

Conference Paper

## Evaluation of the Implementation of the Special Interest Tourism Concept at Tourist Destinations in Ijen Geopark, East Java

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### ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the application of the special interest tourism concept to the Ijen Geopark tourist destination in East Java. Ijen Geopark has unique natural potential, including natural phenomena such as sulfur craters and blue fire, which attract domestic and international tourists. Special interest tourism emphasizes in-depth and specific tourism experiences, such as trekking activities, geological exploration, and observation of the region's unique flora and fauna. This study aims to understand the extent to which the special interest tourism concept has been applied to Ijen Geopark, and how it impacts tourist satisfaction and environmental sustainability. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews with managers, tourism actors, and direct observations in the field. The results of the study indicate that the application of this concept is still not optimal, especially in terms of infrastructure management, tourism education, and environmental preservation. Several obstacles such as accessibility, waste management, and minimal information related to geology and conservation are obstacles to maximizing the potential of special interest tourism in this area. This study recommends increasing cooperation between local governments, Geopark managers, and local communities to improve infrastructure, improve tourism education, and strengthen conservation efforts. Thus, the implementation of the special interest tourism concept can have a positive impact not only on tourists but also on environmental conservation and the welfare of local communities.

*Keywords: Ijen Geopark, special interest tourism, sustainable tourism*

### Introduction

Development is human hope to improve conditions, both materially and spiritually, to achieve goodness. Apart from that, development is also an effort to improve the fate of a nation by following certain predetermined indicators, such as achieving a certain lifestyle. In the tourism industry, tourism development is often evaluated based on the life cycle of a tourism destination. Butler (1980 in Pitana and Diarta (2009) put forward this tourism development model. Destinations proceed according to an evolutionary cycle consisting of exploration, engagement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and post-stagnation (decline or refresh) stages. Changes in various aspects have encouraged the development of tourism areas and increased levels. Opinions regarding tourism products and destinations experience a life cycle, showing that tourism has an impact on various sectors. Various other aspects play a role in tourism development, such as the availability of tourism resources as tourism potential, as well as human resources as business actors in the tourism industry and as owners of tourism resources (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Tourism has become a new lifestyle for broad groups of people. Tourism does not occur in a vacuum but is an open activity that consists of several supporting elements in it (Pitana

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2009). In fact, in its implementation, tourism consists of many industries, but apart from the millions of elements contained in it, one of the things that also supports tourism activities is the existence of several interactions, be they social, political, economic, or physical environmental interactions. However, in tourism activities, one thing that must be paid attention to is how there is good interaction between the host, in this case, the local community, and the guests, namely tourists. Tourism has developed very significantly so several new innovations have emerged in the presentation of tourist attractions. Innovation in tourist attractions is expected to be able to attract tourists to take part in several tourism activities therein, as in alternative tourism activities. One type of alternative tourism that is starting to develop now is special interest tourism. The development of tourism is not only limited to mobility which involves social order in society, but there is a geographic emotional role for each individual in each region who will have an important role in carrying out movements in terms of fulfilling emotional needs. However, there is no detailed explanation regarding the motivation and emotional drive towards a location that is the destination of movement in tourism activities, even though basically one sees another place and is different from the location of the place as a tourism destination. Special interest tourism is a type of tourism provided to meet tourists' special interests, hobbies, or needs. (Syamsiah et al., 2021). This type of tourism emphasizes rich and varied experiences, involving various aspects such as culture, nature, sports, art, history, food, and drink. The aim is to improve the experience of tourists with special interests so that it becomes richer and more meaningful (Bawole. 2020).

The lack of restrictions in determining the attractive character of a tourist destination area is currently much more widespread, especially regarding the existence of different tourist destination areas such as the existence of tourist attractions with concepts adapted based on the preferences or pleasures of tourists which are more often called special interest tourism, which of course becomes a new development model for the concept of tourism, which makes these activities much more widespread and is not limited to motivation but also has pull factors in a tourist destination. Apart from that, the complexity of the factors that support tourism activities also looks at social existence, and the impact that will arise from an economic perspective. It's just that current developments show that it is not only focused on economic interests that are expected from tourism but also on the environment, both physical and non-physical, in the form of culture and local wisdom from a tourism destination area. The importance of tourism potential analysis is to support tourism development in accordance with the characteristics of the tourism destination area (Abbas, 2021). According to Mäntymaa (2021), the progress and life cycle of tourism can influence the positive and negative impacts of tourism on an area. This is important for policy makers to prepare tourism development plans that are in accordance with regional conditions and local communities as well as the target area of the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction and the typology and motivation of tourists who are expected to come to visit the tourist attraction.

