of nature-based tourism. The combination of highland scenery, green vegetation, distinctive landscapes, and cool mountain air creates an attractive environment for recreational activities and tourism experiences. At the same time, however, the mountainous terrain presents challenges for infrastructure development, accessibility, spatial planning, and the provision of adequate tourism facilities. Consequently, the development of tourism destinations in Mamasa requires an approach that integrates local environmental potential with appropriate infrastructure, community participation, and sustainable destination management.

The emerging nature-based tourism destinations in Mamasa Regency is Buntu Kepa', a tourist area that offers panoramic views of green hills, mountainous landscapes, and the characteristic atmosphere of the highlands. The location has become particularly attractive because of its scenic landscape and elevated position, which has contributed to its popular characterization as a "land above the clouds." These natural characteristics constitute an important tourism asset because they provide visitors with opportunities to enjoy scenic views, experience the highland environment, and engage in recreational activities. However, the attractiveness of a natural destination alone is insufficient to ensure sustainable tourism development. Destination competitiveness and visitor experience are also influenced by accessibility, supporting facilities, management

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capacity, promotion, and the ability to organize local resources into a coherent tourism product.

The development of Buntu Kepa' is distinctive because it originated from a local initiative and has been developed primarily through community self-help and locally mobilized resources. Initially, the area consisted of ordinary hills that had not been optimally utilized for tourism purposes. Recognizing the aesthetic and recreational value of the landscape, local residents and managers gradually initiated efforts to transform the area into a tourism destination. Development activities have included land clearing, the arrangement of viewpoints, and the construction of simple visitor facilities. These initiatives demonstrate the potential of community-based tourism development, particularly in areas where formal investment and institutional support remain limited. Community involvement can provide an important foundation for tourism development because local residents possess knowledge of the area, have a direct interest in its economic utilization, and can contribute local resources and labor.

Nevertheless, the development of Buntu Kepa' continues to face several structural and managerial challenges. First, development and operational activities remain highly dependent on community self-financing. This dependence limits the capacity to undertake larger-scale infrastructure improvements and may constrain the continuity of destination development. Second, destination management remains relatively informal. Planning for the spatial arrangement and development of the tourism area has not yet been systematically formulated into a measurable master plan. Consequently, development activities tend to respond to immediate needs rather than being guided by an integrated long-term framework. Such conditions may reduce development efficiency and create difficulties in determining priorities for infrastructure, facilities, environmental management, and visitor services.

Third, the availability of tourism facilities remains limited. Existing facilities primarily consist of viewpoints and simple seating areas, while essential supporting infrastructure, including adequate sanitation facilities, improved road access, and clear directional signage, remains insufficient. These limitations may affect visitor comfort and the overall quality of the tourism experience. Accessibility is particularly important for a mountainous destination because road conditions and transportation infrastructure can influence visitors' willingness and ability to reach the site. Fourth, the promotion and marketing of Buntu Kepa' remain relatively limited. Information about the destination is still disseminated largely through local communication and word-of-mouth promotion. Limited digital marketing capacity means that the destination has not yet achieved broad visibility beyond Mamasa Regency, despite possessing natural characteristics that could potentially attract visitors from wider geographical areas.

These conditions indicate the need for a systematic approach to optimizing Buntu Kepa' as a locally based tourism destination. Optimization should not be understood solely as the construction of additional physical facilities but as a process of strengthening the relationship between local resources, destination management, infrastructure, community capacity, and tourism promotion. A development strategy based on local potential can help ensure that the natural and cultural characteristics of the destination remain central to tourism development while simultaneously creating opportunities for local economic participation. Such an approach is also consistent with the principles of community-based tourism, in which local communities play an active role in the planning, management, and economic utilization of tourism resources.

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Accordingly, this community engagement activity aims to examine the development achievements of Buntu Kepa' from the perspectives of input, process, and output, identify the main constraints affecting destination development, and formulate strategies for optimizing its tourism appeal based on local potential. The activity also seeks to provide recommendations for more structured and sustainable local tourism management. The expected benefits extend to several stakeholders. For local managers and communities, the activity is expected to strengthen tourism governance, expand opportunities for micro- and small-scale businesses, and encourage greater economic independence through the utilization of local resources. For the local government, the findings can serve as input for planning and supporting community-based tourism development in mountainous areas. For academics and practitioners, Buntu Kepa' provides a relevant case for understanding the opportunities and challenges of community-initiated tourism development, particularly in highland destinations where natural resources, infrastructure constraints, community participation, and destination management intersect.

