



Blue Tourism and Community Welfare in Coastal Indonesia: Evidence from Bone Regency

Firman Hamzah, Hasnawati, Irmawati, Ismail & Marhati

Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora, Universitas Cahaya Prima, Indonesia

Abstract

This study investigates how blue tourism contributes to community welfare in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Despite the region's rich marine and cultural resources, such potential has not optimally utilized to support sustainable development. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving 15 local stakeholders, including tourism actors, village officials, community leaders, and micro- entrepreneurs. The findings highlight that local communities play a central role in developing blue tourism by mobilizing natural and cultural assets such as beaches, sunset spots, seafood cuisine, and homestays. Youth and women emerge as the main drivers of promotion and small-scale businesses, while village governments act as facilitators despite budget constraints. Key challenges include limited infrastructure, poor accessibility, and weak promotion, which restrict the sector's growth. Nevertheless, blue tourism has created **new** livelihood opportunities, diversified household incomes, and strengthened social cohesion in coastal communities. This study concludes that community-based blue tourism has significant potential to improve economic and social welfare, but requires stronger institutional support, infrastructure investment, and inclusive governance. The findings contribute to the literature on the blue economy and sustainable tourism by emphasizing the integration of local participation, cultural values, and multi-stakeholder collaboration in coastal development.

Keywords: Blue Tourism; Coastal Communities; Sustainable Economy; Community-Based Development; Bone Regency

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INTRODUCTION

Marine and coastal tourism, also known as blue tourism (Sharafuddin & Madhavan, 2024; Wondirad et al., 2021), has become one of the main pillars of the blue economy, which is increasingly recognized for its potential to drive regional economic growth and improve the welfare of coastal communities (Evans et al., 2023; Martínez-Vázquez et al., 2021; Saboori et al., 2023). With its abundant marine resources, Indonesia has great potential to develop community-based tourism destinations that are economically oriented and consider social and ecological sustainability (Ahsani et al., 2022; Risfandini, 2024). However, this great potential has not been optimally utilized (Arintoko et al., 2020; Priatmoko et al., 2021). Data from the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries in 2023 indicates that only around 30% of the national marine tourism potential has been developed in a structured and sustainable manner, while the majority is still managed without significant involvement of local communities as key actors (Hariyadi et al., 2024; Nurjaya, 2023).

Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, is one of the areas with great potential for blue tourism development (Rusli & Hasniaty, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). Its natural resources, such as small island clusters, sailing traditions, and seafood cuisine, combine with fishermen's unique social and cultural practices (Hasbi & Badollahi, 2019; Marwah et al., 2020; Sudarmi, 2019). However, this potential has not been fully developed into an inclusive tourist destination. Preliminary surveys indicate low institutional capacity, limited infrastructure, and weak community participation in tourism management, which limits the tourism sector's contribution to improving welfare. This phenomenon suggests the need for a community-based tourism development approach that prioritizes optimizing local resources, community empowerment, and sustainable governance.

Previous literature tends to focus on the technical aspects of marine tourism destination development, such as promotion and infrastructure (Cavalheiro et al., 2020; Dwyer & Gill, 2019; Troian et al., 2023). Still, research has provided limited exploration of the role of local institutions, social inclusiveness, and multi-actor collaboration in blue tourism. Wibawa et al. (2020), Cummings & Greenberg (2022), and Khokhar et al. (2024) emphasizes the contribution of marine tourism to the macroeconomy but does not discuss the social dimensions. Briandana et al. (2018) and Hasbi & Badollahi (2019) identified that local community participation strengthens destination sustainability, but their focus does not extensively explore collaboration between government, community, and micro-enterprises. Wondirad et al. (2021), Aznar-Crespo et al. (2020) and Buluy et al. (2023) revealed that economic diversification through tourism can reduce socio-economic vulnerability, but these studies remain centered on fishing activities rather than diversified local livelihoods. Thus, a research gap remains regarding how local cultural values, grassroots participation, and place-based governance can be integrated into blue tourism development. This study addresses this gap by adopting a community-based approach (Phelan et al., 2020) that combines local resource optimization, empowerment, and sustainable governance to analyze blue tourism in Bone Regency.

