Realizing the sustainable potential of Indonesian marine tourism through effective and participatory local tourism governance

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Abstract: Mandala Ria Beach in Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi, possesses significant marine tourism potential but faces various challenges in its development. This study aims to analyze the application of Local Tourism Governance principles and their impact on community welfare and destination sustainability. Employing a qualitative approach that combines literature review, field observations, and in-depth interviews. The collected data was analyzed qualitatively using NVivo 12 Plus software to identify patterns and themes. The findings reveal that collaboration among village government, local communities, and the Bulukumba Regency Tourism Office is key to overcoming constraints such as limited infrastructure, weak human resource quality in tourism, and environmental conservation issues. Local Tourism Governance at Mandala Ria Beach encompasses aspects of transparency, accountability, vision and leadership, acceptance of diversity, knowledge and skill development, and clarity of roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. However, the absence of an official Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Tourism Office and the Ara Village Government, as well as potential land ownership conflicts, pose challenges in optimizing sustainable tourism development. This study recommends the formulation of more integrated and community-oriented tourism strategies and policies, involving dialogue and coordination among stakeholders, and the development of guidelines for destination management, human resource capacity building, and preservation of local environment and culture. Consequently, the development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism is expected to provide equitable and sustainable benefits for all parties involved.

Keywords: Integrated development strategies, Local governance principles, Stakeholder collaboration, Sustainable tourism challenges.

1. Introduction

Bulukumba Regency in South Sulawesi Province possesses abundant tourism potential, particularly marine tourism along its 164 km coastline (Yusuf et al., 2024; Sebastian et al., 2024). One of the premier destinations is Mandala Ria Beach in Ara Village, Bonto Bahari District. This white sandy beach with clear seawater offers a picturesque panorama and rich historical value. In 1961, it became the site for the construction of landing craft by local communities at the request of Commander Mandala for the West Irian liberation operation, from which the name Mandala Ria originates (Gardner, 2019).

Despite its charm and historical significance, the development of Mandala Ria Beach still faces various obstacles. Access to the location, consisting of damaged and steep roads, hinders visitors' comfort in reaching the beach. The lack of supporting facilities, such as accommodation, is also a weakness in offering overnight experiences for visitors. Moreover, the availability of electricity and energy still relies on community self-funded initiatives.

In addition to infrastructure, other challenges arise from management aspects. Local communities working in the tourism sector have not fully prioritized environmental conservation (Baloch et al., 2023; Strzelecka et al., 2024; Kurniati & Nurini, 2024). This is quite risky considering that this location is a center for Phinisi boat construction, which is prone to production waste and debris. The lack of

professional skills among tourism service providers is another area for improvement. Foreign language proficiency, especially English, is still considered insufficient for serving international tourists (Mananeke, 2016; Kasim, 2022; Lee et al., 2023; Clarah et al., 2023; Annisa et al., 2023).

On the other hand, the existence of Mandala Ria Beach opens opportunities for collaboration between the village government and local communities. The potential for marine tourism as the main attraction can be integrated with cultural tourism as a supporting attraction. The presence of Phinisi craftsmen around the beach can add value by providing education and unique experiences for tourists. The active involvement of youth in developing the tourism village is also a promising social capital (Lee, 2005; Lewicka, 2005; Nugraha et al., 2021; Basile et al., 2021).

However, efforts to advance Mandala Ria Beach as a leading destination in Bulukumba are not free from the competing interests of various stakeholders. Local government, investors, community leaders, and local residents often clash in vying for claims and influence over the management of this area. The potential for escalating conflicts could be counterproductive to ongoing development initiatives (Ying Wang et al., 2014; Fan, 2024; Zhu et al., 2025).

Ultimately, the success in transforming Mandala Ria Beach into an advanced and sustainable destination requires strong synergy and commitment from all stakeholders. Collaboration between the village government and community participation is key to unifying visions and mitigating sectoral egos. Only through good and integrative tourism governance can all the potential of this beach be developed optimally and sustainably.

Local Tourism Governance is an approach that emphasizes the active and collaborative role of local government (Keyim, 2018; Brokaj, 2014). This is supported by several recent studies in the past three years. Junaid (2021), in his research in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, emphasizes the importance of active local government involvement in planning, developing, and managing tourist destinations, where local government acts as a facilitator, regulator, and coordinator in optimizing local tourism potential. Similarly, Nugroho & Putri (2023) reveal that the success of tourism development in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is inseparable from the active role of local government in coordinating stakeholders, providing infrastructure, and creating a conducive climate for tourism investment.