Tourists' motivation in traveling is influenced by the development of tourism with the aim of meeting tourists' needs such as medical tourism. Even though previously there was tourism with the concept of spa and resort facilities that emphasized tranquility and relaxation, however, in the postmodern era, medical tourism is considered a new motivation for traveling. Travel, for example, plastic surgery and body shape changes carried out in a tourism destination that has a development concept in this field, then a destination that specializes as a tourist destination specifically for meditation and yoga to gain peace of mind. Not only does it lead to the concept of medical tourism, current travel motivation is also influenced by the development of environmentally based tourism, this is chosen by tourists as a form of helping to reduce the occurrence of global warming, usually these activities tend to be ecotourism tourism activities, green tourism, and prefer destinations with natural attraction capital that applies the concept of sustainable tourism. Research on the potential for special interest tourist attractions in Ijen Geopark has an important role in the development of nature-based tourism that supports

sustainable development. Special interest tourism, such as mountain climbing, geological tourism, and observing natural phenomena, can attract tourists who are more concerned about preserving the environment and local culture. The special interest tourism potential in the Ijen area, such as the blue fire phenomenon and sulfur crater, is a unique attraction that requires special handling to ensure it is maintained and sustainable, so this research will provide wise management guidance. In the aspect of formulating a tourism development strategy that takes into account the environmental and social carrying capacity of the Ijen Geopark area. Through in-depth research, appropriate boundaries can be identified in tourism management so as not to damage the ecosystem, while still providing economic benefits for local communities. In addition, the development of research-based special interest tourism will encourage the preservation of cultural values and local wisdom around the Geopark, which are an integral part of an authentic tourism experience.

Ultimately, this research contributes to sustainable development through increasing awareness of the importance of nature conservation, local economic development, and socio-cultural sustainability. By directing the development of special interest tourism in a balance between exploitation and conservation, Ijen Geopark can be an example of a tourism destination model that integrates environmental, social, and economic aspects into one whole. This research will be the basis for policy makers to design tourism programs that are not only attractive but also responsible and sustainable.

### **Material and Methods**

This research approach uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive method, looking for a general description of the research data, comparing the data obtained, and looking for relationships between each data obtained. This research was conducted in the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area. The location was chosen because of the potential for special interest tourism which carries a cultural concept and is expected to have an impact on improving the local economy. The limitations of this research were carried out in order to provide a focus for the research that will be carried out, namely related to the development of the life cycle of tourist attractions and the management of tourist attractions. The types and sources of data in this research relate to personal documents, interview reports, field notes, official documents and video tapes, direct observations, and interviews conducted with informants, who have been designated as people who know the impact of tourism development in Ijen Geopark as a special tourist attraction as well as photos, and several notes during research and supporting data from related media.

### **Results and Discussion**

A global park (geopark) (hereinafter referred to as a geopark) is a unit that contains geological heritage sites (geosite) and valuable natural landscapes related to aspects of geological heritage (geosite) and geological diversity (geodiversity), biodiversity (biodiversity and cultural diversity) ), and community conservation, education, and sustainable economic development, with the active participation of the community and local government, and with understanding and consideration of the community and its surroundings. Famous for geological phenomena such as the Ijen Crater, the largest acidic crater lake in the world, and the rare blue fire phenomenon which only occurs in a few places in the world. Ijen's biodiversity includes a tropical forest ecosystem that is home to unique flora and fauna, including wild orchids and animals such as leopards, Javan eagles, and various types of birds.

Meanwhile, regional cultural diversity is reflected in the life of the Osing traditional community in Banyuwangi, with unique traditions, arts, and culture such as gandrung dance which have been passed down from generation to generation. These three variations will contribute to making Ijen Geopark a sustainable tourist destination that integrates nature, culture, and environmental protection. The development of special tourism can be seen from the existing

conditions and tourism potential which are starting to change and become opportunities for tourism development in the area, and the Ijen Geopark is managed sustainably so that the tourist attraction development cycle becomes longer, one of the tourist attractions that must be visited. This has a positive impact on the local community's economy, and environmental sustainability and increases the existence of local culture, which in this case is also a tourist attraction. The existing condition of the Ijen geological park is viewed from the 4A aspect, namely apart from culinary tourism, the form of attractions, namely all forms of activities that tourists can carry out while carrying out tourist activities, does not allow tourists to determine when they will visit tourist activities. There are several tourist attractions to choose from. Amenities are hospitality services in the form of accommodation and food and beverage services at tourist attractions. Accessibility can be interpreted as access to tourist attractions, including transportation and infrastructure. On the other hand, secondary activities are another supporting aspect regarding tourism management or related tourism interest groups and organizations (Cooper in Nawangsari & Rahmatin, 2022).