Accordingly, this study focuses on three main components: (1) local potential, (2) the role of institutions and communities, and (3) their impact on economic and social welfare. It seeks to answer two key questions: What are the blue tourism development strategies implemented in coastal areas? and What are the challenges and opportunities for improving community welfare through locally based blue tourism development? The answers are expected to provide conceptual contributions by integrating socio-cultural perspectives into blue tourism studies, and practical recommendations for local governments and coastal communities in designing inclusive and sustainable development models.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to explore blue tourism development strategies in improving coastal communities' economic and social welfare. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of local stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and practices within their unique socio-cultural context. At the same time, the case study design provides a comprehensive analytical framework

for examining the dynamics of community-based tourism development in a specific region (Miles et al., 2019).

The research focuses on Bone Regency because it has rich marine resources such as small islands, sailing traditions, and seafood cuisine, but still faces limitations in utilizing this potential sustainably. Informants were selected purposively to ensure their direct involvement in the planning, managing, and promoting of community-based blue tourism. In total, Fifteen informants participated, comprising six local tourism actors, three village government representatives, four community leaders, and two micro-entrepreneurs. This composition was designed to capture diverse perspectives and provide data triangulation across stakeholder groups.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, field observations were carried out to examine tourism practices, tourist–community interactions, and supporting infrastructure. Observations also captured expressions such as sailing traditions and seafood cuisine, which serve as core attractions. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to explore stakeholders' perceptions, motivations, and strategies regarding blue tourism development. These interviews provided space for informants to narrate their experiences, enabling researchers to understand the social dynamics and challenges they face. Third, document studies were conducted on local government policies, village development plans, tourism promotion materials, and coastal community institutional documents. The use of multiple techniques strengthened the reliability of findings and allowed cross-checking between formal policy and actual practice.

Data analysis was conducted following the interactive model of Miles et al. (2019), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification. In the data reduction stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded and categorized according to themes such as local potential, institutional roles, community participation, and welfare impacts. The data presentation stage was carried out through thematic narratives and matrix visualizations that mapped the relationships between the main themes, thereby facilitating the interpretation of inter-variable relationships. Next, conclusions are drawn through an iterative process involving critical reflection and member checking with informants to validate interpretations.

To ensure validity, both source and technique triangulation were applied. Source triangulation compared perspectives across different informant groups, while technique triangulation cross-checked interview, observation, and document data. This combination strengthened credibility, minimized researcher bias, and ensured that findings represented the actual conditions of blue tourism development in Bone Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Theme 1: Utilization of Local Potential

Utilizing local potential is the primary strategy of the coastal community of Bone Regency in developing blue tourism. Natural attractions such as Tanjung Palette, sunset views, and a brackish swimming pool built in the tourist area are maximized to attract tourists. Additionally, the community is optimizing cultural and marine culinary potential, such as offering grilled fish caught by local fishermen and traditional coastal-style pastries. Simple homestays managed by residents also provide an alternative for tourists seeking an affordable accommodation experience near tourist sites. This utilization emerged as a response to the limited availability of formal facilities, which are still largely inadequate, while also showcasing the community's creativity in transforming everyday assets into tourist attractions.

In interviews, local tourism stakeholders emphasized this through various perspectives:

"There used to be no swimming pool, but now it has been facilitated and built by the government, attracting tourists to come." (I, Tourist Site Guard)

"There are many villas available within the area, but they're quite expensive, so we took the initiative to provide simple homestays as an option for tourists. There are only two rooms, but the location is perfect near the tourist spot, so many guests like it." (H, Homestay Owner)

"We take advantage of the sunset here. Many young people like to take photos, so we created attractive photo spots." (R, Village Youth)

"Seafood is our specialty. Grilled fish straight from the fishermen's catch." (S, Food Vendor)

The interpretation of these findings reveals that the people of Bone have adopted an internal potential-based approach to developing blue tourism. Instead of waiting for significant investments from outside parties, they utilize available resources close to their daily lives. Natural spots previously used only by locals have been transformed into tourist attractions, while simple local cuisine and homestays retain their authenticity to attract tourists seeking authentic experiences. This pattern reflects collective creativity from limitations, signaling the community's readiness to adapt to experience-based tourism trends without losing its coastal cultural identity.