The collaborative governance theory proposed by Ansell and Gash (2018) also emphasizes the importance of collaboration between government, community, and the private sector in tourism governance, where local government acts as a collaboration leader facilitating active involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process. The local government-centered approach to tourism governance has also been proven to increase the effectiveness of tourist destination management, as demonstrated by Selvaag et al. (2020) in Norway. In this context, local government plays a role in coordinating resources, aligning interests, and ensuring tourism sustainability. Through a participatory local tourism governance approach, local governments can empower communities, preserve culture, and improve economic welfare in tourist destinations.

In the context of Mandala Ria Beach, the implementation of Local Tourism Governance becomes crucial considering the significant marine and cultural tourism potential of this area, which is still constrained by various issues ranging from infrastructure and human resource quality to conflicts of interest among actors. This study aims to analyze the extent to which Local Tourism Governance principles have been applied in the development of Mandala Ria Beach and their impact on community welfare and long-term destination sustainability.

Research on local tourism governance at Mandala Ria Beach is important to map the roles and contributions of village government and local communities in developing sustainable marine tourism. The resulting findings can serve as a reference in formulating better management strategies and policies for the future. By understanding the dynamics of tourism governance at the village level, the wealth of natural and cultural resources in Bulukumba can be maximally utilized, not only for the welfare of local residents but also for the overall progress of the region.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach, combining literature review, field observations, and in-depth interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of Local Tourism Governance in the

development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism. The literature review involves analyzing relevant books, journals, and government documents related to tourism governance, sustainable tourism development, community participation, and tourism policy. This desk research provides a theoretical foundation and contextual background for the study.

Field observations are conducted at Mandala Ria Beach and its surrounding areas in Ara Village to directly observe and document the current state of tourism development, infrastructure, facilities, and community involvement. These observations offer valuable insights into the real-world implementation of tourism governance principles and help identify potential challenges and opportunities.

In-depth interviews are carried out with key stakeholders, including local government officials from the Bulukumba Tourism Office, village leaders, community representatives, tourism business owners, and NGOs involved in tourism development. The interviews aim to gather diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of existing tourism governance practices, the level of collaboration between stakeholders, and the impacts of tourism on the local community. Purposive sampling is used to select informants who have direct knowledge and experience in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of tourism development at Mandala Ria Beach.

The collected data, including interview transcripts, observation notes, and document analysis, is then coded and analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and relationships within the data, which are then interpreted in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. NVivo 12 Plus software is utilized to facilitate the coding and analysis process, ensuring a systematic and rigorous approach to data management and interpretation.

Through this combination of literature review, field observations, and in-depth interviews, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Local Tourism Governance practices in the development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism. The findings are expected to contribute to the formulation of strategies and recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of tourism governance, promoting sustainable tourism development, and maximizing the benefits for the local community in Ara Village and the broader Bulukumba Regency.

3. Results

3.1. Positive Culture, Constructive Communication, and Community Involvement

The development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism involves collaboration between the private sector and the community. Positive culture and constructive communication are crucial factors in this process, considering that this tourist destination is situated within a community with a distinctive culture. Bulukumba Regency has gained global recognition, partly due to its Pinisi shipbuilding sites, which have become an international attraction. Local community members, such as owners of food stalls and cafes, are also actively involved in tourism development by cleaning the beach area and providing facilities for tourists.

Table 1.
Various forms of governance in the development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism.

No	Forms of governance	Involved actors	Roles and contributions
1	Transparency and accountability	• Tourism office of Bulukumba Regency • Tourism destination managers	• Involving stakeholders in decision-making • Human resource development through craft training • Digital promotion strategies
2	Vision and leadership	• Tourism office of Bulukumba • Ara village government	• Involving stakeholders in decision-making • Human resource development through craft training

			• Digital promotion strategies • Assessing situations • Identifying development steps • Managing conditions effectively • Digital marketing through social media, websites, and applications
3	Acceptance of Diversity, efforts to achieve equality and inclusivity	• Local community • Youth groups	• Understanding of tourist destinations • Proficiency in Indonesian and foreign languages • Serving as translators and tour guides
4	Development of knowledge, learning, and various skills	• Tourism Office of Bulukumba • All involved parties	• Training in: Destination management Handicraft production Homestay management Enhancement of excellent service skills Foreign language proficiency • Raising awareness about environmental conservation
5	Clear roles and responsibilities of participants, operational structure, and network processes	• Local community (Homestay owners and Pinisi boat workers) • Youth groups • Local government • Youth organization (Karang Taruna) • Tourism awareness group • All involved parties	• Providing accommodation • Preserving the culture of traditional boat building • Offering hospitality and quality service • Empowerment as guides and interpreters for foreign tourists

The table above illustrates various forms of governance in the development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism, along with the actors involved and their roles and contributions. Although there are positive efforts in local tourism governance, several implications and challenges are still faced at this tourist destination.

