

# Developing the Local Economy of New Rivermoon Klaten Ecotourism: Community Participation, Zero Waste, and SDGs Achievement

**Nabil Haidar**

UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta

**Dastra Nadiani Septianingrum**

UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta

**Qinanthi**

UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta

**Ika Feni Setiyaningrum**

UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta

**Abstract:** New Rivermoon Ecotourism is an environmentally-based tourist attraction in Klaten Regency, Central Java. New Rivermoon Ecotourism is a sustainable tourist attraction carried out collaboratively with the surrounding community. This study aims to identify the role of New Rivermoon Ecotourism in conservation efforts and economic development for local communities by implementing the principle of zero waste that contributes to achieving SDGs. This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews. Data analysis is carried out through the process of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, conclusion, and verification. The results of the study show that New Rivermoon Ecotourism has a positive impact on river conservation through various river flow cleaning efforts carried out collaboratively with the community. In addition, economically, ecotourism has an impact on improving the economy of local communities by opening new jobs. The implementation of zero waste contributes to the realization of a circular economy through the management of organic and inorganic waste. The efforts made by New Rivermoon Ecotourism help achieve Sustainable Development Goals No. 8, 12, 15, and 16.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, SDGs, zero waste, economic growth, conservation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a concept of sustainable tourism that can combine economic and environmental values. Ecotourism is a solution offered to open up economic opportunities for the community but at the same time carry out environmental conservation. Ecotourism is a form of tourism that is responsible for the preservation of natural areas, provides economic benefits, and maintains the integrity of culture for the local community (Fandeli & Mukhlison, 2000). In various regions, ecotourism has been proven to have a positive impact on the economy, society, and environment (Hunt et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2017). Amid the triple planetary crisis, efforts to develop ecotourism are the right choice. This effort also contributes to environmental sustainability by maintaining the existence of biodiversity (Brandt & Buckley, 2018; Kiper, 2013), preventing pollution by managing resources harmoniously (Meng, 2021), while contributing to reducing the effects of global warming through conservation efforts (Brandt & Buckley, 2018; Dushani et al., 2023). However, there is still doubt that ecotourism can maintain its existence towards environmental sustainability (Hunt et al., 2015).

Environmental sustainability reflected in the form of aesthetics is one of the attributes inherent in ecotourism destinations (Liu & Huang, 2017; Saputra et al., 2023). Ecotourism sells environmental values whose presence can be enjoyed by tourists. Therefore, ecotourism managers need to maintain the condition of their natural environment from various destructions due to human activities (Amare, 2015; Fajar & Rini, 2020; Fandeli & Mukhlison, 2000). Klaten Regency is one of the areas with high natural potential in the form of water resources to be used for ecotourism. Klaten is known as the 1001 Springs district (Anggraheny et al., 2020) in addition to being famous for its river resources which are used as tourist locations. These water resources are mostly managed by the community to improve the local

economy (El Anshori et al., 2024; Rahajeng & Suprpto, 2019). The management of this tourism is based on community participation and is under the auspices of the BumDes institution or other forms of business. Many residents are empowered in tourism management so it becomes a job opportunity for them. In addition, the increase in the community's economy also grew from the emergence of various MSMEs around tourist (Nusyirwan et al., 2024; Runtunuwu & Rajasekera, 2023).

One of the ecotourism destinations in Klaten that is a favorite destination for tourists is New Rivermoon. This tour utilizes the potential of the Pusur River resources by making it a vehicle for water recreation in the form of tubing. In addition to making efforts to conserve river resources, New Rivermoon ecotourism also carries out zero waste-based management of those generated from visitor activities. This is an interesting study in addition to the positive impacts generated from ecotourism activities at New Rivermoon. As is currently a fact, the problem of waste in Indonesia is still unresolved, so it takes seriousness for various parties to become problem solvers in terms of waste. In addition, tourism is one sector that has the potential to produce large amounts of waste with a large number of tourist visits (Hilman et al., 2023; Mateu-Sbert et al., 2013). The independence of waste management by ecotourism managers is a solution to the problems that arise at tourist locations. In addition to being a solution, waste management can be part of the educational element that is a characteristic of ecotourism. Integrated efforts of community participation-based ecotourism by implementing zero waste management are also part of the realization of the Sustainable Development Goal for a sustainable future of the earth.