Theme 2: The Role of Local Communities and Institutions

The role of local communities and institutions is a crucial element in blue tourism management in Bone Regency. The main drivers of tourism activities are youth groups who voluntarily organize activities, ranging from parking arrangements and guest reception to simple promotion through social media. Formal institutional support comes from the village government, which is still limited to basic training and facilitating resident coordination. Participation is also expanded to women's groups through the PKK program, which takes advantage of this opportunity to sell local cuisine and souvenirs to tourists. Although coordination is not yet formally structured, the emerging collaborative patterns indicate a collective awareness of the need to manage tourism based on local potential.

The following statements from informants illustrate this dynamic:

"The young people here created a WhatsApp group to coordinate when guests arrive, who will prepare parking, and who will be the guide." (R, Community Leader)

"The village government has helped by providing basic training for homestay owners and managers, although it is not yet regular due to limited budget." (A, Village Official)

"We try to involve everyone, including the women from the PKK, so that they can sell food and small souvenirs to tourists." (S, Culinary Vendor)

Interpretation of these findings shows that the initial success of blue tourism development is highly dependent on cooperation and local community initiatives. Young people act as the main driving force, bridging tourists' needs and the availability of local resources. Women contribute to expanding economic benefits through their involvement in microeconomic activities, while the village government, despite its limited resources, remains a facilitator, ensuring coordination among stakeholders. This dynamic highlights the nascent stages of community-based governance that can be further developed into a formal collaboration model between the community and village government institutions.

Theme 3: Infrastructure and Accessibility Barriers

One of the main obstacles faced in developing blue tourism in Bone Regency is the limited infrastructure and accessibility to tourist sites. The considerable distance from Makassar, approximately five hours by road, poses an initial challenge for tourists. The roads leading to several tourist spots are still suboptimal, with some unpaved, making them difficult to pass during the rainy season.

Basic facilities such as public toilets and parking areas are also limited, often becoming a complaint from visitors who enjoy the beach views or sunsets. Additionally, destination promotion remains minimal, leaving many potential tourists unaware of the existence of these potential spots. The lack of direct public transportation to the locations forces tourists to rent private vehicles at high costs, indirectly limiting the number of visitors, especially domestic tourists with limited budgets.

Several informants directly addressed these issues:

"Access here is still far. It takes five hours by car from Makassar to Bone." (R, Community Leader)

"The road leading to the tourist spot is a bit rough, making it difficult for vehicles to pass through." (H, Homestay Owner)

“Public toilet facilities for tourists are inadequate and often a source of complaint from visitors.” (S, Food Vendor)

“Promotion is still minimal. Many people are unaware that there is a beautiful sunset spot and delicious seafood here.” (A, Village Youth)

“There is no direct public transportation to the tourist site, so tourists must rent private vehicles at high costs.” (L, Traditional Leader)

The interpretation of these findings shows that despite Bone’s rich natural and maritime cultural potential, infrastructure and accessibility challenges remain significant barriers to consistently attracting tourist flows. The long travel distance without public transportation support, inadequate basic facilities, and limited digital promotion make this destination still dependent on visitors with limited information or personal connections. This situation also highlights the need for structural interventions from the local government and other stakeholders to improve physical infrastructure while strengthening the promotion system to enable blue tourism to develop more inclusively and competitively.

Theme 4: Opportunities for Improved Economic Welfare

The presence of blue tourism on the coast of Bone Regency has opened up new opportunities for the community to improve their families' economic welfare. Tourism activities, which were previously limited, have now developed into a significant source of additional income, especially for fishermen, homestay owners, and small traders. This change is evident in diversifying livelihoods; people no longer rely solely on marine products but earn income from providing tourism services, selling food and souvenirs, and managing facilities such as parking and entrance tickets to tourist sites. This situation indicates a more dynamic and inclusive local economic shift, where various age groups, including youth and women, actively participate in the tourism ecosystem.

