

The Potential Role of Local Tour Guides in Tourism Quality Enhancement: A Case Study of Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village, Pangkep Regency

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Abstract: Limited resources, knowledge gaps, lack of understanding about sustainability, and changes in tourist trends and preferences are issues related to the technical competence of local tour guides in Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village. The purpose of this study is to identify the core competencies that a tourism village guide must have and to analyze the needs and expectations of visitors in terms of communication and services they expect from tourism village guides. This study was conducted using descriptive analysis methods through interviews, observation, documentation, and literature review. This study found that the limited number of tourist visits to Sumpang Bitu requires improvement and evaluation of the tourism experience, as well as an understanding of tourism ethics. Optimizing the role of local tour guides in Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village, Pangkep Regency, has a positive impact on tourism development, although it has not been fully maximized, especially in the economic sector. This optimization not only contributes to improving the knowledge and skills of guides but also creates a more satisfying tourism experience for visitors. Furthermore, this can be done through training held by the Tourism Office or universities that have collaborated with the Sumpang Bitu tourism village. Skill development can be done through the development of communication, leadership, and time management skills of the tour guides themselves. Furthermore, optimization by utilizing technology as a source of promotion for tourism villages will provide benefits that can be enjoyed by tourism villages through increased tourist visits.

Keywords: Potential, Competence, Tour Guides.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the largest industries in the world and is a major source of foreign exchange for many countries. Indonesia has a diverse range of cultures and local wisdom in each province. This diversity has the potential to boost tourism in Indonesia. Successful tourism development is development that is carried out jointly, under the term “Building together with the community” so that tourism development can benefit the local community. Basically, the community has the right to participate in tourism management. This is as stated in Article 19 paragraph 2 of Law No. 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism. One of the growing trends in tourism activities is Tourism Villages. Tourism villages are a form of regional development based on basic potential and local empowerment. These tourism activities take place within the community and involve the community in the development of tourism itself, or what is commonly referred to as community participation (Pakpahan, 2018; Prihandoko et al., 2019; Machmud et al., 2021).

A Tourism Village is a place that has certain characteristics and values that can be a special attraction for tourists with a special interest in rural life. This shows that the main attraction of a tourism village is the unique life of the villagers, which cannot be found in urban areas. Tourism villages focus more on utilizing the natural wealth of the village and showcasing the activities that take place in a village, for example in the agricultural and cultural sectors, among others. Therefore, a

tourism village can be defined as a village that has tourism potential and supporting facilities presented within a community structure that is integrated with tradition (Kristiana et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2025; Sahib et al., 2019).

South Sulawesi has considerable tourism potential, such as cultural tourism, historical tourism, religious tourism, nature tourism, and marine tourism, which offer unique experiences for tourists. South Sulawesi is one of ten provinces designated as national tourist areas. Pangkep Regency is an area with significant tourism potential that can support the value of tourism in South Sulawesi Province. The number of tourist villages in Pangkep Regency that have been approved in 2022 by the Regent is 65 villages. One of them is the tourist village of Sumpang Bitu, which is a tourist village in the category of a pilot tourist village located in Balocci District. The potential of the tourist village of Sumpang Bitu is generally in the form of nature and cultural tourism and educational tourism. Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village is very famous for its cultural tourism and natural tourism, which is now often referred to as cave tourism.

The development of tourism in tourism villages has become one of the effective strategies to improve the local economy, preserve culture and the environment, and provide authentic experiences for tourists. One of the key elements in the success of a tourism village is the presence of competent and qualified tour guides. Tour guides in tourist villages play an important role in providing visitors with an enjoyable, informative, and satisfying tourist experience. They act as local ambassadors who introduce the uniqueness, history, culture, and tourist attractions in the village (Jumail et al., 2014; Akhmar et al., 2021; Tilman et al., 2025). The competencies of tourism village guides include knowledge of history, culture, local wisdom, as well as good communication, interpretation, and service skills.

