


## The role of the local community in Pari city village in the development of Sri Mersing beach tourism in Serdang Bedagai district

Slamet Widodo<sup>\*1</sup>, Ahmad Aswan Waruwu<sup>2</sup>, Agung Putranto<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<b>Keywords:</b> Sri Mersing Beach, Community Roles, Tourism Development	The purpose of this study is to analyze the participation of the community in Kota Pari village in the development of Sri Mersing Beach tourism before and after it was managed by the government. Support and participation of the local community are crucial in tourism development. The government is expected to play a role in encouraging increased community participation. However, in practice, government involvement in management can potentially have both positive and negative impacts on community participation. Through a qualitative descriptive method, this study examines the level of community participation in the development of Sri Mersing Beach tourism, currently managed by the government, using Arnstein's ladder of participation. The results show that the participation of the community in Kota Pari village in the development of Sri Mersing Beach tourism is at the level of tokenism or symbolic participation after Sri Mersing Beach was managed by the government. Therefore, the government's role, which is largely focused on physical development, needs to be accompanied by efforts to increase community participation to ensure its sustainability and continual improvement, thus achieving sustainable tourism.
This is an open access article under the <a href="#">CC BY-NC</a> license 	<b>Corresponding Author:</b> Slamet Widodo Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia <a href="mailto:widodoprofesional@gmail.com">widodoprofesional@gmail.com</a>

### INTRODUCTION

In There are four pillars in the concept of sustainable tourism destination management, namely sustainability management, utilization of the economy for local communities, preservation of culture for communities and visitors, and environmental sustainability (Kemenparekraf, 2022). In the concept of sustainable tourism development, there is a relationship between sustainability and community participation (Rusata, 2019). In many cases, tourism development is influenced by the level of involvement of the local community. On the one hand, tourism development itself is expected to improve the welfare of the local community (Hermawan, 2016; Lasso & Dahles, 2021; Nurwanto, 2020). On the other hand, tourism development faces obstacles if it does not receive full support from the local community (Jupir, 2013; Purwaningsih & Mahagangga, 2017). One model of participatory tourism development planning is community-based tourism, where local communities are given the opportunity to manage tourism for their benefit (Anuar & Sood, 2017). This concept is an alternative development strategy through community

empowerment around tourist locations to improve community welfare focusing on community involvement and development.

In practice, the implementation of community-based tourism concept faces obstacles. This is because the conditions of communities vary. Tourism development also depends on the level of acceptance and support from the community (Hilman et al., 2019; Wahyuni, 2018). In some areas, it is difficult to implement this concept due to limitations faced by the community, whether operational, structural, or cultural (Belieu & Fina, 2019). These limitations vary, such as financial factors, infrastructure limitations, and the knowledge possessed by the community itself (Belieu & Fina, 2019; Elim & Mba, 2021; Palimbunga, 2018; Rahayu et al., 2016). These limitations require external intervention to assist the community. The increase in tourism activities in North Sumatra is greatly influenced by the availability of adequate accessibility, amenities and attractions (Surya ED, et al, 2023).

The government is one external party that can play a significant role in assisting the community. However, government involvement in community-based tourism development has various impacts on the local community. On the one hand, the government can benefit the community through mentoring, training to improve skills and knowledge, and supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of tourism activities conducted by the local community (Marlina, 2019; Pribudi, 2020). On the other hand, government involvement in local tourism development, especially when the government plays a role in destination management, can cause conflicts due to land expropriation and issues in income distribution and rights to manage tourist attractions (Wang & Yotsumoto, 2019). Research using SEM is needed to find out how much interest people have in visiting the tourist area (Ritonga, et al, 2022). Based on this situation, it is important to analyze community participation in tourism development managed by the government, one of which is by using the ladder of community participation. The model of community participation is divided into levels called the participation ladder (Arnstein, 1969)

**Table 1.** Arnstein Participation Date

1	Citizen Control	Degree of Citizen Power
2	Delegated Power	
3	Partnership	
4	Placation	Tokenism
5	Consultation	
6	Information	
7	Theraphy	Non
8	Manipulation	Participation