3.2. Transparency and Accountability
Transparency and accountability involve stakeholders in providing input and making constructive decisions for the development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism. The Tourism Office of Bulukumba

Regency has not yet collected local revenue (PAD) from this destination but continues to involve managers in human resource development through craft training. Digital promotion strategies are also considered important to support tourism development. However, the absence of an official Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Tourism Office and the Ara Village Government has become an obstacle to maximum collaboration.

3.3. Vision and Leadership

Vision and leadership in the development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism require the government to read situations, identify necessary steps, and manage conditions effectively. The absence of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Tourism Office and Ara Village Government has resulted in a lack of a clear framework for future development. Nevertheless, several efforts have been made, such as digital marketing through social media, websites, and applications to attract tourists.

3.4. Acceptance of Diversity, Efforts to Achieve Equality and Inclusivity

In developing Mandala Ria Beach tourism, accepting diversity from various tourist backgrounds becomes crucial to achieve equality and inclusivity and avoid conflicts. The main challenge lies in the local community's understanding of tourist destinations and proficiency in the Indonesian language for interacting with tourists. Mastery of foreign languages, especially English, is also necessary to serve international tourists. The formation of youth groups as translators and tour guides is one of the solutions being pursued.

3.5. Development of Knowledge, Learning, and Various Skills

Human resource development becomes an important focus in developing Mandala Ria Beach tourism. All parties involved are expected to have knowledge and expertise in their respective fields. The Tourism Office of Bulukumba Regency has conducted training on destination management, handicrafts, and homestay management. However, budget limitations have become an obstacle to more intensive coaching. Weak skills in excellent service and foreign language proficiency also pose challenges. Additionally, local community awareness in preserving the environment, especially in managing waste from Pinisi boat construction, still needs to be improved.

3.6. Clear Roles and Responsibilities of Participants, Operational Structure, and Network Processes

The roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in developing Mandala Ria Beach tourism need to be based on sustainable tourism strategies. Local communities, such as homestay owners and Pinisi boat workers, have played a role in providing accommodation and preserving the culture of traditional boat building. Hospitality and good service become added values in attracting tourists. The local government has also empowered youth organizations and tourism awareness groups as guides and interpreters for foreign tourists. However, this empowerment still needs to be enhanced through further guidance and training.

The development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism faces several challenges that need to be addressed to achieve sustainable tourism governance. The following diagram summarizes these challenges:
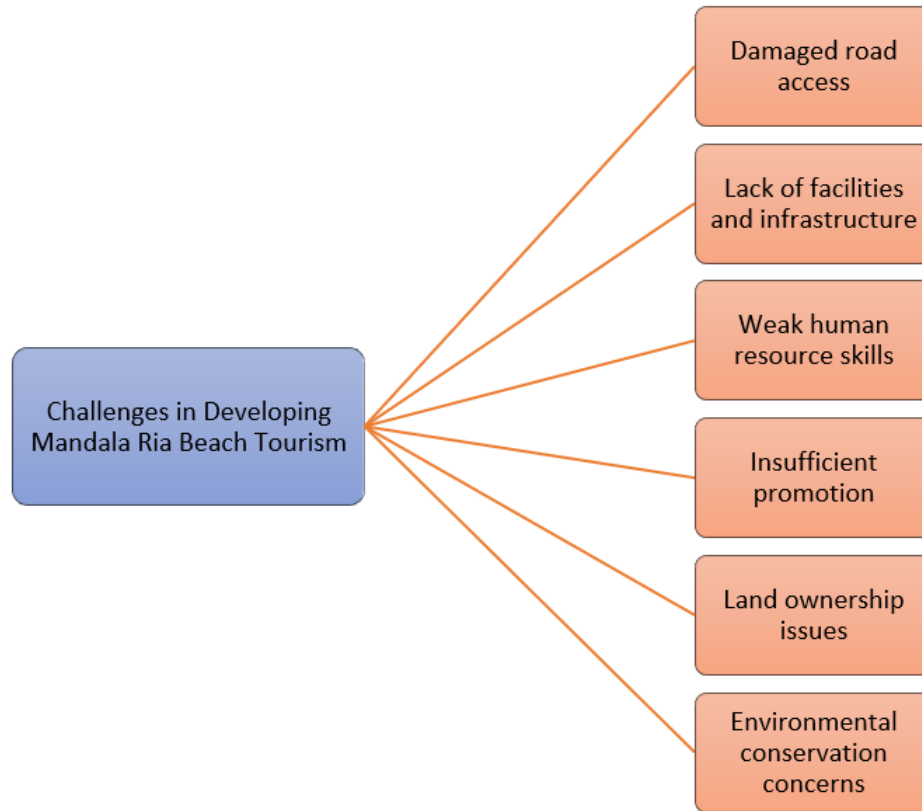
Figure 1.
Development challenges.