The following quotes from interviews reinforce these findings:

“Since tourists started coming, our family income has increased because my wife and I can sell food, not just rely on fishing.” (M, Fisherman)

“My homestay gets busy on certain days, like New Year’s and holiday seasons. It’s a decent extra income.” (H, Homestay Owner)

“Young people now don’t just follow their parents to sea, but also work in tourism, such as parking attendants or ticket sellers. They earn extra pocket money.” (R, Village Youth)

“My stall now sells not only to villagers but also to visitors from outside who come to the beach.” (I, Snack Vendor)

The interpretation of these findings indicates that blue tourism is not only a short-term economic opportunity but also has the potential to drive more sustainable socio-economic transformation. The involvement of various community members strengthens local economic circulation while enhancing a sense of ownership toward the tourist destination. With these opportunities, the community considers tourism an alternative livelihood that can reduce dependence on marine catches, especially during lean seasons or bad weather. This marks an important starting point for fostering more inclusive community-based economic growth in the coastal areas of Bone.

Theme 5: Social Impact and Inclusiveness

The development of blue tourism in Bone Regency has significantly impacted coastal communities, strengthening cultural identity and creating new social dynamics within communities. The presence of tourists has increased the community's pride, especially the younger generation, in their villages, which were previously rarely noticed. These changes have also encouraged the participation of women's groups, taking advantage of new economic opportunities, such as selling food and souvenirs around tourist sites. However, not all segments of society benefit equally; some residents are still spectators because they are not directly involved in tourism activities. In addition, minor conflicts have arisen, such as the division of parking spaces or selling locations. However, these are usually resolved through deliberation using a family-oriented approach typical of coastal villages.

The following statements from informants illustrate these social dynamics:

"Young people are more proud of their village because many visitors come." (R, Youth Leader)

"Not all residents feel the benefits. Some are just spectators because they are not directly involved in tourism." (H, Homestay Owner)

"The women are happy because they can sell food around the tourist area, so they have their income." (S, Food Vendor)

"Sometimes there are small conflicts over parking lot or sales location distribution, but they are usually quickly resolved through consensus." (A, Village Official)

The interpretation of these findings reveals complex social dynamics as a direct consequence of the blue tourism transformation. Although it has a positive impact in building pride and opening economic opportunities for certain groups, the uneven distribution of benefits creates participation gaps that have the potential to trigger social friction. The consensus-based resolution mechanism is key to maintaining harmony and ensuring inclusivity, while also serving as evidence that the community's spirit of cooperation remains vital in managing social changes driven by tourism development.

Discussion

The development of blue tourism in Bone Regency show how coastal communities utilize local potential to address economic development challenges while maintaining social and cultural sustainability. The main findings of this study indicate that the development strategies adopted are bottom-up, driven by communities with limited institutional support from the village, but effective in mobilizing existing natural and cultural assets. This approach aligns with community-based tourism, where communities are not merely beneficiaries but also key actors in tourism planning and management (Phelan et al., 2020). In the context of Bone, assets such as Tanjung Palette, sunset views, local seafood cuisine, and simple homestays have become key attractions developed without relying on large-scale external investments. This phenomenon supports the view of Saboori et al. (2023) and Sudarmi (2019), who emphasize the importance of optimizing local resources in creating destination differentiation, especially in rural areas facing infrastructure and capital constraints. Community creativity in utilizing internal potential aligns with experience-based tourism, which prioritizes authenticity of experience as the main attraction (Arintoko et al., 2020; Aznar-Crespo et al., 2020).

