

The Social Aspects for Sustainability of “Wisata Kampung Sawah” Agrotourism in North Sumatera, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines the societal factors that impact the social sustainability of the Wisata Kampung Sawah agrotourism project in Pematang Johar Village, Labuhan Deli District, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Agrotourism, which combines agricultural activities with tourism, is crucial in promoting local economic growth and preserving the environment. Nevertheless, insufficient institutional backing and fragmented program implementation hinder its development in Indonesia. This study utilizes a qualitative methodology, specifically examining the viewpoints of farmers engaged in agrotourism. The study used focus group discussions (FGDs) to examine the primary social aspects such as transparency, community cohesion, and local management techniques. The findings indicate that the act of openly sharing information and promoting innovation has a significant role in building trust and encouraging active involvement from all parties involved. This is particularly important for the long-term success of agrotourism. The cohesion of the community promotes collaboration and efficient utilization of resources, while proficient local management strategies guarantee that tourism activities are in line with community requirements and cultural conservation. The findings indicate that reinforcing these social components greatly improves the sustainability of agrotourism, resulting in substantial economic, social, and environmental advantages. This study provides useful insights for enhancing the management of agrotourism and fostering comprehensive sustainable development in rural settings.

Key words: Agrotourism • Social Sustainability • Transparency • Community Cohesion • Local Management Practices

INTRODUCTION

Agrotourism is a form of tourism that emphasises agricultural activities and rural communities. Agrotourism plays a significant role in the worldwide tourism business and is recognized as a means of promoting local economic growth [1-4]. In Indonesia, agrotourism is defined as a form of tourism that utilizes agribusiness as a focal point, aiming to enhance knowledge, provide recreational experiences, and foster business relations within the agricultural sector [5, 6]. It serves as a unique attraction that immerses visitors in agricultural activities while promoting educational and business opportunities.

Agrotourism in Indonesia is underdevelopment, Marwanti [7] identified six main factors contributing to the under development of agrotourism in Indonesia, including limited capital for farmers, insufficient

institutional support, lack of human resource competence, limited market access, inadequate assistance from relevant institutions, and fragmented program implementation.

Based on the statistics provided by Statistics of Indonesia [8], there was a substantial increase in the number of international tourists visiting Indonesia, rising from 142.01 million to 809.96 million between March 2022 and March 2023 (on a monthly basis). The countries with the highest number of visits were Malaysia (15.39%), Singapore (13.74%), Australia (11.87%), Timor Leste (7.85%), and China (6.42%). Tourists entered Indonesia using multiple modes of transportation, such as air, sea, and land.

North Sumatra, the third-largest city in Indonesia, it boasts a wide range of engaging tourist attractions that draw a significant number of visitors. These attractions encompass a wide range of themes, such as natural,

cultural, artistic, creative industries, historical, shopping, and gastronomic tourism. The Statistics of Indonesia (BPS) reported in 2023 that North Sumatra possesses a wealth of tourism potential, which attracts both domestic and foreign tourists. By listening to their direct voices, we can deeply understand how farmers see the existence and sustainability of agrotourism. The study investigates the perceptions, perspectives, and goals of farmers regarding social factors in the context of agrotourism sustainability, including transparency, cohesive communities, and local governance.

Social Dimensions: The sustainability of agrotourism endeavours is contingent upon the social dimensions [5, 9]. To ensure social cohesion and project success, it is critical to engage a variety of stakeholders, including local communities and governments [10, 11]. Furthermore, agrotourism practices that incorporate local knowledge and customs can increase local economic output and advance community welfare [10]. Social inclusion initiatives are also necessary for agrotourism real estate investments to be successful, highlighting the importance of social sustainability factors [12].

The overall sustainability of agrotourism initiatives can be improved by community-based agrotourism development strategies that prioritise social empowerment, income generation, and poverty alleviation [13-15].

In summary, giving social considerations top priority in agrotourism initiatives can boost community welfare, fortify social ties, spur economic growth, and support the preservation of the environment and cultural heritage.