Tourist attractions are a form of activity that tourists can carry out during tourism activities (Park et al., 2019) at Ijen Geopark involving a number of elements of geodiversity, biodiversity, and cultural diversity which make the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area an attractive place for tourists. Ijen Geopark as a special interest tourist attraction offers opportunities to deepen tourist experiences and support local economies in various destinations. For tourists, it provides an opportunity to pursue personal interests. Increasing the number of tourists attending, tourists come from within Bondowoso and Banyuwangi Regencies and outside Bondowoso and Banyuwangi Regencies. Ijen Geopark is a tourist area that has various interesting natural tourist attractions, spread across two districts, namely Bondowoso and Banyuwangi. In the center of the Geopark area, tourists can witness unique and amazing natural phenomena, such as the Ijen Crater with the largest acidic crater lake in the world, and the rare blue fire phenomenon. This phenomenon only exists in two places in the world, namely Ijen and Iceland. Tourists can also enjoy the beautiful view of the sunrise from the top of Mount Ijen after climbing, which takes several hours. In addition, sulfur miners working around the crater add to the attraction for tourists interested in traditional activities and local culture. In Bondowoso Regency, the area around Ijen Geopark offers various other natural attractions that are no less interesting.

There are waterfall tours, such as Tancak Kembar Waterfall and Blawan Waterfall, which offer pristine natural beauty. Apart from that, Bondowoso also has agro-tourism areas, such as coffee plantations and horticulture, which allow tourists to enjoy the beauty of nature while learning about the production process of coffee or local fruit. The tourist villages around Bondowoso also offer interesting cultural experiences, such as local traditions and regional handicrafts. Meanwhile, in Banyuwangi Regency, tourists can enjoy other natural tourism that supports the Ijen Geopark, such as Baluran National Park is famous for its savanna, so it is often called "Africa van Java" which is included in the administrative area of Situbondo Regency. Apart from that, Pulau Merah Beach, Watu Dodol Beach, Plengkung Beach, and Teluk Hijau offer the charm of natural beaches with waves suitable for surfing and beautiful views. In Banyuwangi, cultural tourism is also growing rapidly with the Gandrung Sewu Festival and various arts and cultural events that tourists can enjoy throughout the year. The area around Ijen Geopark creates a variety of tourist attractions, ranging from natural, and cultural, to adventure tourism that enriches the tourist experience.

Amenities around the Ijen Geopark in Bondowoso and Banyuwangi are an important factor in providing comfort and convenience for tourists who come to the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area. Several types of facilities may exist around Ijen Geopark, there are adequate parking facilities, which is very important for tourists who come by private vehicle. An orderly and safe parking area can provide comfort for tourists and what is very supportive is that the parking area is provided by the local community, so that parking fees are directly received by the local community, of course with coordination from every relevant stakeholder. Clean and well-

maintained public toilets are important basic facilities for tourists. The availability of sufficient toilets can improve the experience for tourists, however, the availability of toilets still requires improvement in quality and quantity, especially during high season. There are information boards or maps around the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area which help tourists to get to know and explore the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area better. Information about attractions, services, and directions can help tourists to orient more easily. Rest areas with benches or seating should be a place to rest for a while for tired tourists, but they are not often found or available properly. Places selling food and drinks around the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area provide options for tourists to fill their stomachs and enjoy local dishes, however, the local culinary choices at Ijen Geopark can also be an alternative for tourists to get to know traditional culinary delights. There is a tourist information center that can provide information about local attractions, activities, and events around Ijen Geopark. Tourists can get the latest information about what to do and see in the area from officers and young volunteers under the guidance of the Bondowoso and Banyuwangi Regency Tourism Services. Other facilities include souvenir businesses and local craft products offered to tourists at Ijen Geopark, such as traditional household utensils.

However, there are several facilities that are not available at Ijen Geopark so they require development as support, such as universal accessibility luggage storage (Lockers) which still require expansion, especially the capacity capacity when tourist visits are high, including stairs, flat footpaths, and accessibility for tourists with special needs, such as a wheelchair. And emergency health centers that can guarantee safety for tourists are not yet available properly. It is important to ensure that all facilities are well managed and maintained in order to provide a comfortable and positive experience for all Ijen Geopark tourists.

