

## A Critical Perspective of the Unique Selling Point for Sustainable Tourism Development: Pentingsari Tourism Village

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### Abstract

The proliferation of community-based tourism village development in Indonesia context promises an ideal model of alternative tourism that puts its main central concern in empowering community. This model could also escalate the community participation and emancipation in their development process through enabling tourism activities surround their area. However, the raising numbers of community-based tourism villages that mostly appear with similar product characteristic and unique selling point, for example in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, has also encouraged challenges in terms of product competition and development. This study aims at identifying the potentials and challenges of the Unique Selling Point of Pentingsari Tourism Village through enabling sustainable tourism product development and marketing lens. Through employing a qualitative case study approach, the data gathered mostly through observation and interview with local community tourism organization members. The findings show that to some extent, sustainable tourism village development paradigm can also encourage the unsustainable practices of tourism development if the paradigm is only be applied partially in a tourism village site.

**Keywords:** *Unique Selling Point, Tourism Village, Sustainable Tourism Development, Community Based Tourism*

### 1. Background

Rural tourism is a relatively distinct form of tourism in towns, cities, and coastal resort (Bramwell, 1994). Some scholars argue that the main distinctive point of rural tourism is the rural image created that has specific meaning to the tourist, affecting whether people want to visit the countryside and “what they see and do when they are there” (Bramwell, 1994; Squire, 1994). Bramwell (1994) states that the emergence of new rural tourism comes from the combination of change in supply and demand sides of tourism. The supply side change consists of the increase of rural tourism among a “better-off clientele”, the increase of intention towards environmental awareness among holiday makers and the desire to be more integrated with local community when doing the tourism activities

in the area they visit (Bramwell, 1994). Thus, this change opens a new opportunity for rural development, generating more tourist visitation to rural areas (Campon-Cero et al., 2016). Rural tourism development is also strengthening “non-urban areas” income by generating more additional income towards local community that directly improves community’s life quality as well as infrastructure and employment levels (Bardon, 1990).

In Indonesia, rural tourism is often associated with tourism village attraction that is a model of leisure focusing on the symbolic and experiential dimensions of a place, represented by an atmosphere of authenticity which cannot be found in other sectors of tourism (Damanik, 2013). There are so many tourism villages particularly in

the region with high visitation number of tourists, for example Bali and Yogyakarta (Nuryanti, 2001; Suarhana, 2015). In terms of tourism marketing, because of supply-demand transformation, tourism village inevitably has uniqueness in its product characteristics which link ecological sustainability and cultural richness of rural community with rural scenery as a set of attractions. This combination can be considered as the unique selling point aspect of the tourism village. Thus, in the importance to develop more sustainable business of tourism village, it is important to consider the potentials and challenges of unique selling point aspects in tourism village concept.

This study will examine the potentials and challenges of unique selling point of tourism village, using Pentingsari Tourism Village in Yogyakarta as a case study. It is important to note that the proliferation of tourism village in Yogyakarta does not only contribute to the economic benefits of tourism development, but also creates some challenges in terms of competition between tourism village organisers that affects the sustainability of tourism village business in Yogyakarta. Furthermore, assessing the potentials and challenges of unique selling point of Pentingsari tourism village in Yogyakarta is also intended to know the sustainability of tourism village business in Yogyakarta.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Rural tourism depends on its environment quality to generate its economic viability and therefore also appears as a fundamental sector in the “sustainable development approach” (Lane, 1994). Therefore, it is clear that rural tourism appears as one of sustainable tourism applications that enhance a collective responsibility of all stakeholders to encourage behavioural change that can reduce environmental impacts provided by mass tourism and contribute to environmental protection as well as resource conservation (MacLellan, 1997; Wanhill, 1997). Furthermore, the success of sustainable tourism in the concept of rural tourism that is intended to benefit the economy of tourism destinations as well as protects and enhances the conservation of natural environment and meets the socio-cultural needs of local community (Countryside Agency

& English Tourism Council, 2001) is determined by cooperation of local community in the planning and managing the tourism village as a fundamental element and its cooperation with other tourism village (Garrod et al., 2006).

In terms of tourism village business development, cooperation and competition are two challenges that are strongly related. As identified by Mitchel & Hall (2005) cooperation in tourism village business appears as one of the challenges facing the development of sustainable tourism village. Some regional environments might have more stimulating economic progress and success than others (Jenkins & Parrott, 1997) and the emergence of new competitors insists each destination to monitor their competitive strategies (Mitchell & Hall, 2005). Furthermore, to maintain their competitive strategy, it is important to consider rural tourism unique selling point aspects and its competitive advantages to respond market competition with other rural tourism business.