Transparency: An essential component of agrotourism's sustainability is transparency. Academic research has demonstrated that agrotourism can successfully strike a balance between the needs of visitors and rural communities, fostering social and economic development while reducing adverse environmental effects. Involving a range of stakeholders is essential for promoting sustainable development in the field of rural agrotourism, highlighting the need for open and honest decision-making procedures [10]. In addition, the development of assessment metrics for sustainable rural tourism underscores the significance of open and inclusive decision-making processes in guaranteeing the long-term viability of tourism initiatives [16].

Agrotourism in Indonesia, emphasize the importance of transparency in addressing environmental, social, and

economic dimensions [17]. Furthermore, the development of social capital and the involvement of local institutions are critical to the advancement of agrotourism because they support economic diversification, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment. This emphasises the value of transparency in promoting sustainable agrotourism [13].

Agrotourism sustainability faces a variety of challenges from the social aspects, as mentioned by Baharudin *et al.* [12]; Olagunju [18]; Rosardi *et al.* [17]; Rosardi *et al.* [9]; Wartini *et al.* [19]; Zulgani *et al.* [10] regarding transparency. It will build strong relationships and trust from local communities, protect the environment, and impact on a satisfying experience for visitors. By incorporating transparency into the development strategy of agrotourism sites, like the Pagilaran Tea Plantation, a holistic approach that considers social, economic, environmental, and educational aspects can be achieved [9].

Community Cohesion: The sustainability of agrotourism initiatives takes into consideration community cohesion. Community capacity is built through social cohesion which is facilitated by unity, ties and dependable relationships within the community [20]. The strength of social connections among the community determines its cooperative potential, transparency in communication and affinity bonds crucial for the longevity and success of Agrotourism endeavours [21]. Further, promoting successful communication, social relationships and overall community development, hence justifying such factors as acceptance of diversity, and trust that encourage sustainable practices in agrotourism [21, 22]. The prosperity and welfare of agrotourism farmers and other residents depend on the degree to which a united community fosters local economic growth and job prospects [13, 23]. Manaf *et al.* [24] elucidate that agrotourism not only develops communities economically but also strengthens bonds through social ties among them, thus making it possible for these localities to be self-reliant. This understanding further emphasises the importance of community cohesion in achieving the objectives and maintaining the vitality of agrotourism initiatives through processes such as enlisting local institutions and promoting social capital development to achieve sustainable Agrotourism development [13].

Many studies have identified community cohesion and agrotourism sustainability [25-28]. Community cohesion will encourage collaboration, cooperation,

participation, empowerment and preservation of culture and traditions. The last factor is local managerial practices [29-31]. Effective local management is needed to maintain a balance between sustainable tourism development and the preservation of the local environment and culture.

Local Management Practices: Integrating culture and traditional knowledge into agrotourism programs can enhance the economic income level for locals. This integration will also encourage communities to participate in sustainable practices [32]. Local authorities are crucial players with regards to ensuring agrotourism success and sustainability hence calling for collaboration between them and the management team in charge of these activities [33]. Moreover, the active participation of local associations and stakeholders geared towards economic development at the grassroots level is one of the local economic development strategies employed in agrotourism areas for promoting sustainability [2]. Community forest management that effectively considers ecosystem functioning and indigenous ecological knowledge is necessary for sustained forest resource conservation [34]. It is also important to note that rural tourists come from diverse backgrounds thus understanding their existence would enhance the growth of rural tourism thereby requiring a long-term planning perspective on the part of those involved in managing such places.

Therefore, this study focuses on identifying the social dimension of agrotourism sustainability from the farmers' point of view. This is necessary because farmers are not only the main actors in this industry but also the guardians of local wisdom and community sustainability. The results of this research are expected to help improve Wisata Kampung Sawah management, empower local communities, boost regional economic growth, and provide tourists with a better tourist experience. Moreover, the research findings can offer valuable perspectives for formulating enhanced agrotourism sustainability strategies and policies at both the local and global scales, thereby enabling agribusinesses to serve as a potent instrument for comprehensive sustainable development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach to explore agro-social sustainability from a farmer's perspective, focusing on transparency, community cohesion, and local management techniques. The

qualitative approach was chosen because of its ability to reveal the meaning, experience, and subjective context of respondents that cannot be fully explained through a quantitative approach [35, 36]. This approach looks at the personal experience and explanation of someone who is highly valued [37] and is complementary to qualitative research.