Research on community empowerment-based ecotourism has indeed been widely conducted in various regions. In Klaten, studies on ecotourism were conducted in various water tourism locations, both springs and river tourism. Various studies on ecotourism that have been conducted examine various aspects such as analysis of the willingness to pay for environmental services (Deristani & Hidayat, 2022), ecotourism development strategies and their impacts (Kusumaningrum et al., 2023), implementation of the CBT concept in ecotourism development (Putri & Gustaman, 2024), innovation in ecotourism development (El Anshori et al., 2024), and the potential and challenges in ecotourism development (Widyaningtyas, 2023). Research on Rivermoon ecotourism has indeed been conducted but more on the study of tourism potential analysis (Kurniawan, 2023). In this research, the study focused on integrated ecotourism efforts with the principle of zero waste and the impact of the presence of this ecotourism on local communities and its relationship with Sustainable Development Goals.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that combines social, economic, and environmental aspects. In ecotourism activities there is conservation and sustainable development, opening new job opportunities for local communities, as well as providing environmental education for tourists (Butarbutar, 2021). Ecotourism can also be an alternative source of livelihood for people living in rural areas (Kim et al., 2019). Four components characterize tourist locations, namely Attractions, Amenities, Accessibility, and Ancillary (Andrianto & Sugiana, 2016; Harianto et al., 2021). The main principles that characterize ecotourism include conservation, education, tourism, economy, and community participation (Fandeli & Mukhlison, 2000; Kusumaningrum et al., 2023).

Ecotourism has an impact on the community's economy by increasing the economic level and reducing the percentage of low-income people (Arsad et al., 2021). The majority of people admit that ecotourism has a positive impact from an environmental, social, and economic perspective (Kim et al., 2019). The development of ecotourism has a positive impact on the surrounding community through several aspects, namely opening up opportunities for local MSMEs, developing village infrastructure and supporting tourist attractions as well as creating environmental conservation, felling trees, and maintaining cleanliness from plastic waste (Muhammad & Widarjono, 2024)

The success of ecotourism based on local community participation can have a positive impact on the development of tourist attractions, marked by the development of tourism destination attributes over time (Putri & Gustaman, 2024). In developing ecology-based tourism, nature conservation, and community empowerment are still considered

(Wahyuni et al., 2023). In Klaten, ecotourism development is carried out by implementing cooperative, participatory, and emancipatory principles, which means that all components involved in BUMDes have established good cooperation for the development and continuity of the business as a tourist village (El Anshori et al., 2024). In efforts to develop ecotourism, several aspects need to be prioritized, such as maintaining and improving the ecosystem, improving service quality, and optimizing spatial planning (Widyaningtyas, 2023).

In Indonesia, the implementation of the zero waste principle has been carried out in several tourist locations, one of which is in Kunjir Village, South Lampung (Metalia & Sembiring, 2022). The implementation of the zero waste concept is carried out through various strategies such as improving the quality of human resources through information technology and entrepreneurship, marketing environmentally friendly tourism, developing environmentally friendly tourism products, synergistic and independent waste management, and developing tourism infrastructure and facilities based on environmentally friendly tourism. At the Lombok halal tourism location, the zero waste principle is also implemented through the provision of supporting infrastructure and facilities, the existence of a waste bank, the provision of environmentally friendly equipment, simple waste sorting activities, and maintaining environmental cleanliness (Rojabi et al., 2020).

### 3. METHOD

This research is qualitative. The research location is the New Rivermoon tourist attraction. The research was conducted in June-September 2024. The data collection method was through observation and in-depth interviews. Informants consisted of New Rivermoon ecotourism managers, local communities as employees at tourist attractions, as well as MSMEs who sell around tourist attractions. Data analysis is carried out through the process of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, as well as drawing conclusions and verification.



Figure 1. The Maps of New Rivermoon Ecotourism

## **4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **History and Description of New Rivermoon Ecotourism**

Ecotourism development has become an increasingly recognized approach to improving the sustainability and economic prosperity of a region. One of the ecotourism developed in Klaten is New Rivermoon. This ecotourism utilizes the resources of the Pusur River by combining natural adventure with environmentally friendly recreational activities. New Rivermoon is located in Pusur Hamlet, Karanglo Village, Polanharjo District, Klaten Regency, Central Java. Ecotourism is outdoor tourism that utilizes the surrounding environment such as open land, rice fields, and rivers. There is a river tubing activity offered to visitors with two choices of tubing distance, namely 500 m and 2 km. Safety facilities to support tubing activities are available in the form of life jackets, helmets, and tires, and accompanied by an instructor. New Rivermoon also offers natural outbound activities for visitors. Apart from that, some restaurants provide various dishes, ranging from Indonesian, and oriental, to Western dishes.