It is important to continuously improve the competencies of tourism village guides to ensure optimal tourism experience quality. Competency improvement can be done through training and education programs that focus on local knowledge, guiding skills, tourism management, and personality and communication skills development. With the increased competence of village tour guides, it is hoped that they can provide accurate information, explain cultural values appropriately, promote environmentally friendly practices, and provide good service to tourists. Competent guides can also play a role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting local crafts, and developing sustainable tourism activities (Pakpahan, 2023; Abbas et al., 2024; Andini et al., 2026).

However, improving the competence of village tourism guides also faces several challenges, such as limited resources, knowledge gaps, lack of understanding of sustainability, and changes in tourist trends and preferences. Therefore, research and collaborative efforts between the government, local communities, and other relevant parties are needed to identify existing needs and challenges and design effective competency improvement programs.

With the increased competence of village tour guides, it is hoped that tourist villages can become attractive destinations and provide valuable tourism experiences for tourists, while still paying attention to the sustainability of the local environment and culture. The objectives of this study include: (1) Identifying the core competencies that a village tour guide must possess. This involves identifying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for guides to provide a satisfying tourism experience to visitors: (2) Analyzing the needs and expectations of visitors in terms of communication and the services they expect from tour guides.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Optimization

According to Winardi (2014, p. 363), optimization is a measure that leads to the achievement of objectives, whereas from a business perspective, optimization is an effort to maximize activities in order to realize desired or intended profits. Optimization can also be defined as the process of obtaining a state that provides the maximum or minimum value of a function. Optimization is the act

of obtaining the best results under given circumstances.

In the design, construction, and maintenance of engineering systems, several technological and managerial decisions must be made in several stages. The ultimate goal of all such decisions is to minimize the effort required or to maximize the desired benefits.

B. The Concept of Tourism Villages

A tourism village is an area related to a region or various forms of local wisdom (customs, culture, potential) that is managed as a tourist attraction in accordance with its capabilities, which is intended for the social and economic benefit of the community. The local wisdom or local knowledge system referred to here is the unique knowledge belonging to a particular community or culture that has developed over a long period of time, as a result of the reciprocal relationship between the residents and their environment (DIY Regional Culture Utilization Project, 2003). The author defines a tourist village as a rural area that has tourist attractions based on local wisdom, such as customs, culture, and natural resources that have unique and authentic characteristics in the form of a distinctive rural atmosphere. Rural areas that are managed as tourist villages usually have more than one or a combination of several tourist attractions, for example, a combination of agrotourism, cultural tourism, and ecotourism in one tourist village area, such as in Balocci Tourist Village, Pangkep. The concept of tourism village development According to I. Pitana (2009), the development and growth of tourism will directly touch and involve the community, thereby bringing various impacts on the local community, both positive and negative.

For the community, tourism development has enormous potential benefits for the economy, socio-culture, and environment, but sometimes misguided tourism development can actually cause many losses for the local community itself. The existence of various benefits and challenges illustrates that tourism development is like managing fire, where managers can use it for the benefit of the community, but on the other hand, it can cause losses if management is not effective. Therefore, research on economic impacts is considered essential as an evaluation and preventive measure in determining further development steps, as the development of tourism villages involves multisectoral activities.

The implementation of tourism development must be planned in an integrated manner, with particular consideration given to the economic and socio-cultural aspects of the local community. At each stage of development, tourism stakeholders should minimize as much as possible the negative impacts that may arise and are closely related to the economic and socio-cultural development of the local community.

C. Tour Guide

Tour guiding is the process of explaining to tourists the significance of the places, communities, and attractions they visit so that they understand, appreciate, and are interested in visiting again, as well as developing a sense of care for preserving and conserving these attractions (Kuo, 2002; Dann, 1997, Bromley, 1994). According to Pond (2003), tour guides also have many roles and duties, namely as representatives or ambassadors of the local community, intermediaries between the host (host or local community) and the guest (guest or tourist), leaders, “educators,” facilitators, information centers, and at the same time a drawing power to attract tourists to tourist destinations.