The primary method employed for data gathering was the utilization of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to investigate agro-social sustainability from the viewpoint of farmers, with particular emphasis on transparency, community cohesiveness, and local management techniques. The FGD participants consist of 15 farmers residing in the village of Pematang Johar. These farmers are actively engaged in agrotourism activities and are also members of the village's farmers' group. Before implementing the FGD, we created a thorough discussion guide to ensure that all research factors are covered. The participants were assembled in a room that was previously furnished with a set of recording tools, which were intended to document the FGD process.

Data collected from FGD will be recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Qualitative data analysis techniques and thematic analysis are used to identify major themes, patterns, and insights that emerge from the discussion. It involves the process of encoding data and synthesizing findings to understand the participant's collective perspective on agrotourism sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic: This section provides a comprehensive review of the characteristics and background of paddy farmers, as well as the social aspects related to the sustainability of Wisata Kampung Sawah. The respondent's profile is displayed in Table 1.

The majority (56.3%) of farmers had an elementary school education, and 87.5% of them were married. The mean duration of farmers' involvement in rice production is 5-6 years, with the majority of them having a family size of 3 individuals (80%). All farmers implemented the paddy-paddy cycle in their agricultural practices, with 73.3% of them including their families in cultivation activities. 26.7% of paddy rice farmers participated in and perceived the opportunity (73.3%) to engage in agrotourism. Agrotourism provides employment opportunities for a majority of farmers, with 53.3% of them being able to work in this sector. The majority of the

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondent FGD Section

Demographic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Education		
Elementary School	9	56.3
Junior High School	3	18.8
Senior High School	3	18.8
Marital Status		
Not Married Yet	1	6.3
Married	14	87.5
Farmers Experience		
1-2 years	2	12.2
5-6 years	6	37.5
More than 6 years	4	25.0
Others	3	18.8
Family Member		
No one	3	18.8
One Person	1	6.3
Two Person	2	12.5
Three Person	8	50.0
Others (more than 3 person)	1	6.3
Paddy Planting Cyclus		
Paddy- Paddy	15	100.0
Who involve cultivation		
Family	11	73.3
Non-Family	4	26.7
Opportunity to Join Agrotourism		
Yes	11	73.3
No	3	20.0
Others	1	6.7
Involve Agrotourism		
Yes	4	26.7
No	8	53.3
Others	3	20.0
Benefits Agrotourism		
Job Opportunity	8	53.3
Knowledge	1	6.7
Capital Access	1	6.7
Others	5	33.3
Capital source		
Bank	1	6.6
Non-Bank	7	46.6
Others	7	46.6

Source: Primary Data, 2024

farmers' capital for agriculture activities was sourced from non-banking institutions, accounting for 46.65%.

Social Aspect in Agrotourism: The results showed three important social dimensions of Wisata Kampung Sawah sustainability, including transparency, community cohesion, and local management technique.

1. Transparency and Agrotourism Sustainability: Transparency in the realm of agrotourism sustainability refers to the clear and open provision of information,

active involvement of the community, and the promotion of education and awareness. Respondents showcased the transparency of information through their knowledge of cultivation techniques, the possibility of developing products and services, and their utilization of information media as a source of ideas and inspiration. The method of achieving transparency is through the utilization of "lemeng" and "salibu" techniques, which are applied after the completion of the first growing season in two-cycle paddy cultivation. The farmer obtains this information from the agricultural adviser personnel in the village. "Lemeng" is the process of preparing paddy seedlings by soaking them in a small pool or nursery before they are transplanted to the main field. Conversely, "salibu" is a pioneering technique in rice farming that enables farmers to achieve many harvests during a single growing season without the need for replanting.