Method

This community engagement activity employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a participatory method to examine the current conditions, management challenges, and development potential of Buntu Kepa' Tourism Destination in Mamasa Regency, West Sulawesi. The participatory approach was selected to ensure that the assessment and formulation of development strategies incorporated the perspectives, experiences, and needs of local tourism managers and community representatives. The implementation was organized into three sequential stages: preparation and observation, participatory discussion, and strategy formulation.

Preparation and Field Observation

The first stage involved direct field observation and an initial evaluation of the existing tourism conditions at Buntu Kepa'. The observation focused on the physical condition of tourism infrastructure, accessibility, existing visitor facilities, spatial arrangement, and the surrounding natural potential. Particular attention was given to the availability and condition of viewpoints, seating areas, road access, directional signage, sanitation facilities, and other supporting infrastructure. The observation also aimed to identify local environmental and landscape characteristics that could be developed as tourism attractions. Field observations provided the basis for identifying priority issues and determining the topics to be explored further during the participatory discussion.

Participatory Discussion and Focus Group Discussion

The second stage consisted of a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving local tourism managers and community representatives. The FGD was conducted as a participatory forum to obtain information regarding the management and development of Buntu Kepa' from the perspective of local stakeholders. Discussions focused on the challenges encountered in managing the destination, availability and sources of development resources, internal management practices, infrastructure needs, community involvement, and current tourism promotion activities. Particular attention was also given to the limitations of conventional promotional practices and the potential application of digital media to expand the destination's market reach. The participatory discussion enabled stakeholders to collectively identify priority problems and communicate their expectations regarding future tourism development.

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Management Analysis and Strategy Formulation

The third stage involved analyzing the information obtained from field observations and the FGD using an operational management framework consisting of input, process, and output. The input dimension examined the resources supporting tourism development, particularly financial resources, community participation, local potential, and available infrastructure. The process dimension assessed management practices, planning, organization, maintenance, community involvement, and promotional activities. The output dimension evaluated the existing tourism facilities, visitor services, accessibility, and utilization of the destination's local potential.

The results of this analysis were subsequently used to formulate recommendations for optimizing Buntu Kepa' as a locally based and sustainable tourism destination. The recommendations emphasized improvements in spatial and facility planning, strengthening local management capacity, prioritizing basic tourism infrastructure, and developing digital marketing initiatives to increase destination visibility. The strategy formulation process considered the existing resources and capabilities of the local community so that the proposed interventions would be realistic, applicable, and consistent with the principles of community-based tourism development.

Location and Time of Implementation

The community engagement activity was conducted in Rante Hamlet, Taupe Village, Mamasa District, Mamasa Regency, West Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The activity took place from 8 to 10 February 2026. The location was selected based on the potential of Buntu Kepa' as a nature-based tourism destination and the need to strengthen its development through a locally oriented and participatory approach. During the implementation period, the activity involved field observation, assessment of existing tourism conditions, stakeholder discussions, and the formulation of recommendations for optimizing the destination based on its local potential.

Target Participants

The participants in this community engagement activity consisted of lecturers from STISIP Bina Generasi Polewali and final-semester students of the Public Administration Program at STISIP Bina Generasi Polewali. The involvement of lecturers provided academic and methodological support in the observation, analysis, and formulation of tourism development strategies, while the participation of final-semester students provided an opportunity to apply academic knowledge to a real community and destination-management context. The involvement of participants with an academic background in public administration was particularly relevant to the activity because tourism development requires effective governance, stakeholder coordination, community participation, and appropriate management of local resources.

Relevance to Higher Education Institutions

The community engagement activity on optimizing the tourism appeal of Buntu Kepa' based on local potential has strategic relevance to the institutional objectives of higher education. First, the activity represents an implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, particularly the community service component, by applying academic knowledge to address practical issues encountered by local communities and tourism stakeholders. The activity therefore establishes a direct connection between academic expertise and community development needs.

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Second, the activity contributes to the achievement of relevant Key Performance Indicators (IKU), particularly those associated with lecturers' engagement in activities beyond the university and the utilization of academic knowledge and outputs by communities. Through direct involvement in field-based tourism development, lecturers and students can contribute their knowledge while gaining practical experience in addressing real-world management and governance challenges.

Third, the activity supports the development of applied knowledge and research by connecting theoretical perspectives, particularly community-based tourism and local resource management, with empirical conditions in the field. The findings and experiences obtained from Buntu Kepa' can serve as a foundation for subsequent research, academic publications, student projects, and the development of evidence-based tourism management models for rural and highland destinations.