Source: Arnstein, 1969

Table 1 shows the Arnstein's ladder of participation, where in the Non-Participation category, there are two lower levels, Manipulation and Therapy. The manipulation ladder indicates that there is no possibility for community participation in planning. The holders of power, in this case, the government, will select and train a number of people as representatives of the community who must always agree. In the second ladder, therapy, limited communication has been established, initiatives come from the holders of power  
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(government), and it runs only one way. The government informs the community minimally about some approved programs, and other community members just listen.

The third to fifth ladders fall into the Tokenism category. The third ladder is Information, where information and communication have been provided but still run one way, and feedback mechanisms are minimal. The next ladder is Consultation, where two-way communication has been established but participation is only formal, aspirations of the community are beginning to be captured, there is a possibility that community aspirations will be heard but not guaranteed to be implemented. The fifth is the Placation ladder, meaning communication has gone well, marked by negotiations between the community and the government as the holders of power, but the final decision remains with the holders of power, namely the government.

The quality of human resources as the main actors of tourism development is also one of the important aspects that must be considered in which the three main components in the management of tourism management, namely the government, the private and the public have not been coordinated perfectly (Dian Septiana Sari, Megasari Gusandra Saragih, 2018).

The top three ladders fall into the category of Degree of Citizen Power, meaning in the decision-making process, the community has influence, community participation has entered the determination space for processes, outcomes, and policy consequences by running a Partnership. The community has been able to negotiate with holders of power on an equal footing. The government treats the community as colleagues. Delegated Power, where the community has higher authority than the government in decision-making. The government delegates some authority to the community. In the Citizen Control ladder, full participation of the community in a decision determines the sustainability of an activity. In this level, the government's function is minimal while community participation is high in holding authority. The community dominates more than the government, even to the extent of evaluating work, making it an ideal participation.

Studies on community-based tourism in tourism development generally focus on the role of the community, development benefits, or issues related to community participation that occur after tourism is developed (Ahsani et al., 2018; Palimbunga, 2018; Sasongko et al., 2019). There are not many studies analyzing community participation before and after tourism development involving other stakeholders. By using the Arnstein's ladder, the aim of this study is to analyze the participation of the Kota Pari village community in the development of Sri Mersing Beach tourism before and after this tourist attraction is managed by the government. The Arnstein's ladder serves as an appropriate analytical tool to observe changes in the level of participation of the Kota Pari community based on indicators at each level. Tourist attractions also require marketing programs, because the benchmark for the success of SMEs to win the competition is through marketing performance (N Siregar, et al, 2021). Marketing strategies that are feasible to be applied in tourism, using SWOT analysis, for the success of tourist destinations (Ritonga HM, et al, 2018).

## METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach, which involves the collection and analysis of

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data in the form of words, both spoken and written, as well as human actions, to examine the participation of the Kota Pari village community in the development of Sri Mersing Beach tourism. In this study, the researcher chose Sri Mersing Beach, Kota Pari Village, Pantai Cermin District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province as the research location. The reason for selecting this research location is because of the attractive natural panorama and watersport activities, making it one of the leading tourist destinations in the region. Its unique white sand beach and development potential distinguish it from other beaches. Sri Mersing Beach is currently managed by the Tourism Office of Serdang Bedagai Regency, hence the researcher's interest in analyzing the participation of the Kota Pari village community in the development of this tourist attraction.

In this research, the researcher conducted observations related to the research object, namely Sri Mersing Beach tourism, followed by in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face with participants such as individuals or institutions responsible for the management of Sri Mersing Beach, as well as members of the Sri Mersing Pokdarwis (Tourism Awareness Group) who reside around the tourist site. Additionally, document studies were conducted to complement the data obtained in the field. Data collection was carried out using snowball sampling method, and all data collection activities were conducted with the consent of the informants. In-depth interviews were conducted when the informants had free time to avoid disrupting their daily activities.