Only a minority of farmers possess this knowledge, hence not all farmers employ this cultivation strategy. As stated by responder 1 below. The absence of knowledge and openness. The lack of transparency among other farmers poses a significant challenge to the long-term viability of Sawah Village Tourism. If every farmer possesses awareness and a willingness to embrace novel knowledge, concepts, or innovations, it will enhance the likelihood of transforming into an additional tourist destination. Experience the Sawah Village Tour and indulge in its delights. Visitors can not only appreciate the scenic paddy fields in the area, but also engage in activities like planting rice seedlings and participating in cultivation operations. The implementation of sustainable farming techniques using "lemeng" and "salibu" in rice cultivation has a positive effect on the growth of tourist activity, providing visitors with a unique experience. Additionally, it contributes to the improved and responsible administration of Wisata Kampung Sawah.

“This is what is rarely realized to the community, how to cultivate paddy with salibu after 2 planting seasons, my own family still does not know this technique” (P1, Male, Sub-village 7)

The use of social media is not only a summit of information but also a promotional media. Farmers can acquire ideas, sources of inspiration and socialization, by looking at activities or tourism products offered elsewhere. Farmers are aware of the importance of social media as a source, media of promotion of products or tourist activities offered in Wisata Kampung Sawah, but

only a few of them are aware, as mentioned by farmers 1, 5. This shows that farmers are aware of the importance of information technology as an educational medium and a means of promotion. Only a few farmers are aware of this, which shows a lack of openness among farmers in the use of information technology.

The results of the FGD showed that there exists a spectrum of transparency among farmers towards information and technology. In this regard, some farmers are open to new information, including open-field cultivation, acceptance of innovative ideas to develop products and services and embracing technological improvements. When the awareness of the importance of transparency to information and technology among farmers is realised, then the trust, the sense of ownership and the commitment of the community will awaken. If all the farmers are committed, then the sustainability of the Wisata Kampung Sawah can be achieved.

In the context of transparency, communication strategies play a pivotal role in engaging stakeholders effectively, as a fundamental element in building trust, fostering engagement, and ensuring accountability [38, 39]. By integrating transparent communication strategies, fostering trust among stakeholders, and ensuring accountability, agrotourism initiatives can thrive and contribute positively to local economies and environments.

2. Community Cohesion and Agrotourism Sustainability: Community cohesion refers to a sense of unity, cooperation and solidarity between members of local communities involved in or affected by agrotourism activities. The success of agrotourism sustainability depends on support, participation, and cooperation among community members. Public participation is its involvement in the activities of the Wisata Kampung Sawah, ranging from planning, and implementation to evaluation of programmes. Farmers are not only part of the implementation of activities, but also of the planning and evaluation process. Farmers will be interested in creating innovations, new ideas to attract more and more visitors and come to the Wisata Kampung Sawah. As expands by Dalsgaard [40] it involves not only providing access to resources but also enabling communication and collaboration across traditional barriers. The desire is implemented with the intensity of farmers who are increasingly interacting and cooperating, farmers are becoming increasingly often meeting to talk about the development of Sawah Village Tourism, carry out product development below.

Community cohesion is demonstrated by community activity that unites and collaborates through *gotong royong* cleaning the area around the Wisata Kampung Sawah site. The awakening social interaction between communities is becoming stronger with increasingly frequent non-formal meetings in the fields to discuss how product development, menus and quality of food, farmers are becoming more frequently to come to their fields to nurture and ensure their paddy grow optimally, as shown by farmers 4 and 8 above. Community cohesion built between farmers plus motivation, government support will enhance the opportunities for sustainability of Wisata Kampung Sawah.

Gotong royong is one of the principles in the social and cultural life of the community, as well as the local charity that is still preserved and carried out by the society today. This activity is carried out collectively between the members of the community working together to a common goal. The form of *gotong royong* that the community carries out in cleaning, improving the infrastructure in the area of Wisata Kampung Sawah.

