



Sustainable Economic Perspectives on Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism: Balancing Conservation and Value Creation

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Submitted	: 04-01-2026	Accepted	: 12-01-2026
Revision	: 06-01-2026	Published	: 20-01-2026

Abstract: The development of nature-based tourism in Indonesia faces challenges in balancing economic growth with environmental conservation and the well-being of local communities. This study aims to analyze the management of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism from a sustainable economic perspective, particularly the relationship between environmental conservation and the creation of economic value. The research employs a qualitative approach using a literature study method through a systematic review of scholarly articles, policy reports, and relevant documents related to sustainable tourism, ecotourism, and community-based tourism management. The findings indicate that Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism is managed through a community-based sustainable tourism approach, characterized by visitor limitations, conservation education, and active involvement of local communities. This management model generates economic value through the creation of local business opportunities, employment absorption, and the enhancement of community entrepreneurial capacity. However, the sustainability of the destination continues to face challenges, including potential environmental pressure, unequal distribution of economic benefits, and natural disaster risks. This study concludes that the integration of environmental conservation and community economic empowerment is a fundamental prerequisite for the sustainability of nature tourism. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of collaborative governance and inclusive, long-term-oriented tourism policies to ensure balanced and sustainable destination development.

Keywords: Sustainable Economy, Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Tourism, Community Empowerment, Nature Tourism

Abstrak: Pengembangan pariwisata alam di Indonesia menghadapi tantangan dalam menyeimbangkan kepentingan pertumbuhan ekonomi dengan konservasi lingkungan dan kesejahteraan masyarakat lokal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengelolaan Wisata Alam Nawang Jagad dalam perspektif ekonomi berkelanjutan, khususnya hubungan antara konservasi lingkungan dan penciptaan nilai tambah ekonomi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi literatur melalui penelaahan sistematis terhadap artikel ilmiah, laporan kebijakan, dan dokumen relevan yang membahas pariwisata berkelanjutan, ekowisata, dan pengelolaan wisata berbasis komunitas. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa Wisata Alam Nawang Jagad dikelola dengan pendekatan pariwisata berkelanjutan berbasis komunitas melalui pembatasan

jumlah pengunjung, edukasi konservasi, serta keterlibatan aktif masyarakat lokal. Pengelolaan tersebut menghasilkan nilai tambah ekonomi melalui penciptaan peluang usaha, penyerapan tenaga kerja lokal, dan peningkatan kapasitas kewirausahaan masyarakat. Namun demikian, keberlanjutan destinasi masih menghadapi tantangan berupa potensi tekanan lingkungan, distribusi manfaat ekonomi yang belum merata, serta risiko bencana alam. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi konservasi lingkungan dan pemberdayaan ekonomi masyarakat merupakan prasyarat utama bagi keberlanjutan wisata alam, serta menegaskan pentingnya tata kelola kolaboratif dan kebijakan pariwisata yang inklusif dan berorientasi jangka panjang.

Kata Kunci: Ekonomi Berkelanjutan, Konservasi Lingkungan, Pariwisata Berkelanjutan, Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, Wisata Alam

INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is one of the key pillars of Indonesia's economy, contributing significantly to the national gross domestic product (GDP). In 2024, tourism's contribution reached 4 percent, a slight increase from 3.9 percent in the previous year. This growth marks the recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, with 13.74 million international tourists visiting Indonesia and foreign exchange earnings amounting to USD 16.7 billion (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian, 2025). Beyond its macroeconomic contribution, tourism also has a broad multiplier effect, particularly in job creation and reducing economic inequality. In 2024, the sector absorbed 25.01 million workers (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian, 2025), further cementing tourism's role in driving inclusive economic development.

However, despite its growth, Indonesia's tourism sector faces several structural challenges, including limited connectivity, human resource quality, tourist safety and comfort, suboptimal destination promotion, and increasing pressure on environmental sustainability (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian, 2025). These challenges highlight the need for tourism development to go beyond mere economic growth, integrating environmental conservation and local community empowerment.