Mancini (2000) states that tour guides are front-line employees who are responsible for creating a positive image of a tourist destination and ensuring tourist satisfaction. Tour guides are also referred to as “information givers and founts of knowledge,” “mediators,” and “culture brokers.” The mediator and cultural broker functions refer to the interpretive aspects of the tour guide's work, which play a vital role in enhancing visitors' experience at a destination and their understanding of the destination and its culture (Welgemoed, 2001; Prihandoko et al., 2022; Dalyan et al., 2024).

According to Muhajir (2015, p. 68), tour guides are classified based on where they perform

their duties, divided into Local Guides and City Guides, as explained below: (1) Local Guides are tour guides who handle tours lasting one or several hours in a specific place, at a tourist attraction, or in a limited area, such as historic buildings, museums, amusement parks, and others; (2) A City Guide is a tour guide who is tasked with taking tourists and providing tourist information about the main tourist attractions in a city, usually done on a bus or other vehicle.

According to Irawati (2013, p. 107), a tour guide is a leader in a tourist trip. In general, the duties of a tour guide are as follows: (1) To conduct and direct, which is to organize and carry out tourist activities for the tourists under their care based on a predetermined travel program; (2) To point out, which is to show and take tourists to the desired tourist attractions and points of interest; (3) To inform, which involves providing information and explanations about the tourist attractions and points of interest visited, historical and cultural information, and various other information.

III. METHODS

The research method used in this study was qualitative research with a descriptive approach (Sugiyono, 2017). The researcher used qualitative research because qualitative research solves problems from a complex issue or description being studied, in accordance with the complexity of the object being studied. This research was conducted in the Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village area, Pangkep Regency, South Sulawesi Province, from December 10-11, 2024. The data sources used were primary and secondary data sources.

The data collection techniques used in this study were direct observation, interviews, literature study, and documentation. The data collection technique used in this study was direct observation, which involved collecting documentation in the form of photographs and observation lists related to the conditions of local guides in Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village. Then, interviews were conducted using an interview list to find out the potential of the local guides of Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village, which was addressed to the informants.

The informants in this study were Mr. Amirullah from Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village and the local community. The technique for determining key informants in this study was to select informants who were knowledgeable about the research topic. The data analysis technique used in this study was descriptive analysis, which describes actual events based on facts and data found at the research location. The author also used a data analysis categorization technique, which is to compile categories from a set of findings based on thoughts, institutions, or opinions from certain criteria (L. J, 2021).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

The tourist village of Sumpang Bitu is located in Balocci District, Pangkajene Islands Regency (Pangkep). This tourist area is located about 58 km from the city of Makassar. The village of Sumpang Bitu has several prehistoric caves, namely Sumpang Bitu Cave and Sumi Cave, which contain wall paintings, stone artifacts, and ancient human fossils. These caves are silent witnesses to human life in the past. The wall paintings inside the caves depict the daily lives of ancient humans, such as hunting and gathering food.

Table 1. Tourism Potential of Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village

No	Potential Aspect	Description
1	Prehistoric Cave Sites	Sumpang Bitu Cave and Leang Bulu Sumi contain wall paintings, stone tools, shells, pottery fragments, and bone remains that reflect ancient human life.
2	Archaeological Value	The caves function as important archaeological heritage sites and silent witnesses of prehistoric civilization in South

Sulawesi.		
3	Karst Landscape	The village is surrounded by towering limestone hills that form a unique karst landscape within the Maros–Pangkep Geopark area.
4	Natural Scenery	The area offers panoramic views of green hills, lakes, and natural vegetation that enhance the attractiveness of nature-based tourism.
5	Accessibility	The main cave sites are accessible via concrete stairways, making them relatively easy to reach for visitors.
6	Educational Tourism	The site has strong potential for educational tourism, including archaeology, history, and cultural heritage learning.
7	Trekking Opportunities	A “thousand steps” trekking route provides a recreational hiking experience combined with nature exploration.
8	Supporting Facilities	The presence of gardens, ponds, and resting areas at the foot of the hill supports visitor comfort.
9	Community Involvement	Local residents are involved as tour guides, contributing local knowledge and community-based tourism development.
10	Research Potential	The site is suitable for archaeological research, cultural studies, and eco-tourism development.

Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village possesses diverse and integrated tourism potentials, ranging from archaeological heritage to natural and educational attractions. These potentials indicate that the village is highly feasible to be developed as a sustainable tourism destination through effective management and community involvement.

B. Sumpang Bitu Cave Archaeological Park

One of these tourist destinations is the Sumpang Bitu Cave Archaeological Park, which is part of the Maros-Pangkep Geopark karst hills. Not only does it offer natural beauty, but it also preserves prehistoric relics. The name Sumpang Bitu comes from the words “Sumpang” and “Bitu.” Sumpang is a Bugis word meaning door or gate, and Bitu is the name of a village. It is said that there was a village called ‘Bitu’ next to Mount Sumpang Bitu. However, there are no longer any residents living there. So, the meaning of ‘Sumpang Bitu’ is the gateway to the village of Bitu. Sumpang Bitu Cave is the largest cave in Pangkep Regency and even in South Sulawesi. This cave has a high dome that slopes backward.

The cave is located at an altitude of about 280 meters above ground level. The cave is relatively easy to access because there are cement stairs 1 meter wide from the bottom of the hill to the cave entrance. This cave is also classified as a sheet cave with 3 rooms. The cave floor is relatively flat, with a width of 15 meters. Archaeological remains in this cave include various items, such as wall paintings, stone artifacts, mollusk shells, pottery fragments, and bone and tooth fragments. Most of the paintings were found on the left wall of the cave, while other findings were discovered on the floor and in the cave courtyard.

This cave is classified as a sheet cave with horizontal and spacious passages. Stalactites and stalagmites are very few. Pillars are only visible at the mouth of the cave. The mouth of the cave faces northeast (55°) and is 12.77 meters wide with a depth of 31.79 meters. This cave has three chambers. Chamber I is 25 meters long, 9 meters wide, and has a ceiling height of 5 meters. Chamber II is 16 meters long, 7.5 meters wide, and has a ceiling height of 3 meters. Chamber III is 6 meters long, 3 meters wide, and has a ceiling height of 2.5 meters. The cave floor is relatively flat with a width of 15 meters. The light intensity in the cave is relatively bright. Meanwhile, the air circulation

is quite good. The cave walls where the paintings are located are fitted with guardrails to prevent visitors from touching the paintings directly. Inside the cave, there are two passages that are not very long.

The archaeological remains found include wall paintings, stone artifacts, mollusk shells, pottery fragments, and bone and tooth fragments. The wall paintings are in the form of handprints of various sizes, children's footprints, images resembling babirusa of various sizes, and a painting resembling a boat. All of the paintings are red and most of them were found on the left wall of the cave. Meanwhile, findings such as stone artifacts were scattered on the cave floor. The mollusk shells found belong to the gastropoda and pelecypoda classes and were scattered on the floor and courtyard of the cave. Pottery fragments were also found scattered on the floor and courtyard of the cave. Bone and tooth fragments were found scattered in small quantities.

Therefore, discovering and exploring the natural potential of Sumpang Bitu village, which is essentially very promising given its natural panorama of a vast lake backed by beautiful and lush green hills and many other types of tourist attractions such as cultural sites, is very necessary to be developed and realized by the government and tourism investors.

C. Sumi Cave

Leang Bulu Sumi or Sumi Cave is a prehistoric cave archaeological site located within the Sumpang Bitu Prehistoric Park complex, the Bulu Bitu hills, Bulusaraung Nature Reserve, Maros-Pangkep Karst, and Bantimurung-Bulusaraung National Park. Administratively, this cave is located in the village of Sumpang Bitu, Balocci Baru subdistrict, Balocci district, Pangkajene and Islands regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This cave is a sheet-type cave with a horizontal cave chamber. The cave mouth faces northwest. It is 8.82 meters wide and 10.15 meters deep. Components such as pillars, stalactites, and stalagmites can also be found in this cave. It appears that the karstification process is very little visible both at the front and inside of the cave. The cave floor surface is relatively flat at the front with a smooth soil structure. However, the floor surface then rises in the inner passage of the cave. The surface of the inner cave walls tends to be covered with moss, while the front of the cave has almost none. This is because the inside is relatively more humid than the front of the cave.