Thematic analysis was employed in this research. Thematic analysis is one of the methods used in qualitative data analysis to identify patterns or determine themes from the collected data (Junaid, 2016). To thoroughly examine qualitative data, thematic analysis is an effective method as it helps to identify patterns in an event and explain to what extent the event occurs from the researcher's perspective (Heriyanto, 2018).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Tourism Potential in Kota Pari Village, Pantai Cermin Subdistrict, Serdang Bedagai Regency**

One of the tourism potentials in Serdang Bedagai Regency is Sri Mersing Beach located in Kota Pari village, Pantai Cermin subdistrict, south of Medan City. Geographically, the beach, located at coordinates 3°38'42"N 98°58'55"E, features vast stretches of naturally formed white sand along hundreds of meters, shaped by natural winds (Nugraha & Enga, 2021; Tualaka et al., 2018). Additionally, Sri Mersing Beach offers suitable waves for surfing, and along the coastline, there are many pine trees, adding to its allure. It is approximately 48 km from the center of Medan City, with a travel time of 1 to 1.5 hours, and the entrance fee is around Rp 10,000 to 15,000 per person, applicable for both weekdays and weekends.

According to legend, the name "Sri Mersing" originates from a folk tale where a king had a beautiful daughter named Mersing, who fell in love with a prince. Their meeting place was named Sri Mersing Beach.



**Figure 1.** Mersing Beach

Source: Field Data, 2024

Based on Figure 1 above, the uniqueness of Mersing Beach lies in its extensive white sand, which is an attraction for tourists to take photos, and the cleanliness of the beach is well maintained. Each year, the number of visitors increases, as stated by the head of Kota Pari village, Mr. Abdul Khair. The potential of Sri Mersing Beach has motivated the residents of Kota Pari village to develop this area into a prominent tourist destination.

Management of Tourism in Kota Pari Village, Pantai Cermin Subdistrict, Serdang Bedagai Regency. The potential of Sri Mersing Beach has been a focus since the reign of the kingdom, with many royal families visiting to enjoy its beauty. The rapid development of this beach began during the tenure of Mr. Tengku Ery Nuriadi as the Regent of Serdang Bedagai Regency. Mr. Tengku Ery Nuriadi led Serdang Bedagai Regency for 2 terms. The development of the Cermin Beach area, including Sri Mersing Beach, aimed to clean up the Mersing Beach tourist area, which still retained its natural beauty, and to develop its facilities to make it more comfortable for visitors. Road access to the tourist location was also improved. This was stated by Mrs. Yuli, one of the residents who participated in maintaining the Mersing Beach tourist area.

"The routine activity is called 'Jumat bersih' (Clean Friday). We clean the tourist area together from garbage. Usually, the elder people give directions to the community" (Khair, 2024).

The community was enthusiastic about cleaning up the tourist area. Even though they were not paid, the community worked responsibly because they felt a sense of ownership of the tourist destination. The community agreed that Sri Mersing Beach needed to be developed due to its significant potential to improve the local economy and reduce unemployment.

The participation of the Kota Pari village community began with a mutual effort to clean the beach. This was important not only to maintain the health of tourists visiting Mersing Beach but also to demonstrate the initial active participation of the community in

preserving and developing Mersing Beach voluntarily. At that time, the community was led by the elders, and the village head coordinated with the Tourism Office of Serdang Bedagai Regency. The residents living around Mersing Beach cleaned the surrounding beach. The purchase of materials was self-funded by the community. Since then, the beach has been managed by the community itself, albeit with limited facilities and a relatively small number of tourist visits.



**Figure 2.** Watersport  
Source: Field Data, 2024

As the popularity of Mersing Beach increased, evidenced by the arrival of many local tourists, the community took the initiative to build supporting infrastructure such as simple toilets for visitors, with the costs shared by the community. This community initiative later led to the formation of the Mersing Beach Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), which was subsequently approved by the government in the Regent's Decree.