In response, sustainable tourism has emerged as a primary approach in destination management. This approach seeks to balance economic growth, environmental conservation, and the social well-being of local communities (Dinas Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif Indonesia, 2025). For Indonesia, which boasts rich natural and cultural resources, applying sustainability principles is crucial to maintaining environmental carrying capacity while ensuring long-term benefits for society.

Conservation areas like Mount Merapi National Park exemplify the complex relationship between conservation and economic use. The park serves as a protector of high-biodiversity ecosystems, while also offering economic opportunities through ecotourism that supports the livelihoods of thousands of surrounding residents (Zulfa Aulia, 2024). The designation of the Merapi Menoreh Merbabu Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO strengthens a management approach focused on synergies between ecological and economic interests (BKSDA Yogyakarta, 2020).

Community empowerment is a critical element in the success of sustainable tourism. Local community involvement as key stakeholders in destination management not only increases economic benefits but also contributes to environmental conservation through the use of local wisdom (Devi & Rahaju, 2025). Training programs, institutional strengthening through Tourism Awareness Groups

(Pokdarwis) and Karang Taruna, and locally based enterprise development are crucial tools for fostering inclusive tourism.

Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism in the Kaliurang area, on the slopes of Mount Merapi, Yogyakarta, serves as a concrete example of integrating conservation with economic value creation. This community-based destination, managed by the Karang Taruna of Dusun Kaliurang Barat on Sultan Ground land covering 3.7 hectares, is supported by the Yogyakarta Sultanate (Radar Jogja, 2022). Its management takes into account volcanic disaster risks and implements visitor limitations to control environmental carrying capacity (Septiyani & Prasetya Wikan, 2021).

Economically, Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism generates positive impacts through local business opportunities, such as nature tourism services, culinary activities, and transportation, providing added value for surrounding communities. However, the destination's sustainability faces challenges in balancing income generation with ecosystem conservation and ensuring equitable economic benefits.

Therefore, the study of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism is crucial for understanding the dynamics between conservation and economic value creation in community-based nature tourism management. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for the development of other sustainable tourism destinations in Indonesia and contribute to the formulation of inclusive, long-term tourism policies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a library research method (Creswell, 2022). The qualitative approach was chosen as it allows for a conceptual and critical analysis of the management of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism from a sustainable economic perspective, focusing on the interplay between environmental conservation and the creation of economic value. The literature study method was selected as it enables the examination of this phenomenon through a systematic review of relevant written sources, without the need for direct field data collection (Snyder, 2019).

The data sources for this research consist of scientific literature and secondary documents related to the research topic. These include journal articles, academic books, government policy reports, institutional documents, and credible media publications on topics such as sustainable tourism, ecotourism, conservation, local economies, and community-based tourism management (Grant & Booth, 2009). Publications specifically addressing the Mount Merapi area and Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism also serve as supporting reference materials.

Data collection was carried out through a systematic literature search using targeted keywords such as sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, sustainable economy, environmental conservation, and Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism (Snyder, 2019). The literature selected was based on relevance, source credibility, and publication timeliness, ensuring the quality and validity of the data analyzed (Ruhanen et al., 2015). This search included academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect.

Data analysis was performed using a descriptive-analytical approach, categorizing and classifying the data into main research themes, including the concept of sustainable tourism, the role of conservation in nature-based tourism, community empowerment, and mechanisms for creating

economic value (Kim et al., 2017). The data were then interpreted by relating findings from the literature to the context of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism management as a conceptual case study (Creswell, 2022).

The validity and credibility of the research results are maintained through the use of accountable scientific sources and analysis of various relevant theoretical perspectives (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019). This approach allowed for a logical, consistent, and literature-based scientific synthesis, ensuring that the conclusions drawn are grounded in solid academic foundations (Creswell, 2022). By employing this qualitative, literature-based approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between conservation and economic value creation in the management of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism, contributing to the development of discourse and policies surrounding sustainable tourism in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The progress of Indonesia's tourism sector shows a clear shift from a mass-growth approach toward a more sustainable paradigm. The Government of Indonesia, along with the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, has officially embraced sustainable tourism as a national policy framework, aiming to balance economic growth, socio-cultural aspects, and environmental conservation. For nature-based tourism, the application of sustainability principles is crucial, particularly given Indonesia's 54 national parks and hundreds of conservation areas, which serve not only as key tourism assets but also as life-support systems for local communities (Suharto et al., 2024; Wibowo et al., 2025).