Finally, the activity provides an opportunity to establish and expand strategic partnerships between STISIP Bina Generasi Polewali and relevant stakeholders, including local government institutions and tourism-management communities in Mamasa Regency. Such partnerships can support the continuity of community engagement programs and create opportunities for collaborative activities in tourism planning, community empowerment, digital promotion, public administration, and sustainable local economic development.

Results and Discussion

Results of the Community Engagement Activity

Buntu Kepa' Nature Tourism Destination is administratively located in Rante Hamlet, Taupe Village, Mamasa District, Mamasa Regency, West Sulawesi Province. The destination is situated within a mountainous highland area at an elevation ranging from approximately 1,200 to 1,378 meters above sea level. Its geographical position gives the area considerable ecological and tourism value, particularly because it is located adjacent to the buffer area of Gandang Dewata National Park. The destination is relatively accessible from the administrative center of Mamasa. It is approximately 2–3 kilometers from Mamasa town and can normally be reached by both two-wheeled and four-wheeled vehicles within approximately 10–15 minutes. Nevertheless, despite its short geographical distance, the route toward the summit has distinctive mountainous characteristics, including steep sections that require careful driving and appropriate attention to road safety.

The physical landscape of Buntu Kepa' is dominated by green hills, dense vegetation, and relatively well-preserved natural surroundings. Its high elevation creates a cool microclimate, with temperatures becoming particularly cold from evening through the early morning. These geographical and climatic characteristics form the basis of the destination's principal attraction, commonly described as the "Land Above the Clouds." In the morning, thick white clouds and mist frequently cover the valleys below the viewpoint, creating an attractive landscape and providing opportunities to observe the sunrise. At night, the elevated location offers a broad landscape view of illuminated settlements in Mamasa, Balla, Tandukkalua, Sumarorong, and Messawa. Thus, the destination provides different visual experiences according to the time of day and has the potential to develop nature-based activities centered on landscape appreciation, sunrise viewing, camping, and outdoor recreation.

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The name Buntu Kepa' also has cultural and historical significance within the local community. In the local understanding, the term "Buntu" means hill, while "Kepa'" refers to the kekep bird. The area has traditionally been associated with the habitat of groups of kekep birds that move across the mountainous landscape of Mamasa. This local interpretation illustrates that the tourism value of Buntu Kepa' is not limited to its physical landscape but is also connected to local knowledge, historical narratives, and community identity. Incorporating such local meanings into destination interpretation could strengthen the authenticity of the tourism experience and distinguish Buntu Kepa' from other nature-based destinations.

The socio-economic conditions surrounding Buntu Kepa' indicate a strong relationship between local communities and the utilization of natural and productive resources. The local economy is primarily supported by agriculture, plantations, and small-scale livestock activities. The surrounding community also possesses several locally distinctive products, including Trigona honey, traditional culinary products, and miniature Mamasa traditional houses known as *Banua Pitu*. Buntu Kepa' was initially developed independently by a local initiator in March 2022 and has subsequently attracted visitors from several regional areas, including Makassar, Palu, and Luwu, as well as visitors from outside Indonesia. The relatively spacious summit area is used for camping, family recreation, and religious or spiritual activities. Increasing visitor flows have gradually stimulated local microeconomic activities, particularly through the emergence of small food and beverage stalls around the tourism area. This development indicates the emergence of a community-based tourism ecosystem in which local residents can participate directly in the economic benefits generated by tourism.



Figure 1. View of Buntu Kepa' Tourist Attraction

The assessment also identified several tourism potentials that can be further developed. The most prominent is the mountainous natural panorama, which combines expansive landscape views, green hills, and a cool highland climate. The relatively authentic environmental character of the area is another important asset because the landscape has not been extensively transformed by modern development. Furthermore, local commodities and cultural resources provide opportunities to diversify the tourism

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experience. The proximity of the destination to areas associated with Mamasa coffee production, traditional food, handicrafts, and local cultural practices creates opportunities to connect landscape-based tourism with agricultural and cultural tourism. Such integration could increase the variety of visitor experiences while simultaneously creating additional economic opportunities for local residents.