Despite their simplicity, community-managed homestays offer direct interaction between tourists and fishermen's daily lives, creating added value not found in modern commercial accommodations. This is also consistent with the findings of Hasbi & Badollahi (2019) and Marwah et al. (2020) on the contribution of homestays to rural economic diversification and the strengthening of cultural identity. However, this approach differs from Ahsani et al.'s (2022) and Evans et al.'s (2023) study, which criticized the growth of blue tourism in some coastal areas for neglecting local social values; in Bone, cultural values are at the center of the development narrative. The role of the community and local institutions is key to the initial success of blue tourism development.

Village youth emerge as driving forces organizing tourism promotion through social media, managing parking, and guiding tourists. This dynamic aligns with Hariyadi et al.'s (2024) findings, highlighting local community involvement as a determinant of the sustainability of marine tourism destinations. In Bone, women's participation is also significant through PKK activities that leverage new economic opportunities by selling local food and souvenirs. This pattern aligns with Buluy et al.'s (2023) perspective on tourism as a tool for socio-economic empowerment for marginalized groups in rural areas. Despite their limited resources, village governments play a crucial role as facilitators and serve as important bridges between communities and regional policies. The informal collaboration between youth, women, traditional leaders, and village governments indicates the emergence of community-based governance that can be further developed into a more formal structure. This aligns with the quadruple helix approach, which emphasizes multi-actor collaboration—government, community, academia, and the private sector—in social innovation (Dwyer & Gill, 2019; Troian et al., 2023).

Although great potential has been tapped, infrastructure and accessibility constraints remain significant challenges. The five-hour journey from Makassar without direct public transportation, inadequate road conditions, and limited basic facilities such as toilets and parking areas are significant barriers to tourist growth. The lack of digital promotion also causes this destination to be less known, in contrast to Cavalheiro et al.'s (2020) study on smart tourism, which emphasizes the importance of digital technology in increasing destination visibility. These challenges highlight the gap between high natural and cultural potential and low infrastructure capacity, a common phenomenon in many developing coastal destinations (Khokhar et al., 2024). This indicates the need for local government intervention and cross-sectoral support to improve physical accessibility while building digital infrastructure that supports tourism promotion.

The economic impact of blue tourism in Bone is evident through the diversification of community income sources. Fishermen and homestay owners earn additional income from tourists, while young people and women are involved in micro-enterprises such as parking, ticketing, and food sales. These findings align with those of Wondirad et al. (2021), who demonstrated that tourism diversification can reduce coastal communities' socio-economic vulnerability. This phenomenon also supports the view of Risfandini (2024) on the contribution of tourism to food security and household income in rural areas. In Bone, these new economic opportunities strengthen local financial circulation and reduce dependence on seasonal marine catches.

However, these benefits are not evenly distributed; some residents still play the role of spectators without direct access to tourism activities, creating a participation gap that can cause social friction. The social impact of blue tourism in Bone reflects the process of community identity transformation. The community, especially the younger generation, shows a new pride in their village, which is now known as a tourist destination. This phenomenon supports Briandana et al.'s (2018) findings on how tourism can build community pride and revitalize local culture. However, social dynamics also present new challenges, such as minor conflicts over parking spaces or trading locations, which, although resolvable through consultation, still indicate potential tensions in the distribution of economic benefits.

This situation highlights the need for inclusive governance mechanisms to ensure that all segments of society feel the benefits of tourism. An overall analysis of the findings shows that blue tourism development in Bone is moving from a resource-based approach toward a participatory community-based model. Unlike many studies that emphasize top-down intervention by the government or investors (Cummings & Greenberg, 2022; Wibawa et al., 2020), the case of Bone shows how communities can be the main drivers of development even with limited resources. This approach is relevant to the theory of sustainable livelihoods, which emphasizes using local assets to build household economic resilience (Martínez-Vázquez et al., 2021). On the other hand, infrastructure and digital promotion challenges indicate the need to integrate smart tourism theory (Jawad & Naz, 2022) to support destination sustainability without sacrificing local cultural values.