The Concept of Sustainable Tourism in the Management of Nature-Based Tourism

Sustainable tourism is an approach to destination governance that integrates three key pillars: economic growth, environmental conservation, and the social well-being of local communities (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019). It emphasizes the balance between utilizing tourism resources for economic purposes while simultaneously maintaining ecosystem sustainability and empowering local communities. In nature-based tourism governance, sustainability is critical as these destinations directly depend on environmental quality to attract visitors. Research by Fennell (2020) underscores that sustainable nature-based tourism must consider environmental carrying capacity, biodiversity conservation, and the active participation of local communities in both management and the equitable distribution of economic benefits.

However, Indonesia's tourism policy faces several challenges, including infrastructure limitations, institutional capacity, and the economic pressures that drive over-exploitation of natural resources (Kawuryan et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, several tourism destinations have successfully implemented community-based management models, aligning economic interests with conservation efforts.

Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism exemplifies this integration of sustainable tourism concepts. Managed by the Karang Taruna of Dusun Kaliurang Barat, the destination enforces visitor limitations as a means of controlling environmental carrying capacity while also factoring in the risk of volcanic disasters due to its location on Mount Merapi's slopes (Septiyani & Prasetya Wikan, 2021). This

strategy aligns with the precautionary principle for managing high-risk tourism areas, as emphasized by Becken & Hughey. (2013).



Figure 1. Photo Spots and Tours of Nawang Jagad

The Role of Conservation in the Development of Ecotourism

Environmental conservation is a pivotal factor in the development of sustainable ecotourism. According to Honey (1999) ecotourism involves responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains local communities, and includes educational elements. This definition stresses that ecotourism is more than just tourism in natural settings—it must actively contribute to conservation efforts.

The Mount Merapi National Park, where Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism is located, holds significant conservation value with its rich biodiversity. The area's designation as part of the Merapi Menoreh Merbabu Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO further strengthens its status as requiring a conservation-based management approach (BKSDA Yogyakarta, 2020). Research by Surya (2024) confirms that conservation areas can serve dual roles—protecting ecosystems and generating economic benefits through controlled ecotourism development.

In Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism, conservation is reflected in several management strategies. First, limiting visitor numbers helps maintain ecosystem carrying capacity. Eagles et al. (2002) highlight that visitor management is crucial to preventing environmental degradation. Second, the management of the 3.7-hectare Sultan Ground land preserves natural vegetation and ecological characteristics. Third, conservation education plays an essential role, encouraging visitors to understand the importance of protecting the ecosystem and the volcanic risks present (Ardoin et al., 2015).

Local Community Empowerment in Destination Management

Empowering local communities is crucial for the success of sustainable tourism. Scheyvens (1999) provides a framework for community empowerment that includes economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions. Genuine empowerment occurs when local communities control tourism resources, participate in decision-making, and receive equitable economic benefits.

Indonesia's community-based tourism (CBT) model has been implemented in various destinations, with varying success. Suansri (2003) outlines the key characteristics of CBT, including community ownership, democratic participation, and the fair distribution of benefits, alongside contributions to natural and cultural conservation. In the case of Nawang Jagad, the Karang Taruna directly manages the destination, beginning with an initiative by village youths to revitalize underutilized land. This development underscores the active role of young people in creating tourism opportunities that prioritize environmental value (Fadila, 2024). This is in line with the findings of Okazaki (2008) which state that institutional support from the government or formal institutions is an important factor in the sustainability of CBT.

The empowerment of local communities at Nawang Jagad has had clear economic impacts, creating new business opportunities such as nature tourism services, culinary ventures, and transportation. As Cole (2006) argues, community-based tourism can stimulate a multiplier effect across local economic sectors. However, ensuring a fair distribution of benefits requires transparent institutional mechanisms, particularly to prevent disparities among community members.