This ecotourism was founded in 2016 where initially it was agricultural land that was unproductive because the yield was low or the land was less fertile. In the 1970s, in this area a large dam collapsed and was destroyed, resulting in a lot of material covering the area below New Rivermoon, such as river rocks. This material enters the rice fields below so that the land cannot be reused. New Rivermoon Ecotourism is a tourism business owned by individuals but empowering local communities as employees. There are 140 residents recruited to manage this ecotourism, starting from parking guards, waiters, river tubing guides, ticket counter officers, and others.

### **Community Involvement in Conservation Efforts and Ecotourism Management**

One of the important elements in ecotourism is nature conservation efforts to maintain the continuity of ecosystem functions within it; biodiversity, flood control, water quality, and carbon sequestration (Boley & Green, 2016). Nature conservation at New Rivermoon Ecotourism has an important role in preserving the resources of the Pusur River so that its existence can continue to be enjoyed as a source of life for biota, drinking water, agricultural irrigation, fisheries, recreation, and others. Community involvement in ecotourism conservation is an important element in sustainability. At New Rivermoon Ecotourism, conservation efforts are carried out by both employees and the local community. This is because rivers are not only a resource for recreation, but also for the sustainability of people's lives. Employees at New Rivermoon routinely carry out river crossing activities to maintain cleanliness and environmental sustainability. This activity is carried out every Saturday and Sunday morning with the main aim of cleaning up plastic waste, dry leaves, and other rubbish that can pollute the water ecosystem, especially in river areas which are often used as waste dumping points.

The involvement of local communities in cleaning the river is carried out once a month. This activity aims to educate residents to be more concerned about environmental cleanliness and sustainability, especially river ecosystems. Keeping rivers clean will have a positive impact on the surrounding flora and fauna, help maintain water quality and maintain ecosystem balance. River conservation efforts based on community participation in sustainable ecotourism are also carried out in other places such as the Mayangsari River, Semarang (Fajar & Rini, 2020). Various regulations and activities to preserve rivers are carried out, such as making regulations and sanctions not to pollute rivers, providing rubbish bins in every house, providing free toilet assistance to households that do not have latrines, cutting down banana trees around rivers which can cause the soil to erode easily, carry out cooperation in cleaning rivers, and educate the public about preserving the river environment.

Apart from river conservation efforts, New Rivermoon ecotourism management also pays attention to the principle of zero waste. Both organic and inorganic waste are managed through separate management sites for organic and non-organic waste. At this location, there is also an independent Waste Water Treatment Plant (IPAL) which has been tested by the Environmental Service and is declared capable of processing waste safely. This installation includes waste management from canteens, toilets, and restaurants. Apart from that, the eco enzyme is added to preserve the



environment. Eco enzyme is used to process organic waste, such as skin and fruit or vegetable dregs, into a useful liquid. Eco enzyme is a recycling method to overcome environmental pollution from organic waste. Plastic or inorganic waste in New Rivermoon is stored in its well-managed waste storage area. The waste is sorted independently, then released, and collaborates with community waste banks, such as the Sami Ikhlas Waste Bank in Polanharjo, as well as other waste collectors. Ecotourism also encourages reducing the amount of waste produced, recycling and reusing materials, as well as reducing the environmental impact of products and production processes. This helps maintain environmental cleanliness and avoid river pollution. Despite the many benefits obtained, New Rivermoon faces challenges, such as a lack of public awareness about waste management and a mindset that still relies on burning waste.

### **Economic Impact of the New Rivermoon Ecotourism**

Economic growth is one of the indicators of successful development in an economy (Ma'ruf & Wihastuti, 2008). Economic growth can be seen from indicators in the form of increased production of goods and services in the economic activities of the community (Regina, 2022). The existence of New Rivermoon ecotourism encourages economic growth in the Pusur Village community. This is evidenced by the availability of jobs for the surrounding community in the tourism sector. In addition, New Rivermoon ecotourism also provides benefits for MSMEs around the New Rivermoon Ecotourism environment.