Accessibility can be referred to as access to tourist attractions including supporting transportation facilities and infrastructure. Ensuring good accessibility to the Ijen Geopark in Bondowoso and Banyuwangi is very important to enable all types of tourists, including those with special needs, to visit and enjoy the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area. Improving accessibility not only makes the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area friendlier for all types of tourists but also reflects a commitment to inclusion and equality. However, of the several available accesses, there are some that have not been met and are suitable for use, such as ramp or stair facilities that are friendly for wheelchair users and people with limited mobility. There are no paths to certain tourist attractions such as ancient dolmen heritage sites, caves and mountains, and the ancient hills of Ijen, apart from that, access to public transportation is still not well accommodated to get to the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area. Most tourists visit by transportation. Private or mass rental transportation. Other facilities that require addition include rest areas, relaxing seating, and public toilets. Other facilities related to sanitation at tourist attractions are very important to provide comfort for tourists. Facilities that are well available and make it easier for tourists to visit include directional signs from the main provincial and district roads to the Ijen Geopark location, clear and easy-to-read directional signs around the general area and the road to the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area, thus helping tourists. To identify the correct direction. Employees and officers receive good direction to interact with tourists and there is a collaboration with youth organizations so that their involvement supports cultural preservation which is the main capital of Ijen Geopark as a tourist attraction.

Tourism stakeholders or in aspect 4 A are Ancillaries, namely other supporters in terms of management or related tourism organizations. Ijen Geopark in Bondowoso and Banyuwangi, managed by the Bondowoso and Banyuwangi Regency Tourism Office, is starting to be revived to increase the potential of the area to have an impact on improving the local economy and income from entrance ticket fees. The tourism department is involved in the management and development of the traditional Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area. Apart from being a manager, he also provides support in licensing, maintenance, and infrastructure development and is also a main actor in the development of Ijen Geopark. The government has a central role in regulating, developing, and managing the tourism sector. The Tourism Office is responsible for policy making,

promotion, and development of tourism destinations. The government also plays a role in providing regulations, licensing, and supervision of the tourism industry to ensure service quality and sustainability. The government, in this case, the Bondowoso and Banyuwangi Regency Tourism Services, also as media managers and tourism promoters, play an important role in promoting tourism destinations both domestically and internationally (Casais, 2020). Promotional campaigns, reviews, and media coverage have a big impact in attracting tourists to visit. However, several community groups are also part of the tourism business at Ijen Geopark. Local communities around tourism destinations have a significant role in providing cultural, environmental, and service experiences to tourists. Local community participation in managing tourism destinations can have a positive impact in terms of cultural preservation, protecting the environment, and sustainable community development. Several community groups that are members of the Ijen Geopark management include trader groups and individual traders. Traders in the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area have a role in management, especially in terms of arranging the layout and providing quality products. Local community groups can have a role in maintaining the traditions, cleanliness, and safety of the Ijen Geopark tourist attraction area, in this case, the Karang Taruna group participates in organizing special events or maintenance.

Sustainable stakeholder analysis should be able to provide support for the existence of the Ijen Geopark Tawun tourist attraction area as a special interest tourist attraction, such as non-governmental organizations that focus on preserving the environment, culture, and welfare of local communities involved in efforts to develop sustainable tourism. Provide guidance, training, and technical assistance to local communities to ensure that negative impacts on the environment and culture are minimized. The tourism industry, hotels, restaurants, transportation, travel agents, and various other service providers are very important stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem. Play a role in providing services required by tourists during their trip to Indonesia. These companies also have a role in creating jobs and contributing to economic growth. Educational and research institutions play a role in developing knowledge and understanding about tourism. Research the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts of the tourism industry, which can assist the government and industry in decision-making. Collaboration between all stakeholders is very important in building a sustainable tourism industry, promoting the beauty and diversity of tourist destinations, as well as providing positive benefits for society and the environment (Sitorus, 2020).

## Conclusion

Tourism development has an important role in improving the economy, society, and culture of a region. In this context, nature-based and special interest tourism, as implemented in the Ijen Geopark, offers great opportunities for sustainable development. Ijen Geopark, with natural uniqueness such as the Ijen Crater and the blue fire phenomenon, is a main attraction that can be managed wisely to ensure its sustainability. This research highlights the importance of managing tourism destinations according to local characteristics, both from social, cultural, and environmental aspects. Proper management can extend the life of a tourist attraction and encourage economic benefits for local communities. In addition, the development of special interest tourism that pays attention to the balance between environmental exploitation and conservation will enrich the tourist experience while preserving nature and culture. Management of infrastructure and amenities around Ijen Geopark needs to be improved to ensure tourist comfort, while the involvement of local communities is very important in maintaining traditions, security, and cleanliness of the area. With the support of all stakeholders, Ijen Geopark can become an example of a sustainable tourism destination that combines economic, social, and environmental aspects.

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