Mechanisms for Creating Economic Value Added

Economic value in sustainable nature-based tourism is not just about revenue generation, but also about equitable benefit distribution, job creation, and strengthening the local economy. According to Stone & Stone (2011) highlight that economic value in ecotourism can be categorized into direct benefits, such as income from entrance fees and services, and indirect benefits from supporting businesses and increased local property values.

At Nawang Jagad, economic value is generated through entrance fees, camping ground services, and nature tourism packages. Walpole & Goodwin (2000) suggest that community-managed destinations tend to have lower levels of economic leakage, as revenue remains largely within the local economy. Furthermore, the creation of business opportunities, skill enhancement, and local entrepreneurship aligns with Pro-Poor Tourism principles, where tourism serves as a tool for poverty reduction (Ashley et al., 2000).

In the concept of Pro-Poor Tourism, tourism is emphasized as an instrument for poverty reduction when it is deliberately designed to maximize benefits for poor communities through the creation of economic opportunities, capacity building, and participation in the tourism value chain. However, the creation of economic value added faces several challenges. Research by Stronza & Gordillo (2008) identifies that the distribution of economic benefits in CBT is often uneven, with a small portion of community members receiving greater benefits than others. In the context of Nawang Jagad, mechanisms of transparency and accountability in financial management become important to ensure a fair distribution of benefits.

Excessive dependence on a single tourism destination can also pose economic risks when there is a decline in tourist visits due to natural disasters or other external factors. Research by Tao & Wall (2009) on tourism in disaster-prone destinations emphasizes the importance of economic diversification and the development of risk mitigation strategies to maintain the economic sustainability of local communities.

Challenges in Balancing Conservation and the Economy

Balancing environmental conservation with economic growth is a classic challenge in nature-based tourism management. Buckley (2012) asserts that while trade-offs between economic interests and conservation are inevitable, they can be minimized through strategic planning, effective regulation, and continuous monitoring. In the context of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism, the primary challenges include the pressure to increase visitor numbers to maximize revenue versus the need to limit capacity to protect the ecosystem's carrying capacity, the development of tourism facilities versus the risk of environmental degradation, and the short-term economic expectations of local communities versus long-term conservation goals.

Research conducted by Strickland-Munro et al. (2010) highlights that involving local communities in planning and monitoring can foster greater acceptance of conservation policies that may temporarily limit economic benefits. Active participation in decision-making processes enhances a sense of ownership and responsibility for the sustainability of the destination. The location of Nawang Jagad on the slopes of Mount Merapi, which is prone to volcanic disasters, further complicates management. Research by Becken (2013) emphasizes the need to integrate disaster risk management into tourism planning, including early warning systems, evacuation routes, and visitor safety education.

For long-term economic sustainability, it is crucial to reinvest a portion of the revenue into conservation programs and community capacity building. Lindberg & Halpenny (2001) argue that sustainable tourism revenue management should prioritize allocating funds for environmental monitoring, ecosystem rehabilitation, and conservation education, ensuring long-term investments that support both ecological and economic resilience.

Collaborative Management Models and the Role of Stakeholders

The success of sustainable tourism management requires effective collaboration among various stakeholders. Jamal & Getz (1995) developed the theory of collaborative tourism planning, which emphasizes the importance of coordination among government, the private sector, local communities, and non-governmental organizations in the development of sustainable tourism destinations.

In the case of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism, collaboration occurs among Karang Taruna as the manager, the Yogyakarta Sultanate as the landowner, the Yogyakarta Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) as the conservation area authority, local government, and surrounding communities. Reed (1997) states that collaborative management models in natural resource management can reduce conflicts of interest and enhance conservation effectiveness through social legitimacy and community support.

The role of the Yogyakarta Sultanate in providing institutional support demonstrates the importance of traditional institutions in the management of community-based tourism in Indonesia.

Another study conducted by Cole (2007) shows that traditional institutions can function as mediators between the economic interests of communities and conservation objectives, while also preserving local cultural values in tourism development.

Furthermore, multi-stakeholder collaboration also faces challenges related to differences in interests, capacities, and bargaining power among the actors involved. Bramwell & Lane (2011) identify that power asymmetry can lead to suboptimal decisions or disadvantage certain parties, particularly local communities that often have weaker bargaining positions.