"90% of employees at New Rivermoon Ecotourism come from the surrounding community. Increasing (-economic conditions-), 140 local community employees and can support their families. " (Ecotourism Manager, P01, 24 years old). The existence of New Rivermoon ecotourism has an impact on improving the quality of life for the local community. "My life has improved a lot. I used to not have a motorbike, now I have a motorbike. My house used to be ugly, now it's pretty good. Can send children to college" (Parking Employee, Y02, 53 years old) Almost all employees working at New Rivermoon Ecotourism have experienced an increase in income. "I think all employees here, almost all of them can be said Alhamdulillah have increased. Especially in River Tubing. Previously there were no school children who could work, so the children could lighten the burden of their parents because Saturday and Sunday they could work here", (Tubing employee, A03, 26 years old). New Rivermoon Ecotourism also participates in the development of business activities in the surrounding community. There is an increase in purchasing power in MSME activities such as souvenirs and street vendor around the New Rivermoon Ecotourism environment. "With the presence of Rivermoon MSME souvenirs are selling well because there is a market or place, increased purchasing power, street vendor stalls can sell around," (Ecotourism Manager, P01, 24 years old). "The presence of New Rivermoon Ecotourism helps improve his economy. I used to sell around. However, now I only sell around the New Rivermoon Ecotourism area from morning until the closing time of the New Rivermoon Ecotourism," (UMKM actor, S04, 70 years old)

A similar thing also happened in Kalitalang Ecotourism, Balerante Village, Kemalang District, and Klaten Regency. In a similar study conducted by Muhammad and Agus Widarjono, the study stated that the existence of Kalitalang Ecotourism helped increase the economic activities of the surrounding community. In the study, it was explained that Kalitalang Ecotourism absorbed at least 130 people in tourism operations. In addition, the study also explained that the existence of Kalitalang Ecotourism also helped in increasing the increase of MSMEs (Muhammad & Widarjono, 2024). The presence of ecotourism does have a positive impact on the economic aspects of the community. Various previous studies have shown that the presence of ecotourism can increase the economic level of the community (Arsad et al., 2021; Runtuwuwu & Rajasekera, 2023). In addition, ecotourism is also a means to create business opportunities for the surrounding community (Nusyirwan et al., 2024).

## **The Relationship Between New Rivermoon Ecotourism and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

SDGs or Sustainable Development Goals (TPB) are a series of goals set by the United Nations (UN) to achieve sustainable development at the global level. SDGs are a continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) program initiated in 2000 which still focuses on socio-economics. SDGs add an environmental proportion to the development planning carried out (Elder & Olsen, 2019). SDGs cover various aspects of development, including economic, social, and environmental. New Rivermoon strives to apply the principles of sustainable development. The steps taken at New Rivermoon contribute to achieving the SDG's goals namely responsible production and consumption (SDG 12), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), life on land (SDG 15), and peace, justice, and institutions the strong one.

One measure of the success of ecotourism is by setting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or sustainable development goals (Muqsith et al., 2023). New Rivermoon Ecotourism has attempted to conserve river resources through various efforts involving the community. The management also educates visitors not to throw rubbish in the river. Apart from that, waste management efforts are carried out in an integrated manner to implement the zero-waste principle. All of this is part of ecotourism management that supports sustainable development goals, especially SDG 12 and SDG 15

The existence of New Rivermoon also has a significant positive impact on society in the economic aspect, thus contributing to the achievement of SDG 8. A clean tourist environment and increased tourist visits encourage the growth of MSMEs and increase sales of souvenirs. Apart from that, the availability of job opportunities provides opportunities for local communities to earn income. The implementation of zero waste also has an economic impact, especially as part of circular economic activities. The resulting waste is reprocessed and used, such as organic waste which is converted into maggots for catfish feed and fertilizer applied to agricultural land. Inorganic waste is also deposited in waste banks and provides economic value to society.

New Rivermoon also contributes to cultural preservation by providing sponsorship funding for cultural carnivals. An exclusive and peaceful cultural parade can promote peace and harmony in society by respecting diversity. In addition, cultural carnivals are used as an educational tool to increase awareness and understanding of local and global culture and support learning about history and traditions. This is part of the realization of SDG 16.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

New Rivermoon Ecotourism is one of the tourist attractions that utilizes water resources by making conservation efforts to create economic opportunities for local communities. The existence of this ecotourism has an impact on the realization of river sustainability as a source of livelihood for the community while being able to improve the economy with the existence of jobs and the growth of MSMEs. The implementation of the zero-waste principle is carried out at the ecotourism location by managing organic and inorganic waste that has economic value. New Rivermoon Ecotourism also contributes to the creation of sustainable development goals through the creation of decent jobs, the implementation of responsible production and consumption patterns, protecting, restoring, and encouraging the use of sustainable terrestrial ecosystems, and strengthening inclusive, peaceful communities, realizing justice and building strong institutions.

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