

## Local Political Dynamics in the Development of Ecotourism in Barru Regency in 2025

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the involvement of local government actors in the development of ecotourism in Barru Regency, South Sulawesi. Ecotourism, as defined by Law Number 10 of 2009 and Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 33 of 2009, emphasizes the balance between environmental conservation, community empowerment, and economic growth. Despite Barru's rich natural potential, the implementation of ecotourism policies remains suboptimal due to limited human resources, weak institutional coordination, and the absence of specific local regulations. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study reveals that local government plays a central role in planning, facilitating, and regulating ecotourism activities; however, the effectiveness of these roles is constrained by bureaucratic and financial challenges. Strengthening collaboration among government institutions, the private sector, and local communities is essential to achieving sustainable ecotourism development. The findings recommend that the Barru Regency Government formulate a regional regulation on sustainable ecotourism as a strategic step to harmonize national and local policies, promote participatory governance, and enhance the welfare of local communities through environmentally responsible tourism.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Local Government, Policy Implementation, Sustainable Development, Barru Regency

### INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism aimed not only at environmental preservation but also at supporting the welfare of local communities. However, in the context of political science, the development of ecotourism cannot be separated from local political dynamics, especially in the era of regional autonomy, which grants significant authority to district and city governments in managing their administrative affairs. The implementation of ecotourism policies is not merely a technical or administrative matter but a product of political processes involving various actors with differing interests. Local governments, regional parliaments, village heads, local communities, and business actors all play roles in the political arena that determine the success or failure of such policies. In Barru Regency, South Sulawesi Province, the potential for ecotourism development is vast, with destinations such as Mount Kapire, Lappa Lona, and various mountain areas attracting visitors. However, the reality shows that the implementation of ecotourism policies has not yet become a priority for the Barru Regency Government. One reason is the weak political will of local authorities, the absence of a specific Regional Regulation on ecotourism, and the lack of synergy among political actors in developing this sector.

Local political dynamics are defined as movements and forces that develop within the scope of local and regional politics. Overall, local political dynamics reflect how politics functions and evolves at the local level, influenced by more specific factors than national politics. The interactions among local governments, communities, the private

sector, and non-governmental organizations in political decision-making can significantly affect regional development.

In this context, the development of ecotourism should be viewed as a complex political phenomenon, not merely as an environmental development program. This thesis seeks to explore the role of government in ecotourism development and the political realities in Barru Regency, as well as how the dynamics among political actors influence the sustainability of these programs. Through a political science approach, the research contributes to understanding the power relations and interests behind public policy in the ecotourism sector.

Additionally, there is a tendency toward politicization in tourism management, where the distribution of projects and resources is often based on political affiliations or electoral interests rather than conservation or sustainability considerations. In many cases, village governments or local communities take over the management of tourist destinations due to the weak presence of formal district government institutions. The UNWTO emphasizes that achieving sustainable tourism requires stakeholder involvement, political leadership, and effective monitoring that provides both preventive and collective impacts. The guidelines and management practices for sustainable tourism development apply to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and niche tourism segments. The principle of sustainability refers to the balance among environmental, economic, and sociocultural aspects, which must be properly maintained to ensure long-term sustainability.

The term “eco” in “ecotourism” originates from “ecological.” It was introduced to describe the interaction between visitors, the environment, and local cultures, based on ethics that aim to minimize environmental and social impacts while maximizing local economic benefits and visitor satisfaction. With the enactment of the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs No. 33 of 2009, the objectives include promoting regional economic growth, providing visitors with experiences and skills, creating employment and income opportunities for local communities, ensuring private sector added value, and generating tax/retribution revenue for local governments to be reinvested in conservation efforts. Barru Regency has promising tourism potential that can increase local government revenue.

The definition of Ecotourism according to Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs No. 33 of 2009 on Ecotourism Development Guidelines is: “a nature-based tourism activity that is conducted responsibly by considering educational aspects, understanding, and support for natural resource conservation efforts, as well as increasing local community income

Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism explains that ecotourism is one of the tourist attractions alongside cultural tourism and special interest tourism. Article 14 paragraph (1) states that the operation of ecotourism attractions constitutes the utilization of natural resources and environmental management as a means of tourism. Regional governments play a central role in designing, managing, and implementing policies that support the development of ecotourism. One of the main regulatory guidelines is the Minister of Home Affairs Regulation (Permendagri) Number 33 of 2009 concerning Guidelines for the Development of Ecotourism, which emphasizes the importance of integrating environmental conservation, local community empowerment, and regional economic growth.