Recognizing the existing tourism potential, the Tourism Office of Serdang Bedagai Regency began to take over the management of Mersing Beach in collaboration with the local community. This area boasts extensive white sand and beautiful pine trees surrounding the beach area. This was mentioned by the caretaker of Sri Mersing Beach.

"This tourist destination has been established since the kingdom era, managed by the local government in collaboration with the surrounding community. Infrastructure and facilities have been continuously improved to meet the needs of visitors" (Khair, 2023).

Since this takeover, the development of facilities and infrastructure has been optimized by the Tourism Office, including paving the entrance road to the beach area, constructing several toilets, and building other supporting facilities. Additionally, accessibility improvements were made by repairing roads leading to the beach area and providing electricity for both visitors and residents living near the tourist location.

In managing the Mersing Beach tourist destination, the Tourism Office focused on developing supporting facilities, but the community was not directly involved in these

developments. The concept of development mainly originated from the local Tourism Office. However, during the physical development phase of the tourist destination, the community was involved in specific aspects. Initially, the construction of supporting facilities was undertaken by the winning bidder of government project tenders, with community participation limited to individuals working as construction workers who were paid for their participation in the projects.

Subsequently, the Tourism Office of Serdang Bedagai Regency implemented an entrance fee for visitors. However, Kota Pari village did not receive a share of the revenue from this fee due to the absence of village regulations governing revenue sharing. As a means of community involvement, the Tourism Office appointed several local residents from Kota Pari village as honorary staff members of the Tourism Office, placed as beach guards with salaries adjusted to the regional minimum wage (UMR). Their tasks included managing ticket booths, recording the number of visiting tourists, reporting ticket sales to the Tourism Office, and submitting ticket sales proceeds to the Tourism Office at the end of each month. They also attended evaluation meetings regarding issues occurring on-site or conveyed feedback from visitors. In addition to the tasks assigned by the Tourism Office, beach guards also prepared supporting facilities such as clean water for visitors.

To enhance community awareness of the tourism potential, the Tourism Office conducted tourism awareness campaigns and technical guidance (Bimtek). The tourism awareness campaign was aimed at all residents of Kota Pari village. The goal of this campaign was to increase the community's understanding of tourism in Kota Pari village, creating a conducive environment for the development of tourism at Sri Mersing Beach. However, this campaign did not arise from community needs but was an initiative of the Tourism Office. The topics selected were also ideas from the Tourism Office, so the residents of Kota Pari village did not pay much attention during the activities. The community participated primarily to receive a stipend from these activities.

Community Participation in the Development of Tourist Attractions at Mersing Beach Based on Arnstein's Participation Ladder. Referring to Arnstein's ladder of community participation, it is evident that during the initial development of Mersing Beach, the residents of Kota Pari village had full control over its development. They planned, controlled, and fully implemented the construction of Mersing Beach tourist attractions. Their autonomy at that time falls under the category of "Degree of Citizen Power" or full community participation in the development of Mersing Beach tourist attractions. Although they only contributed labor, time, and local resources, the community was at the top level of the participation ladder, namely "Citizen Control." What happened in Kota Pari village during the initial development phase is similar to Sasongko's findings in the development of the Kragilan Pine Forest tourism managed independently by the community (Sasongko et al., 2019). Through the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), the community participated in the planning, decision-making, and division of labor. During this period, the community freely expressed their opinions regarding the development ideas of the tourist attractions and collaborated in implementing the proposed ideas.

The level of community participation in Kota Pari village shifted during the development phase. At that point, government intervention began in the construction of Mersing Beach tourist attractions. During this period, the village community entered the "Degree of Citizen Power" category or full community participation in Mersing Beach tourist attractions but was at the "Partnership" level (Arnstein, 1969). The community was on an equal footing with the government. The government treated the community as partners, especially in supporting the opening of Mersing Beach. They also started collaborating in designing and implementing various public policies, as evidenced by the Regent's Decree approving the formation of the Mersing Beach Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis).