From the perspective of destination carrying capacity, Buntu Kepa' has several important strengths. The initial development of the destination was supported through community self-financing, demonstrating the commitment of local actors to utilizing their own resources. Community participation is also evident through collective labor in the initial arrangement and maintenance of the tourism area. In addition, the emergence of small culinary businesses demonstrates that tourism activity is beginning to generate local economic opportunities. However, these strengths are accompanied by significant development challenges. The management system remains relatively informal, and physical development has not yet been integrated into a formal tourism master plan. The existing management structure also remains largely personal or family-based, indicating the need for a more institutionalized community management organization, such as a Tourism Awareness Group (*Kelompok Sadar Wisata* or Pokdarwis). At the same time, promotional activities remain largely dependent on conventional word-of-mouth communication, while digital marketing capacity among local managers is still limited.

The main physical constraints identified during the activity relate to the availability of basic tourism infrastructure and accessibility. Essential supporting facilities, including adequate toilets, prayer facilities, and waste bins, remain limited. Road infrastructure toward the summit also requires improvement, while directional signage is insufficient for visitors who are unfamiliar with the area. These conditions are important because destination attractiveness must be supported by basic facilities that ensure visitor comfort, safety, and convenience. In addition, infrastructure development must be carefully managed because of the destination's proximity to the Gandang Dewata National Park buffer area. Long-term development therefore requires a balance between improving visitor facilities and maintaining the ecological characteristics that constitute the principal attraction of Buntu Kepa'.

Strategy for Optimizing Buntu Kepa' Tourism Based on Local Potential

The optimization of Buntu Kepa' as an emerging tourism destination requires a strategic approach that positions the local community and natural resources as the principal actors and assets of destination development. Given that the destination has developed primarily through community self-help and operates with limited financial resources, its development strategy should not depend exclusively on large-scale infrastructure investment. Instead, optimization can be achieved by improving the management and presentation of existing resources while gradually developing supporting facilities according to local capacity and environmental conditions.

The first strategic pillar is the development of eco-tourism infrastructure and sustainable spatial planning**.** Physical development should maintain the distinctive characteristics of Buntu Kepa', particularly its green hills, natural vegetation, and cool mountain environment. The application of green architecture principles can guide the construction of supporting facilities such as viewing platforms, gazebos, seating areas, and photo spots. Locally available and environmentally appropriate materials, such as bamboo and local timber, can be considered where technically and environmentally suitable. This approach can reduce initial investment requirements while creating facilities that visually integrate

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with the surrounding landscape. Development should also be supported by simple spatial zoning to ensure that important viewpoints and environmentally sensitive areas are protected from unnecessary physical intervention.

The second strategic pillar involves diversifying attractions through the integration of local culture and commodities**.** Buntu Kepa' should not rely solely on its natural panorama because a destination based exclusively on static scenery may provide limited opportunities to extend visitor stays and increase local economic participation. Local culinary products, Mamasa coffee, traditional handicrafts, and cultural performances can therefore be incorporated into the tourism experience. Small community-owned food stalls could be supported to provide locally distinctive food and Mamasa coffee in a clean and attractive setting. In addition, cultural activities such as traditional weaving, local music, or other cultural expressions could be presented periodically, particularly during weekends or designated tourism events. This approach would allow visitors to experience both the natural and cultural dimensions of Mamasa.

The third pillar is strengthening destination governance through the establishment of a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis)**.** The transition from individually or family-managed tourism toward community-based institutional management is important for ensuring continuity and accountability. A Pokdarwis involving local youth, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders could coordinate tourism services, cleanliness, environmental management, visitor safety, and promotional activities. The organization could also develop simple standard operating procedures covering visitor services, waste management, maintenance responsibilities, and financial administration. A more structured institution could facilitate communication and partnerships with the local government, tourism agencies, private-sector organizations, and other potential partners.

The fourth pillar is community-led digital marketing. The limited reach of conventional word-of-mouth promotion can be addressed through the systematic use of social media and digital platforms. Local managers can be trained in smartphone photography, short-form video production for platforms such as Instagram Reels and TikTok, and digital location management through Google Maps. The development of visually attractive but environmentally appropriate viewpoints can encourage visitors to generate user-created content and share their experiences through social media. In this way, visitors can become indirect promoters of the destination, creating a form of digital word-of-mouth marketing that can expand the visibility of Buntu Kepa' while requiring relatively limited financial resources. Digital promotion should nevertheless be accompanied by accurate information concerning access, facilities, safety, environmental rules, and visitor expectations.