The implications of these findings include theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, this study enriches the blue tourism literature by highlighting the integration of socio-cultural and economic dimensions in rural Indonesia. Previous studies have primarily focused on marine tourism's ecological or technical aspects, while this study demonstrates the importance of community and cultural values in creating sustainable attractions. Practically, the findings provide recommendations for local governments to develop community-based blue tourism policies that focus on physical infrastructure development and the social and cultural empowerment of local communities. Enhancing youth capacity, providing community-based tourism management training, and integrating simple digital technologies such as social media can effectively expand promotion and improve tourist experiences.

A multi-stakeholder collaborative approach involving local governments, communities, academics, and the private sector is needed to strengthen the blue tourism ecosystem. This collaborative model can combine each actor's strengths: communities as holders of local knowledge, governments as policy facilitators, academics as providers of research and innovation, and the private sector as sources of capital and market networks. Such collaboration has proven

effective in several other coastal destinations in Southeast Asia and can be replicated in Bone with local context adjustments.

This research also has implications for destination promotion and marketing strategies. Given resource constraints, storytelling-based promotion highlighting authentic fisherfolk experiences, local cuisine, and traditional customs can serve as a competitive advantage for Bone compared to more commercial marine tourism destinations. This approach simultaneously preserves local cultural values while attracting tourists seeking unique and meaningful experiences. On the other hand, efforts to improve basic infrastructure such as road access, sanitation facilities, and public transportation remain an urgent priority to support the growth of tourist visits.

Overall, these findings and discussions underscore that community-based blue tourism development in Bone has great potential to promote economic welfare while strengthening the socio-cultural identity of coastal communities. However, the sustainability of this development requires a holistic strategy that integrates community empowerment, infrastructure improvement, digital promotion, and collaborative multi-stakeholder governance. This approach is relevant for Bone and can serve as a model for other coastal areas in Indonesia with similar characteristics.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals how blue tourism in Bone Regency has developed through the utilization of local potential and active community participation. Findings show that coastal communities utilize existing natural and cultural assets, such as Tanjung Palette, sunset spots, seafood cuisine, and simple homestays, as the main tourist attractions. The development process is bottom-up, initiated by youth groups, women, and traditional leaders, with limited but significant facilitation from village governments. Economic impacts are evident in livelihood diversification, increased income for fishermen and traders, and the involvement of vulnerable groups such as women and rural youth.

On the social side, there is a growing sense of pride in local identity and strengthened community cohesion, although not all segments of society have benefited equally. Despite this, blue tourism in Bone still faces significant challenges, particularly in infrastructure, accessibility, and digital promotion. This highlights the need for integrated policies that combine community empowerment, institutional support, and infrastructure investment to sustain tourism growth. The main contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how community-based blue tourism integrates socio-cultural values with economic benefits in a coastal Indonesian context. It enriches the literature on blue economy and sustainable tourism by emphasizing the importance of multi-actor collaboration, including communities, governments, and micro-entrepreneurs.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the scope of the study is limited to one study site in Bone Regency, so the results do not necessarily represent the entire coastal area of Indonesia, which has different social, cultural, and infrastructure conditions. Second, the qualitative approach with a limited number of informants provides depth of understanding but does not allow for detailed quantitative measurement of economic impacts, such as the percentage increase in household income or tourism's contribution to regional domestic product (RDP). Third, the study was conducted during a specific period following the initiation of the blue tourism program, thus failing to capture long-term dynamics, including program sustainability and seasonal impacts. In addition, this study focused more on the perspectives of local actors and did not fully explore tourists' perceptions of these destinations.

Future research should expand the scope of the study area to allow comparisons between coastal areas with different characteristics, thereby identifying a wider range of success factors and challenges. A mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis is also recommended to measure economic and social impacts more comprehensively, including estimating the contribution of blue tourism to household welfare and the regional economy. Subsequent research should also involve tourists' perspectives to understand their preferences, satisfaction, and behavior, which are essential for developing marketing strategies and destination management. In addition, exploring more structured multi-actor collaboration models, including

integrating digital technology and innovative tourism approaches, can enrich our understanding of how blue tourism can be managed adaptively and sustainably amid global socio-economic and environmental changes.

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