The main challenges in developing Mandala Ria Beach tourism include damaged road access, lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure, weak skills of tourism human resources, insufficient promotion, land ownership issues, and environmental conservation concerns. The damaged and steep road access makes it difficult for tourists to reach the destination. The scarcity of accommodation facilities and limited electricity availability also hinder visitor comfort. The weak skills of human resources, especially in foreign language proficiency and excellent service, affect the quality of tourism services. Insufficient promotion and information through digital media limit the reach of the tourist market. Land ownership issues involving local communities and investors create potential for conflict. Additionally, environmental conservation, particularly the management of waste from Pinisi boat construction, poses a challenge in maintaining the cleanliness and aesthetics of the beach.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that the successful development of this tourist destination requires collaboration and synergy between the village government, local communities, and the Tourism Office of Bulukumba Regency. The identified forms of Local Tourism Governance, such as collaboration between village government and community, local community participation, and cooperation with the Tourism Office, reflect the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach in managing tourism resources sustainably (Keyim, 2018; Brokaj, 2014). Although Mandala Ria Beach has significant marine and cultural tourism potential, several significant challenges need to be addressed to achieve optimal development. Poor road access, lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure, and weak tourism human resource skills are common obstacles faced by many tourist destinations in developing countries (Aliyah et al., 2020; Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016). These findings emphasize the need for adequate investment in

physical infrastructure and human resource capacity development to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of tourist destinations.

The lack of promotion and information through digital media also poses a constraint in reaching a wider tourist market. In the current era of digitalization, technology-based tourism marketing is becoming increasingly important to improve visibility and attract tourist interest (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2020; Slivar et al., 2021). Therefore, an effective and integrated digital promotion strategy needs to be developed to position Mandala Ria Beach as a premier tourist destination in Bulukumba Regency.

Land ownership issues and potential conflicts between local communities and investors also present challenges in developing Mandala Ria Beach tourism. Such conflicts are common in tourism contexts, where the interests of various parties may clash (Saufi et al., 2019; Wondirad et al., 2020). To address this issue, fair and inclusive conflict resolution mechanisms are needed, as well as policies that protect the rights of local communities while encouraging responsible investment.

Furthermore, environmental conservation, particularly waste management from the Pinisi boat-building industry, becomes a crucial challenge in maintaining the cleanliness and aesthetics of Mandala Ria Beach. Sustainable tourism requires a balance between economic development and environmental protection (Hall, 2019; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). Therefore, environmentally friendly waste management practices involving local community participation need to be implemented to minimize negative impacts on the coastal ecosystem.

The findings of this study also highlight the importance of transparency, accountability, and clear vision and leadership in local tourism governance. The absence of an official Memorandum of Understanding between the Tourism Office and Ara Village Government hinders coordination and synergy in the development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism. A strong and collaborative institutional framework is necessary to ensure effective planning, implementation, and evaluation in tourist destination management (Keyim, 2018; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

Acceptance of diversity, efforts to achieve equality and inclusivity, and the development of knowledge and expertise become important aspects in the development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism. Local community understanding of tourism, language proficiency, and excellent service skills need to be enhanced through structured empowerment and training programs. Active involvement of local communities in decision-making and the distribution of tourism benefits is also crucial to ensure inclusive and sustainable development (Saufi et al., 2019).

5. Conclusions

The development of Mandala Ria Beach tourism in Ara Village, Bonto Bahari District, Bulukumba Regency reflects the complexity of local tourism governance involving collaboration between government, community, and other stakeholders. Although this destination has promising marine and cultural tourism potential, various challenges such as limited infrastructure, weak human resource quality, and environmental conservation issues indicate the need for more comprehensive and inclusive efforts.

The implications of implementing Local Tourism Governance at Mandala Ria Beach encompass several important aspects, including strengthening synergy among actors, increasing local community participation, developing tourist attractions based on local wisdom, and improving tourism support facilities. Furthermore, potential conflicts of interest, government responsibility in protecting community welfare, and the influence of social and cultural norms contribute to the dynamics of tourism governance in this destination. The lack of clear regulations and formal cooperation between the Ara Village Government and the Tourism Office of Bulukumba Regency remains one of the obstacles in optimizing sustainable tourism development.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that stakeholders at Mandala Ria Beach consider formulating more integrated tourism strategies and policies that favor local communities. These policies need to involve dialogue and coordination between village government, the Tourism Office, business actors, and community representatives to ensure that the interests and rights of all parties are respected without neglecting the protection of vulnerable groups. Additionally, it is crucial to develop clear guidelines for tourist destination management, enhancement of tourism human resource capacity, and

preservation of the local environment and culture to ensure the long-term sustainability of Mandala Ria Beach tourism development. This is expected to provide a sense of security, comfort, and fairness for tourists, local communities, and all parties involved in managing this tourist destination.

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