### **2.1 Unique selling point of tourism village**

Unique Selling Point (USP) a feature of the product that most stands out as different from the competition, and is usually a feature that conveys unique benefits to the consumer (Blythe, 2006). Usually, USP is equated with Unique Utility Selling Points that can help customers making their time more efficient in buying product or services (Prentice, 2006). The notion of USP is related to the effort to differentiate the specific product with the competitor’s products by emphasising its differences (Blythe, 2006).

In terms of competition, USP is related to the uniqueness of the products that can be used as a tool for competing in the business competition. USPs, as the marketing statement used to promote the superiority area of the businesses’ products, needs to be communicated to make the consumer know the excellence of the products. The effort to effectively communicate the USPs of the products can be achieved by using branding as a strategy regarding specific needs of the market as USP will only be effective if it means something to the consumer (Blythe, 2005).

In the need to achieve competitive advantage, using USP is one of several methods to inform the differentiation of the product for engaging more

consumer. It is important to note that the claim of uniqueness and the benefit-in-use of the products can be verified and proven objectively (Laskey et al., 1989). Thus, implied message through advertising should be delivered clearly, with regard to the market situation analysis in order to make the products superior in the competition.

## ***2.2 Competitive advantage and positioning in tourism village***

Traditionally, competition and cooperation are two different aspects opposing each other particularly in terms of strategic management when focusing on sources of advantages for enterprises (Caves & Porter, 1977; Barney, 1986). Nowadays, there are so many attentions towards the issue (Della Corte & Aria, 2016). Yami et al. (2010) clarify that competition is a way to encourage “the search of new regenerating combinations of resources, skills and processes” while cooperation allows “access to rare and complementary resources”. Thus, cooperation and competition, although they are arguably opposing each other, have a linkage. Competition can encourage the cooperation of firms by encouraging the search of “access to rare and complementary resources” to create regeneration of resources to develop the business. Furthermore, the notion of competitive advantages appears as a question to define the cooperation in the competition.

Competitive advantages fundamentally have its root in the competition as the core value of the success or failure of the business that determine the development activities of the business such as innovations, a cohesive culture and good implementation (Porter, 1985). Thus, to be successful, there is an important need to develop competitive strategy. Porter (1985) argues that competitive strategy is the disclosure of appropriate competitive position in industry and aims to create a profitable and sustainable position in the competition with other business. In other words, competitive strategy is inevitably an important factor that determines the attractiveness of the business.

Competitive advantage is the difference that set apart the business from the competition and contains highlight in the benefits the customer will receive after using the products (Porter, 1985).

Pfeffer & Villeneuve (1994) explain that competitive advantage is related to the way a firm use to get a sustainable cost advantages and “differentiates itself from competitors” as well as selecting the segment. It is also related to the way of creating value for buyers. Furthermore, competitive advantages of the business inevitably have strong relationship with other business competing in related industry as this competition relationship provides the underpinnings of corporate strategy (Porter, 1985).

To create the competitive strategy for enabling the competitive advantage of the business it is important to consider the market positioning term for the related business. Competitive position can be achieved by maximising strengths that differentiates the whole business from its competitor (Porter, 1985). Positioning can make the brand to compete with other brands in specific market (Keller, 2003). The positioning of how to market their products depends verily to the position of each tourism village business. Pentingsari Tourism Village itself appears as a leader for the tourism village products development in Yogyakarta. The need to develop new products is also an important point to consider in the tourism village development discourse for responding the increase of new tourism village that have similar product characteristic. Thus, it is important for Pentingsari tourism village organiser to develop their unique selling points of their products to make their products sustainably competitive.

## ***2.3 Sustainable Tourism and Economic Partnership***

Butler (1999) argues that sustainable tourism is essentially related to research and knowledge on sustainable development aspect in tourism context. This concept raises several prominent critics for being too inflexible and simplistic or even supporting capitalism (Hunter, 1997; Fletcher, 2011). However, sustainable tourism is argued as a breakthrough in political economy context as a relevant action needed to improve sustainable governance work (Bramwell, 2011). Bramwell’s perspective of sustainable tourism therefore bases the approach of this study in defining the nexus of political economy economic cooperation in sustainable tourism context.