Barru Regency, located in South Sulawesi Province, is one of the regions with great potential for ecotourism development. This area is endowed with natural resources such as beaches and mountains that offer diverse tourist attractions, including Ujung Batu Beach, Lappa Lona, and the surrounding hilly areas. However, this potential has not been fully optimized due to a lack of promotion and limited public understanding of the ecotourism concept.

Permendagri Number 33 of 2009 provides a foundation for regional governments to address these challenges. This regulation encourages local governments to make ecotourism a priority development sector through comprehensive planning, community involvement, and environmental protection.

### **Revenue and Number of Visitors to Tourist Attractions in Barru Regency (2022–2024) Source: Barru Regency Tourism Office, 2025**

Management	No	Tourist Attraction	Revenue (Rp)	Number of Visitors
Barru Regency Government	1	Ujung Batu Beach	80,000,000	40,195,000
	2	Lappa Lona	100,900,000	20,545,000
Village Government	3	Laguna Beach	56,195,000	86,940,000
	4	Maddo Hill	6,176,000	5,754,000
	5	Mount Kappire	12,517,500	3,817,500
Private Sector	6	Dutungan Island	392,000,000	324,350,000
	7	Diana Waterpark	693,875,000	892,220,000
	8	Pesantren Alam	9,450,000	5,595,000

Based on Barru Regency Regional Regulation Number 12 of 2016 concerning the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA) for 2016–2030, the regulation on ecotourism has not yet fully accommodated sustainability aspects. As a result, the Barru Regency Tourism Office faces a dilemma due to the absence of a specific regulation governing comprehensive ecotourism management.

Since 2023, Barru Regency has established 14 tourist villages managed directly by village governments. However, the management has not been optimal due to limited human resource capacity and minimal coordination with the local government. These tourist villages include Nepo, Pancana, Lalabata, Pao-pao, Lasitae, Pacekke, Ajjakang, Kamiri, Bulo-bolu, Jangang-jangan, Pujananting, Kading, and Palakka Villages.

Article 30 of Law Number 10 of 2009 emphasizes that regional governments have the authority to regulate the administration and management of tourism within their jurisdictions. Meanwhile, the national development of ecotourism is guided by Government Regulation Number 50 of 2011 concerning the National Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARNAS), which includes destination development, marketing, industry, and tourism institutions.

However, implementation at the regional level, particularly in Barru Regency, continues to face various obstacles. Limited budget allocations, a lack of competent human resources, low public awareness of conservation values, and weak interagency coordination remain the main challenges. Therefore, a holistic and integrated effort is required to implement Permendagri Number 33 of 2009 so that Barru's ecotourism potential can be optimally developed.

An approach that emphasizes community empowerment, institutional strengthening, and environmentally based infrastructure development is believed to be an effective solution. Through synergy between local governments, communities, and the private sector, ecotourism can become a driving force for sustainable development that not only enhances community welfare but also preserves nature.

This study focuses on the roles of governmental and non-governmental actors in developing ecotourism in Barru Regency and analyzes the implementation of Permendagri Number 33 of 2009 at the local level. The study also highlights the relationship between local politics and the effectiveness of ecotourism policy, where the dynamics of power, political interests, and local community initiatives determine the success or failure of such policies.

In addition to contributing theoretically to the literature on public policy and tourism governance, this study provides practical recommendations for the Barru Regency Government to immediately formulate a specific Regional Regulation on Sustainable Ecotourism. This step is expected to harmonize national and local policies, strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration, and promote tourism governance based on conservation and community empowerment.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Involvement of Local Government Actors in the Development of Ecotourism in Barru Regency

The research findings indicate that the involvement of local government actors in the development of ecotourism in Barru Regency is highly significant, encompassing planning, implementation, and supervision processes. The local government plays a central role in establishing policies, coordinating relevant agencies, and providing infrastructure and facilities that support the sustainability of ecotourism. The study reveals that the local government's active participation, through the Department of Tourism and other related sectors, serves as the main driver in promoting ecotourism programs aligned with the potential of natural resources and community participation.