The intensity of light at the front of the cave is relatively bright, becoming dimmer further inside. Air circulation in the cave is quite good because the front of the cave mouth tends to be open. Archaeological remains found include wall paintings, stone artifacts, pottery fragments, and mollusk shells. Two handprints were found on the cave wall. All of the paintings are red and were made using a spray technique. Stone artifacts, pottery fragments, and mollusk shells were found scattered on the cave floor, mainly from the cave mouth to the cave courtyard. The following are the findings at the Sumpang Bitu Prehistoric Park:

Archaeological Tourism (Prehistoric Caves):

Sumpang Bitu Cave: The largest ancient cave dwelling in South Sulawesi, which has a spacious room with wall paintings (handprints, footprints, deer) and stone artifacts.

Leang Bulu Sumi: A cave that contains archaeological findings in the form of flaked stone tools (flakes), blades, arrowheads, and bone fragments.

Nature & Scenery

Karst Landscape: The exotic view of towering limestone hills unique to Bantimurung-Bulusaraung National Park.

Trekking & Thousand Steps: A concrete staircase trail leading up to a cave site, offering a relaxing hiking experience amid lush trees.

Gardens & Ponds: A neatly landscaped garden area at the bottom of the hill.

Activities: Archaeological research, historical education, nature photography, and trekking.

This tourism initiative aims to introduce Sumpang Bitu Village as a new tourist destination offering natural beauty while boosting the village's economy through tourism. It offers a range of highly attractive activities, including Educational Tourism, Archaeological Research, Nature Photography, and Trekking.

Based on the results of research conducted using interviews and observation, it appears that local tour guides in the tourist village of Sumpang Bitu are not yet optimal, especially in providing tourism services. Tourists who come to the tourist village of Sumpang Bitu are still very rare. The optimization of local tour guides that can be carried out in the tourist village of Sumpang Bitu is in accordance with Irawati (2013: 107) namely To Conduct To Direct, which regulates and implements tourist travel activities, and To Point Out, which takes tourists to the desired tourist attractions and points of interest so that tourists feel comfortable, and To Inform, where local tour guides provide information and explanations about the tourist attractions and points of interest visited. It is hoped that with this optimization, local tour guides can improve their ability to communicate with both local and international tourists.

Tourists who come to the tourist village of Sumpang Bitu using the services of local tour guides for various types of tourism, including cultural and natural attractions that are stunning and captivating, must make an appointment or reservation in advance. This situation demonstrates the optimization of the work of local tour guides in providing assistance and escorting tourists to tourist attractions with good and pleasant service, thereby increasing tourists' interest in returning to visit. Optimization or tactics as a local tour guide in an overall approach related to the implementation of ideas, planning, and execution of an activity within a certain period of time to improve and develop existing tourism.

Local tour guides have optimally demonstrated good tourism services in taking tourists to their desired tourist attractions, so that tourists feel comfortable during their trip with local tour guides and feel safe during their visit to the tourist village of Sumpang Bitu. These local tour guides are members of the Indonesian Tour Guide Association (HPI) of Pangkep Regency, South Sulawesi. The local tour guides of the Sumpang Bitu tourist village have obtained licenses from the HPI (Indonesian Tour Guide Association).