Since the management was taken over by the government, the community has remained involved in tourism development, but based on field findings, community participation has been significantly different from the initial development phase of the tourist attraction. Community participation has become limited to individuals with specific positions or skills. The residents of Kota Pari village serve as beach guards, participate in infrastructure development at the tourist location, and engage in selling goods. However, unlike during the initial pioneering period when community participation was the community's own initiative, during the development by the Tourism Office, community participation was more economically driven.

The community participates because they receive compensation from the Tourism Office. The level of community involvement in planning and development has also decreased because development initiatives originate from the Tourism Office. It is evident that the Kota Pari village community has become highly dependent on the government and lacks initiative to take action. In contrast to Ahsani's findings, the Candirejo village tourism community does not depend on the government for empowerment activities, including implementation, facilities, and funding (Ahsani et al., 2018). The Kota Pari village community only participates when requested by the Tourism Office.

The above indicates that community participation in the development of Mersing Beach tourist attractions is at the "Tokenism" stage. In this category, there is community participation, and their opinions are heard, but the community cannot ensure that their opinions will be considered by the authorities, resulting in a very small likelihood of effecting changes in the community. Since the government took over the management, specifically the Tourism Office, coordination and initiation of development have remained predominantly one-way. The community is involved in tourism activities but only as supporters of the Tourism Office's interests, unlike during the initial development of Mersing Beach tourist attractions, where the community was more proactive in building Sri Mersing Beach. This supports Pari City to advance tourism and can increase knowledge and skills, and can act as a Halal Tourism Guide for Tourist Satisfaction (Sri rahayu, 2018).

The Kota Pari village community participates in discussions to plan the development of the village, including the development of Mersing Beach tourist attractions, but the final decisions and subsequent steps are in the hands of the government. The role of the community is limited to providing input, ideas, and suggestions, expected to form the basis for development policy-making. This indicates that community participation in tourism

planning is at the "Consultation" stage, where the community is given the opportunity to express their aspirations and opinions, but there is no certainty that their opinions will be considered or realized, even though there is a two-way dialogue between the community and the government. The success rate of this process is low because there is no guarantee that the community's ideas or opinions will be considered. The Kota Pari village community is given the opportunity to express their opinions and suggestions in the development of Mersing Beach tourist attractions, but the final decision lies with the government, specifically the Tourism Office, to realize the aspirations, ideas, or opinions of the community. Tourism Village Marketing Branding Towards Sustainable Tourism Based on Local Wisdom (Surya ED et al, (2024)

Currently, Sri Mersing Beach has provided comprehensive facilities such as bathrooms, places of worship, several cafes, dining places for seafood, huts for visitors to relax, small boats owned by fishermen that can be rented by tourists, and water attractions to complement the attractions at Sri Mersing Beach.

### CONCLUSION

Community participation is essential in tourism development. The community is involved by the Tourism Office in the development of Sri Mersing Beach tourism as beach guards, members of Pokdarwis (Tourism Awareness Group), field activity coordinators, traders, and hosts at the tourist site. The results of this research indicate that the success of infrastructure development at the tourist site by the government does not guarantee an increase in the participation of the Kota Pari village community in the development of Sri Mersing Beach tourism. Based on Arnstein's ladder of participation, the participation of the Kota Pari village community has degraded, previously at the level of Citizen Control, but after the tourism development was taken over by the government, the participation of the Kota Pari community changed to Tokenism. If this situation continues, there is a possibility that community participation will continue to erode, leading to Non-Participation in the development of Sri Mersing Beach tourism. This paper provides reference that in community-based tourism development, community participation and the benefits obtained by the community must remain a priority in addition to prioritizing infrastructure development. Therefore, this paper recommends: The infrastructure development carried out by the government must be balanced with efforts to enhance the capacity of the community so that community participation remains preserved, continues to increase, and has an impact on the community's sense of ownership of Sri Mersing Beach tourism. From an academic perspective, studies on community-based tourism development need to examine the level of participation occurring in the community within the long-term study range.

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