Our findings also highlight the importance of community cohesion in maintaining agrotourism sustainability. Solidarity and cooperation between farmers and local communities facilitate sustainable resource management, knowledge exchange, and joint problem-solving in addressing the challenges faced by agrotourism. Junaedi [41] highlights the importance of local community empowerment in the development of agrotourism, while Widyagraha *et al.* [42] emphasized the active involvement of the Blimbingsari community in the conservation of the West Bali National Park. These studies underscore the significance of collaboration and stakeholder participation in promoting sustainable agrotourism. Having community cohesion will raise social well-being, cohesive groups tend to be happy and healthy. Cohesion can also strengthen resilience to the challenges and crises faced by groups, besides with community cohesion there is a sense of connectivity and appreciation so affecting engagement in the sustainability of agrotourism. With community cohesion, communities can be more effective in managing resources, solving problems, and achieving common goals that support environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Thus, community cohesion is not only about unity in action but also about building a sense of shared ownership, responsibility, and a common direction in developing sustainable agrotourism as stated by Artal-Tur *et al.* [43], they mentioned that community resources and capabilities, organization and strategies plays a crucial role

in creating sustainable conditions for rural communities interested in tourism.

3. Local Management Practices and Agrotourism Sustainability: The sustainability of Agrotourism heavily relies on effective local management practices. The local management practices for Wisata Kampung Sawah include the capacity to comprehend the requirements and aspirations of the community, the capacity to guide and synchronize with all stakeholders, the capacity to engage communities, incorporate local knowledge, and promote the active involvement of communities.

Facilitating community engagement will foster the active involvement of community members and enhance their sense of ownership and responsibility for the programs undertaken by Wisata Kampung Sawah. If this occurs, it will lead to an enhancement of the interconnectedness and supportiveness of social networks among different societies. It is imperative to establish a society that is both resilient and cohesive when confronted with difficulties. The participation and collaboration of all stakeholders in the Wisata Kampung Sawah project will contribute to the improvement of social welfare and unity. The active engagement and contribution of farmers in all stages, from planning to evaluation, is crucial for ensuring the long-term viability of Wisata Kampung Sawah.

Effective local management practices will have an impact on sustainable agrotourism management, and it will be effective to sustainability of Wisata Kampung Sawah. With good management skills, such as strategic planning, decision-making, and problem-solving, will be more effective in designing and implementing sustainability programs. In reality, local management leadership has not been implemented well, as felt by several farmers in the Wisata Kampung Sawah. Farmers and the community have not been involved in the management of the Wisata Kampung Sawah at the planning or programming stages.

Good local management can ensure agrotourism management that suits the needs and conditions of the local community. Sutiarto [44] suggests that integrated management is required from the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages, integrating all stakeholders' interests. Sarjana and Surya [45] mentioned that community participation in agrotourism development is carried out starting from the stages of preparation, implementation, supervision/control/evaluation of agrotourism implementation/management.

Strengthening local management capacity can improve the sustainability of agrotourism. Capacity building is carried out through training and mentoring to

the community in agrotourism management. Training and mentoring of the community based on the needs, objectives and development plan of agrotourism. Sutiarto, [44] mentioned that the development of tourism destination management in the future requires exploration of the order of values, locality, and harmony for sustainable tourism destinations. If examined further, socially, it is necessary to plan to include the local socio-cultural conditions of the community in agrotourism activities and mitigate negative impacts and how to overcome them. The social aspect will be strengthened.

The social dimension is crucial for the long-term viability of agrotourism, as it encompasses the connections and engagement among tourists, residents, and other relevant parties. Sustainability will stimulate the empowerment of the local community, the preservation of culture and traditions, the enhancement of quality of life, and the promotion of interaction and understanding between cultures. These long-term benefits will directly benefit the local people. Transparency, community cohesion, and local management practices are essential components for attaining agrotourism sustainability.

CONCLUSION

These findings indicate that transparency, community cohesion, and local management practices are crucial factors that influence the long-term viability of agrotourism. Hence, enhancing these factors can greatly enhance the capacity of agrotourism to contribute to sustainable development. Community trust in agrotourism managers is enhanced by openness. Once trust has been established, community participation and involvement are effectively nurtured, leading to the development of communal cohesiveness. If transparency has been adopted, community cohesion will be built, and local administrators oversee the management of these two forms of social capital. Once these three aspects have been successfully implemented in agrotourism management, the sustainability of agrotourism is attained. In summary, giving social considerations top priority in agrotourism initiatives can boost community welfare, fortify social ties, spur economic growth, and support the preservation of the environment and cultural heritage.

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