To address these issues, transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance mechanisms are required. Research by Hall (2011) on tourism governance emphasizes the importance of clear rules of engagement, regular communication forums, and effective conflict resolution mechanisms in ensuring productive and equitable collaboration.

Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The management of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism, which integrates principles of environmental conservation and the creation of economic value added, demonstrates strong relevance to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In line with the findings of Boluk et al. (2019) sustainable tourism functions not only as an economic sector but also as a multidimensional development instrument capable of simultaneously bridging economic, social, and ecological objectives. In the context of nature- and community-based destinations such as Nawang Jagad, sustainable tourism becomes a strategic medium for internalizing sustainability values into local resource management practices.

More specifically, the contribution of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism to the achievement of the SDGs can be identified in several key aspects. First, its contribution to SDG 1 (no poverty) is reflected in the creation of alternative economic opportunities for local communities, particularly through the development of micro-enterprises in tourism services, culinary activities, and the creative economy. This pattern strengthens household economic resilience while reducing community dependence on extractive exploitation of natural resources. Second, support for SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) is evident in the absorption of local labor and the strengthening of community-based entrepreneurship, which not only creates employment opportunities but also improves job quality through the active involvement of communities in the tourism value chain.

The implementation of visitor number limitations, management of environmental carrying capacity, and conservation education for tourists demonstrate tangible contributions to SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production). These practices affirm that growth in the tourism sector does not have to be synonymous with excessive exploitation, but can instead be directed toward more responsible and environmentally conscious tourism consumption patterns. Meanwhile, efforts to protect natural vegetation, maintain ecosystems, and raise awareness of volcanic disaster risks on the slopes of Mount Merapi constitute an integral part of Nawang Jagad's contribution to SDG 15 (life on land), particularly in safeguarding the sustainability of terrestrial ecosystems within conservation areas.

Research by Scheyvens & Hughes (2019) emphasizes that the contribution of tourism to the achievement of the SDGs is not automatic. Without clear policy design and management practices that are explicitly oriented toward sustainable development goals, tourism may instead reinforce social

inequality and ecological pressure. Therefore, the management of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism requires a continuous monitoring and evaluation system of its economic, social, and environmental impacts. This mechanism is important to ensure that the economic benefits generated do not compromise the ecological functions of the area and remain fairly distributed at the community level. With such an approach, Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism has the potential to become a model of sustainable tourism practice that is not only oriented toward economic growth, but also contributes substantively to the sustainable development agenda at both the local and national levels.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the management of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism represents a practice of sustainable tourism that integrates environmental conservation with the creation of community-based economic value added. Through a literature study approach, this article emphasizes that the balance between ecosystem protection, local community empowerment, and economic growth is not only possible, but also a key prerequisite for the sustainability of nature-based tourism destinations, particularly in conservation areas and disaster-prone regions such as the slopes of Mount Merapi.

The findings indicate that the community-based management model implemented at Nawang Jagad is able to generate both direct and indirect economic benefits for surrounding communities through local business opportunities, job creation, and increased entrepreneurial capacity. At the same time, the implementation of visitor limitations, conservation education, and collaboration with various stakeholders serves as an important mechanism for maintaining environmental carrying capacity and reducing the risk of ecosystem degradation. However, this study also identifies key challenges, including the potential for unequal distribution of economic benefits, pressure to increase tourist numbers, and economic risks arising from dependence on a single destination.

The implications of this study underscore the importance of strengthening collaborative governance that is transparent, accountable, and inclusive, as well as the need to reinvest tourism revenue into conservation programs and community capacity development. Conceptually, these findings enrich the sustainable tourism literature by positioning community-based nature tourism as a strategic instrument in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Going forward, further research is recommended to complement this study with field-based empirical data and quantitative analysis in order to more accurately measure the long-term economic, social, and ecological impacts of the management of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism. Future studies are also encouraged to complement this conceptual analysis with empirical field research to quantitatively assess the economic, social, and environmental impacts of Nawang Jagad Nature Tourism. In addition, comparative studies with other community-based nature tourism destinations are needed to strengthen the generalizability of the findings and to formulate more adaptive and context-specific models of sustainable tourism management in Indonesia.

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