Structured and Sustainable Management Recommendations

Based on the results of the field assessment, the development of Buntu Kepa' requires a phased management strategy that corresponds to the destination's current resources and institutional capacity. In the short term, priority should be given to establishing an organizational foundation. The current management arrangement should gradually be transformed into a community-based structure through the establishment of a formally recognized Pokdarwis, subject to applicable village and local-government regulations. Institutionalization would provide a clearer basis for managing tourism activities, coordinating community participation, accessing potential external support, and establishing accountability. At the same time, simple written standard operating

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procedures should be developed covering waste management, community work schedules, visitor safety, entrance fees where applicable, and basic visitor regulations. Environmental zoning should also be introduced by distinguishing a core conservation area, where natural vegetation and landscape characteristics are prioritized and permanent construction is restricted, from a utilization area designated for visitor facilities, seating, photo spots, and community-owned businesses.

In the medium term, development should focus on capacity building and strategic partnerships. Local residents and tourism managers can receive periodic training in visitor services, *Sapta Pesona* principles, entrepreneurship, food hygiene, and the preparation and presentation of local products such as Mamasa coffee. Strengthening these competencies would help improve the quality of visitor services while increasing the capacity of local residents to benefit economically from tourism. At the institutional level, communication and collaboration with the Mamasa Regency Tourism Office and other relevant government agencies should be strengthened to explore opportunities for improving road access, sanitation facilities, signage, and other essential infrastructure. Financial management should also be designed transparently, including an equitable revenue-sharing mechanism among relevant stakeholders such as landowners, the Pokdarwis, and the village. A portion of tourism revenue should be allocated specifically to environmental maintenance and facility improvement to support the destination's financial sustainability.

In the long term, Buntu Kepa' should develop a formal eco-tourism master plan based on local potential**.** The master plan should integrate spatial planning, environmental conservation, infrastructure development, community participation, cultural resources, local economic activities, and digital marketing into a coherent development framework. It should also consider the destination's relationship with other tourism attractions and village-based tourism initiatives in Mamasa so that Buntu Kepa' can become part of a broader tourism network rather than developing as an isolated attraction. In addition, the destination may pursue recognition within the national village-tourism network, including registration through the Ministry of Tourism's Tourism Village Information System (Jadesta), subject to eligibility and applicable regulations. Such institutional and promotional development can expand the destination's visibility while providing a stronger framework for sustainable tourism management. Ultimately, the long-term development of Buntu Kepa' should maintain a balance between tourism growth, community economic benefits, institutional strengthening, and the conservation of its mountainous natural environment.

Conclusion

The development of Buntu Kepa' Tourism Destination in Taupe Village, Mamasa Regency, demonstrates a form of community-based tourism that has emerged from local initiative and community self-reliance. From a management perspective, the input dimension is primarily supported by independent funding and strong community social capital through mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), without substantial government financial support. In terms of the process**,** the tourism area has been developed gradually while maintaining the natural character of the surrounding ecosystem, although the development process has not yet been supported by a formal planning document or comprehensive master plan. In terms of output, the initiative has successfully established a new nature-based tourism destination that has attracted visitors and stimulated the emergence of small-scale economic activities among surrounding residents.

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Buntu Kepa' has considerable potential to develop as an important tourism destination in Mamasa Regency if supported by improvements in governance, infrastructure, and promotional capacity. Active local community participation constitutes an important foundation for maintaining the sustainability and authenticity of the destination. The distinctive characteristics of Buntu Kepa' can be summarized in three main aspects. First, its development is characterized by independence and community self-reliance, as the tourism area has primarily been driven by local initiative and collective community efforts rather than government funding. Second, its traditional and flexible management system allows development decisions to respond directly to conditions in the field, although the absence of formal planning documents remains an institutional limitation. Nevertheless, local managers have demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the natural characteristics of the mountainous environment. Third, the destination has generated tangible local economic effects. Although these impacts remain relatively small in scale, the emergence of tourism-related microenterprises, particularly food and beverage businesses, indicates that the destination is beginning to create new livelihood and income opportunities for surrounding communities.

The long-term sustainability and development of Buntu Kepa' will depend on the establishment of strategic collaboration among local communities, tourism managers, local government, and other relevant stakeholders. Such collaboration is particularly important in relation to access to development capital, formalization of spatial and destination planning, infrastructure improvement, institutional strengthening, and integrated tourism promotion. Strengthening these dimensions while maintaining community participation and environmental conservation will be essential for ensuring that the future development of Buntu Kepa' generates sustained local economic benefits without compromising the natural and cultural assets that constitute its principal tourism appeal.

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