Tourism partnership essentially is a context

that links political economy and sustainable tourism to identify path dependence should be created to provide a new sustainable creation in tourism economic development (Bramwell & Cox, 2009). This cooperation includes the way in which tourism development activities initiated by the locals should be linked with other institution both in local, regional, national or even international scope. The linkage comprises several aspects including sustainable tourism-related policies, policies for community well-being, actor participation, and sustainable development (Mellon & Bramwell, 2016).

Sustainable tourism economic partnership therefore concerns on how each tourism institution in a specific context should cooperate to develop their tourism products. This cooperation can produce strong linkages among local tourism organization to catalyse a multiplier effect that generate more economic benefits through product differentiation (Gelosso et al., 2007). In developing tourism products, responsible institution should put concern on establishing strong market linkages between the destination and markets and promoting strong local value chains to encourage local business products' engagement in tourism market and sell their goods and services to the tourism sector (Spenceley, 2010). Therefore, tourism development in regional scale could generate "shared growth" through differentiating tourism products of each organization/institution and promoting environmental conservation efforts that inextricably support each other products (Hottola, 2009). This new institutional arrangement that focus on how community could have broader space in designing, developing and maintaining cooperation with other business establish a new platform of rural tourism sustainable development (Van der Duim, 2011; Spenceley, 2010). Failure in addressing this local tourism organization linkage could result in product competition in similar market that potentially decrease each local tourism organization generated income through tourism activities (Frey & George, 2008).

### **3. Research Method**

In determining critical narration of the research context, this study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive – analytic research strategy.

Qualitative research, although the various definition formulated, focuses on providing in-depth understanding of tourism phenomena that enables the researcher to comprehensively identify deeper contextual condition of society, community and specific development activities (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). The data are mostly collected through observation and interview with local community tourism organization. Additional secondary data were collected through literature study of several documents, research paper, journal articles and research reports from various sources related to tourism development in Pentingsari Tourism Village. Generated data therefore thematically categorized and interpreted through interactively connecting the linkage between the findings and theoretical basis to develop an appropriate critical narration of the research context.

### **4. Research Findings and Discussion**

Pentingsari Village is a prominent tourism village development in Yogyakarta. It is located in the Slope of Merapi Mountain, northern area of Yogyakarta Province. The slope of Merapi Mountain Area, in Yogyakarta is deemed as a tourism village chain area, using cultural resources and environmental landscape as its main attraction that should benefit surrounding community (Yogyakarta Tourism Office, 2012). Tourism village also appears as one of national government programme, part of the effort to increase number of tourist visitation and community empowerment (Suarthana, et.al., 2015).

Pentingsari tourism village is established 2008, and until the year 2014 it has increased economically through enabling many new economic income sources for local community surrounding (Suarthana et al., 2015). The economic benefit from the operation of tourism village considerably increase and the benefits are felt by the local community directly through community participation in providing goods and services for tourism activities such as homestays, small restaurants, guiding services and local handicraft production (Herawati et al, 2013). They receive high number of visitors from different cities for example Jakarta, Bandung and even they regularly receive visitation from Malaysian and Germany tourist, most of them are high school and university

students and mostly camp, live in and doing field trip activities with average number of tourist in group reaching up to 400 people in one visitation (Herawati et al., 2013).

There are huge range of products and services offered by the management. Using its natural and cultural resources, Pentingsari tourism village divides its attractions into four main classification; natural attractions, cultural attractions, special interest and agro tourism. Suarthana et. al., (2015) states that there are some attractions as a part of development strategy in Pentingsari tourism village, they are agriculture activities, field plantation, river tracking, outbond activities, learning and making batik (Javanese traditional cloth), creating traditional handicraft made from *Janur* (coconuts leaf), processing coffee and harvesting agricultural products then processing it into a variety of traditional culinary. It is important to note that the tourism activities in this village are organised by local community including some facilities such as local community homestay and food catering facilities.

The unique selling point of Pentingsari tourism village is essentially located in its combination of attractions that combine modern, traditional and natural scenery as a set of integrated tourism attraction. They provide “Nature, Culture, Agriculture and Environment” to describe themselves and create pre-visit image for the visitors (Herawati, et al., 2014). The combination could be seen from the way management sets tourism activities mainly in the field plantation, scenic river landscape and grass field. They also offer the tourists to participate in cultural activities and creating their own cultural products as handicraft. Moreover, the management has established a traditional plantation garden to breed local plants for community use and for tourism purposes by participating the tourist to participate in planting local plants activities such as coffee and rice seeds. This all tourism activities is based on the ecological and environmental sustainability consideration that the management will encourage each tourist understanding of environmental conservation and sustainability aspect while doing tourism activities. It represents the use of natural agricultural resources as well as cultural resources as tourism attractions that can be enjoyed by the visitors.