In carrying out its duties as a tour guide, HPI applies the restrictions set out in the local tour guide code of ethics, which is based on the provisions of the 8th HPI National Working Meeting, held on November 28-30, 2007, in Manado, with additional provisions from Law No. 10/2009 and Government Regulation No. 52/2012. In order to carry out their duties and professional discipline with full responsibility, as explained in paragraph three of the HPI code of ethics regarding the obligations of local tour guides, they must: (1) Always comply with the laws and regulations of the Republic of Indonesia when carrying out their duties; (2) Maintain the good image of Indonesian tourism based on the Pancasila philosophy as the Indonesian way of life; (3) Comply with the use of license cards issued by the government or authorized parties in carrying out duties; (4) Be concerned with the environment based on the master plan that has been decided by the regional and central governments; (5) Understand the culture of the local community and the customs that apply in the development of tourism in the region concerned;

(6) Maintain the reputation of fellow local tour guides and work partners, whether intentionally or unintentionally; (7) It is strictly prohibited to provide tourists with information about state secrets that could negatively impact the nation's image;

(8) It is prohibited to carry out tour guiding duties outside the provisions of the license and language stipulated in the local tour guide certificate issued by the competent government authority.

The main purpose of tourists visiting the Sumpang Bitu tourist village is nature tourism, especially to learn about ancient times. Optimizing the role of local tour guides is very important to

enhance the tourist experience and support the development of tourism in a destination, including in the case of the Sumpang Bitu Tourist Village, Pangkep Regency. Local tour guides in the tourist village of Sumpang Bitu still need to improve their knowledge of history, culture, communication skills, and time management so that they can interact effectively with tourists. Local tour guides also need to have a deep understanding of the tourism potential of Sumpang Bitu Village so that they can explain the local stories and values that attract tourists.

The Sumpang Bitu village tour guides have also played a role in designing interesting and diverse tour routes to ensure that tourists can explore various aspects of Sumpang Bitu Village. The routes also include visits to natural and cultural sites as well as educational tours (martonun). Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village has involved the community in tour guiding because they are the ones who understand the area and its potential best. With this optimization, it is hoped that the role of local tour guides through these steps will enable Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village in Pangkep Regency to experience an increase in the tourism sector and have a positive impact on local economic and cultural development.

V. CONCLUSION

The number of local and foreign tourists visiting Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village is still relatively small, even though large events are often held in the village due to its potential space and beauty. For example, climbing the thousand steps to the cave site attracts large numbers of tourists, but only once in a while. The optimization of the role of local tour guides in Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village, Pangkep Regency, has had a positive impact on tourism development, although it is not yet optimal, especially in the economic sector. The low number of tourist visits means that tourism in Sumpang Bitu needs to be improved and evaluated, as well as an understanding of tourism ethics. Optimizing the role of local tour guides in Sumpang Bitu Village not only contributes to improving the knowledge and skills of the guides but also creates a more satisfying tourist experience for visitors. By designing attractive and diverse tourist routes, guides are able to present the beauty of nature, history, culture, and local uniqueness holistically. This provides an opportunity to attract more tourists and increase the appeal of the destination.

Thus, optimizing the role of local tour guides in Sumpang Bitu Tourism Village is not only about creating an extraordinary tourist experience, but also about empowering the local community and maintaining the sustainability of the destination. With this holistic approach, Sumpang Bitu Village in Pangkep Regency has the potential to become a leading tourist destination that provides maximum benefits for all parties involved. The following recommendations are suggested: Optimizing local tour guides is a crucial step in enhancing the tourist experience and advancing tourism in Sumpang Bitu Village. To achieve this, it is necessary to optimize their knowledge and skills through training and development programs. Knowledge enhancement can be obtained from training conducted by the Tourism Office or universities that have collaborated with the Sumpang Bitu tourism village, and active guides should also seek information related to training and capacity building. The village institution is expected to strongly support this capacity building.

Meanwhile, skill development can be achieved through the development of communication, leadership, and time management skills of the tour guides themselves. This can be done by attending training and courses and forming groups that hold regular meetings to discuss and exchange information and practice with fellow guides. More experienced guides can serve as motivational mentors for other novice guides. Finally, the use of technology, by utilizing technology as a source of promotion for tourist villages, will provide benefits that can be enjoyed by tourist villages through increased tourist visits.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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