However, despite this involvement, the research also finds that coordination between local government actors and other stakeholders, such as the private sector, local communities, and environmental organizations, has not yet been maximized. Bureaucratic constraints and limited budgets are identified as factors that hinder the full optimization of ecotourism development. Additionally, the capacity of human resources within government institutions still requires improvement, particularly in the areas of planning, promotion, and sustainable management.

The research concludes that strengthening inter-sectoral collaboration and enhancing the competence of local government actors are key to ensuring the long-term success of ecotourism in Barru Regency. The active role of the government not only provides regulatory direction and resource allocation but also functions as a facilitator in empowering local communities to participate directly in preserving the environment and promoting tourism. Through more structured and inclusive strategies, the local government of Barru Regency is expected to optimize its potential as a leading ecotourism destination that balances economic growth with environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes that the success of ecotourism development in Barru Regency greatly depends on the consistency of local government commitment in implementing sustainable tourism principles. This includes integrating environmental conservation, social welfare, and economic development into every policy decision. The local government must take proactive steps in developing regulatory frameworks that support community-based ecotourism initiatives, ensuring that local residents are not only beneficiaries but also active participants in managing tourism resources. Community empowerment programs initiated by the local government—such as training in hospitality, environmental awareness campaigns, and the creation of local tourism groups—play a vital role in shaping a sustainable tourism ecosystem. These initiatives encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility among local communities toward natural and cultural assets, which are the foundation of Barru's ecotourism identity. In addition, the research highlights the importance of collaboration with educational institutions, environmental NGOs, and the private sector in developing innovative strategies for marketing and destination management. This multi-stakeholder approach can enhance the visibility of Barru Regency as an ecotourism destination at the national and international levels. The use of digital platforms for promotion and information dissemination is also recommended as a modern and efficient method to attract environmentally conscious tourists. Overall, the involvement of local government actors must evolve from merely being administrative executors to becoming dynamic leaders who can integrate sustainability values into governance practices. By strengthening institutional synergy and adopting a participatory approach, Barru Regency has the potential to become a model for ecotourism development that harmonizes environmental preservation, local empowerment, and regional economic growth.

Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that future development of ecotourism in Barru Regency should focus on strengthening governance transparency, improving coordination among local institutions, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of tourism programs. The local government is encouraged to establish an integrated policy framework that connects tourism development with environmental protection, cultural preservation, and community welfare. Such an approach would prevent the overexploitation of natural resources while ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed among local residents. Investment in infrastructure that supports sustainable tourism—such as eco-lodges, waste management facilities, and environmentally friendly transportation—should also be prioritized. However, this development must remain aligned with environmental carrying capacities and local wisdom to maintain the ecological balance of Barru's natural landscapes. The inclusion of local knowledge and traditions in ecotourism activities is essential to ensure authenticity and strengthen community identity in tourism products offered to visitors. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of long-term monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of ecotourism policies. The government must continuously measure environmental, social, and economic indicators to ensure that ecotourism development remains consistent with sustainability objectives. Collaboration with academic institutions can assist in data collection and policy evaluation, providing scientific evidence that supports decision-making processes. In conclusion, the active involvement of local government actors in Barru Regency serves as a catalyst for the success of ecotourism development. Through consistent policy implementation, community participation, and multi-sectoral cooperation, Barru Regency can realize its vision of becoming a sustainable ecotourism destination that not only promotes economic growth but also preserves its rich biodiversity and cultural heritage for future generations.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that local government involvement in ecotourism development in Barru Regency is still limited due to weak coordination, lack of specific regulations, and low political commitment. Although Barru has significant natural potential, the absence of a clear policy framework hinders sustainable development. Strengthening collaboration between institutions, empowering local communities, and enhancing governance capacity are crucial to optimizing ecotourism's role as a driver of economic growth and environmental preservation. With consistent policy support and participatory planning, Barru Regency can progress toward sustainable and inclusive ecotourism development.

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