The unique selling point aspect of Pentingsari tourism village is also related to the authenticity of their product. They create such performative authenticity (Tiberghien & Xie, 2016) to enhance the sense of place by using local resources for all their activities including local human resources participation, the use of local homestay and some materials for its tourism attraction for example local culinary and Salak (*Salacca zalacca*) as local fruit. In terms of cultural attraction, they also provide some traditional attractions such as leather puppet and some traditional games (Suarthana et al., 2015).

The effort to develop its unique selling point become successful since it has accepted around 25.000 tourist visitation constantly in the recent five years (Yogyakarta Tourism Office, 2018). Its success to develop tourism village community business then inspires the regional government of Yogyakarta Province to put a lot more concern to develop tourism village concept. Thus, with the coordination with Indonesia ministry of tourism, the tourism office of Yogyakarta Province initiated some efforts to increase the number of tourism village by providing regular funding to help the community in settling their community-based tourism village. There are also some festivals to promote tourism village in Yogyakarta Province. These efforts successfully increase the number of tourism village and there are 38 tourism village organised by local community in Yogyakarta.

The condition where there are 38 tourism village business in one province inevitably creates a competition between each of the tourism business village business. They have similar concept with mostly put their main concern in nature and culture-based tourism village development. They also have similar image resulted from the image of Yogyakarta as a city of nature and culture attraction.

Pentingsari tourism village as a role model of tourism village development in Yogyakarta gets inevitable impacts from the initiation of many other tourism village in Yogyakarta. There was a slight decrease of tourist visitation number in 2012-2013 because of other tourism village development that offer same products although the price is relatively similar (Yogyakarta Tourism Office, 2016). The initiation of many other tourism village encouraged price and products competition among tourism villages in Yogyakarta. Thus, in the need

to achieving competitive advantage, Pentingsari Tourism Organisation developed and expanded their services through creating edutourism activities using a combination of modern and traditional games. They targeted elementary school – senior high school students as specific market for their new products. This effort has been proven successful with the increase of their visitors, notably the visitors who are students from different region in both, inside and outside Yogyakarta Province (Herawati et al., 2014). The local community of Pentingsari village can earn extra income since this development, although it's only less than 1 million IDR per month for 95.7% local people but 4.3% of them could earn up to 1-3 million IDR per month (4.3%) (Herawati et al., 2014).

Pentingsari tourism village's effort to develop new edutourism products is thereby followed by other tourism village business. Mostly, the tourism village business in Yogyakarta province have edutourism packages and put school students as their prominent market segment. Thus, to differentiate their products and services with other tourism village and gain the competitive advantage, they develop new service by offering Yogyakarta city tour packages and visitation to well-known tourism sites in Yogyakarta. They also offer some trip packages to other tourism village that have different products for instance the trip to Jamunapari goat (*capra aegagrus hircus*) livestock farming-based tourism village which is located approximately 4 km from Pentingsari Village).

The potential of unique selling point of Pentingsari Tourism Village is in its uniqueness in combining the modern and traditional cultural attraction as well as natural attraction. It is communicated through several efforts such as branding as "local wisdom-based tourism village" (Purwanto, 2015). This kind of combination provides some potentials that support the development of the tourism village for example being the leader for tourism village business competition in Yogyakarta. Furthermore, their branding as local wisdom-based tourism village also in line with the Yogyakarta tourism branding as city of culture that can attract tourists to seek traditional Javanese culture to visit their attractions. In this case, the existence of Yogyakarta tourism inevitably endorses the development of Pentingsari tourism village by

generating more tourist to visit Pentingsari tourism attractions (Munarwati, 2015).

The development of Yogyakarta tourism village business is inevitably causing some challenges for the USP of Pentingsari Tourism Village. The challenges facing village tourism's unique selling point for example in terms of competition, cooperation and networking and globalisation. In terms of competition, they can easily be rivalled by other tourism village businesses because of their competitors can easily develop and brand their village using the Javanese local wisdom resources. Their competitors have similar characteristics of culture and natural background as well as the Javanese traditions.

In responding the competition with other tourism village in Yogyakarta, they try to develop their services by offering city tour to several well-known tourism sites in Yogyakarta. They also offer some tailor-made visitation package that the visitor itself can design their activities both inside the tourism village and outside the tourism village. Their effort to expand their services as city tour provider inevitably can generate more income from the tourist. Besides, they also can make the visitation of tourists longer than usual. Furthermore, there are some exclusive packages offered by the management. This exclusive package contains living in exclusive homestay with a set of city tour and visitations to the famous tourist destinations requested by the tourist. This is the part of competitive strategy in responding the competition with the tourism village business in Yogyakarta by offering exclusive package to the consumer who have high capacity of purchasing.

On the other hand, this effort inevitably generates negative impacts and response from local community. The most prominent problems generated by this effort is the shorter length of stay of visitors. Length of stay is an important factor and the determinant of destination development; the higher visitor's length of stay, the more economy benefit can be absorbed by local community (Baros & Mochado, 2010; Alen et al., 2014). The essence of tourism activities in a destination is to retain the tourist as long as possible to generate their purchasing. Thus, by offering city tour services, the tourists' length of stay in Pentingsari tourism village inevitably decrease. The tourists stay longer but

they only stay for sleeping several nights without any purchase for the food and enjoying more tourist attractions that is offered by the tourism village management. This condition inevitably results in the decrease of local community income from tourism because of their homestays are not being used as often as before.

There is also a conflict between the local community itself generated by less homestay used as accommodation (Suarthana et al., 2015). Furthermore, the conflict related to the income division that only be divided for several people with the competency to organise the city tour is also rising. The new services were being more exclusive as the people who can join to organise the tour is very limited and cannot be wholly contributed to by the local community. Besides that, the exclusiveness of the package offered to tourist makes the jealousy of local community because not all of them have the homestay facilities that meet the requirements of the tourists. Although there are some improvement efforts from the local community itself, this problem is still happening.

The condition in which the tourism village tries to develop their services can be argued as locating more concern in temporary economic benefit without considering the sustainability of its business. It can be dangerous for the level of community engagement and participation in tourism village development. The decrease of community participation will fail to address the authentic experience of visitors and the need to achieve sustainability of development of tourism destinations.

## **5. Conclusion**

Unique selling point is an important factor in assessing the sustainability of tourism village business. There are some potentials and challenges in developing unique selling point aspects in terms of tourism village in Yogyakarta. The most prominent potentials is that the unique selling point of Pentingsari tourism village can generate the local community's additional economy income by the increase of the purchasing level of visitors. The competitive advantages also encourage the development of new services although in the end it created some problems that must be solved as

soon as possible to re-engage the local community contribution in tourism village. In this case, the question of the sustainability of the village tourism businesses is raising.

Sustainable tourism essentially provides a holistic discourse of sustainability globally. Thus, the tourism village development discourse should be followed by holistic sustainable discourse which considers the sustainability of other aspects in other sites or objects regarding the economic, environment and social impacts of tourism. It is important to consider the need to develop new market segment by targeting adults segment in the ages of 30-50. The dominant existing market of Pentingsari tourism village is high school and university students with the interest in more challenging attractions. Thus, to expand the market segment and still retain the unique selling point using the attraction with integration in natural, cultural, agricultural and environmental attraction, the need to develop more relaxing attractions can be considered for example botanic park or animal watching.

The combination of cultural and natural attractions that gives tourist variety of attraction package needs to be considered important in assessing unique selling point. The new city tour package offered by the management inevitably diminishes the length of stay of visitors who supposedly spend most of their time in the village. The pressure from other competitors who follow the development of Pentingsari tourism village cannot be handled appropriately by the management.

There is an important need for government to develop priority concept of tourism village development with different characteristic based on the appropriate area zoning. In the need to minimise the impacts resulted by the competition between tourism village that have similar products with the close proximity of business operation, finding alternative for economic development of local community is important to be considered. The need to reconsider what kind of appropriate sustainable tourism development in tourism village is expected not only comprising the sustainability aspects of the site but also the sustainability aspects of other sites even in other development concerns (i.e. agriculture, industry, etc.) as it is not limited to tourism as one certain thing to increase economic

development of a region. Thus, by using appropriate area development zoning, each area will have their own specific development tools and projected to benefit and subsidise each other to achieve the sustainability of development.

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