

## UTILIZATION OF VILLAGE POTENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BELITAR SEBANG VILLAGE

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

**Received** : 20-11-2025

**Revised** : 07-12-2025

**Accepted** : 15-01-2026

### KEYWORDS

*Asset-Based Community Development;*  
*Destination Development;*  
*Sustainable Tourism;*  
*Local Assets;*  
*Collaborative Governance;*

### ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism development still often uses a needs-based approach, so it does not optimize the assets that local communities already have. This study aims to analyze the strategy of utilizing local potential through the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach in building sustainable tourist destinations in Belitar Sebang Village. A descriptive qualitative research method with a case study strategy was applied, where data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. The results of the study identified three strategic asset clusters, namely unique natural assets (such as the dichotomy of hot and cold waterfalls), living cultural assets (including the art of Kuda Lumping and palm sugar production), and artificial assets that are integrated with the environment. The scientific contribution of this research lies in the provision of an ABCD-based analytical framework that integrates the dichotomous assets of nature and culture as the foundation of destination competitiveness. The study's conclusions show that development effectiveness is highly dependent on collaborative governance that empowers all local assets, where the ABCD approach offers a relevant conceptual foundation for achieving economic and socio-cultural sustainability.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism development has been recognized as one of the key strategies in fostering inclusive economic growth and the preservation of local resources. In Indonesia, this sector not only plays a role as a foreign exchange earner, but also as a catalyst for community development, especially in rural areas that are rich in natural and cultural potential but often have not been optimally cultivated (Fyka et al. 2023). The success of tourism in creating a multiplier effect by stimulating supporting sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, and services has made it an important instrument to reduce unemployment and improve welfare (Dartiningsih, 2021). Therefore, the development paradigm has shifted from simply building tourism infrastructure to a more holistic, participatory, and identity-based approach.

In this context, the development of tourist villages emerged as a strategic model. Its essence lies in a community's ability to recognize, manage, and promote its unique strengths. This concept is in line with the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which offers a theoretical and practical framework for community-centered development. In contrast to the conventional needs-based approach, ABCD focuses on mapping and empowering all existing assets, both tangible such as natural and man-made resources, and intangible ones such as local knowledge, social networks, and cultural traditions (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This approach is believed to create a stronger, more participatory, and sustainable foundation

for the development of tourist villages.

Belitar Seberang Village in Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province, is an ideal natural laboratory to test the application of the ABCD approach. This village is blessed with unusual tourist assets and has high attractions, especially dichotomous natural assets: Tri Sakti Waterfall with its cold water and Puspa Dewi Waterfall with its hot springs. These two natural phenomena are not only geographically close together, but also meet at a single point, creating a uniqueness that is rare even on a national scale. In addition, the village has living cultural assets such as the art of Kuda Lumping in the Bhumi Festival and traditional palm sugar production practices, as well as artificial assets in the form of glamping accommodations that try to blend in with the natural landscape. The combination of these assets forms potential authorized capital for the development of unique and sustainable tourist destinations.

However, the possession of superior potential does not necessarily guarantee successful development. A review of previous research shows that many studies on tourist villages are still general. For example, Waridah's (2021) research discusses the community's response to the originality of destinations, while Bahrudin (2017) focuses on tourism innovations to attract regional investment. On the other hand, the Pudjowati (2017) study sees innovative village development as a solution to improve welfare. Significant research gaps were identified from the literature: there has been no in-depth and specific study that applies the ABCD analytical lens to map, analyze, and design strategies for the integration of unique assets, especially dichotomous (hot-cold) natural assets, into a sustainable tourism destination management model at the village level. Most studies tend to register potential descriptively without providing a robust analytical framework for designing its empowerment and sustainability strategies.

Based on these gaps, the objectives of this research are to: (1) Identify and map all assets (natural, cultural, artificial, social, and human) owned by Belitar Seberang Village through the ABCD approach; (2) Analyze the opportunities and challenges in integrating these unique assets, especially the dichotomous assets of waterfalls, into a tourist destination development model; and (3) Formulate asset-based strategic recommendations for sustainable tourism governance in the village. This research uses a qualitative method with a case study strategy. Data was collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with stakeholders (community leaders, managers, business actors, and visitors), and documentation studies, which were then analyzed thematically.

The scientific contribution of this research is expected to enrich the academic treasure by providing empirical evidence on the application and adaptation of ABCD theory in the context of rural tourism in Indonesia, especially in managing complex and rare natural assets. Practically, this study is expected to be an operational guideline for the Belitar Seberang Village Government and other stakeholders in designing tourism development policies and programs that are more directed, participatory, and sustainable, so as to be able to transform their potential into real prosperity for the entire community.

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design, which aims to describe and analyze phenomena based on the perceptions, experiences, and behaviors of the research subjects (Moleong, 2017). The constructivist paradigm underlies this approach, assuming that reality is multidimensional and shaped through social interaction and interpretation Mugiono dan Purnamasari (2023). The research was conducted in Belitar Seberang Tourism Village, Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province, a location selected due to its recognized potential as a sustainable tourism destination, having been named one of the top 50 Anugerah Desa Wisata Indonesia (ADWI) in 2022. Data was gathered through three primary methods. First, non-participant observation was carried out to directly document the natural, cultural, and man-made tourism attractions, as well as the management and community participation in tourism activities. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with four key informants, including the village head, Pokdarwis (Village Tourism Awareness Group) chairperson, and local community members involved in tourism development. Third, data was also collected from written materials such as village profiles and tourism development plans, along with images and online resources related to Belitar Seberang Village.

**Table 1. Researcher Informant**

No	Nama Informan	Umur	Jabatan/Status
1	Informan K	54	Kepala Desa Belitar Seberang
2	Informan HH	30	Ketua Pokdarwis
3	Informan J	45	Anggota Pokdarwis
4	Informan KS	50	Anggota Pokdarwis

*Source: researcher data processing, 2025.*

Data analysis followed the model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994). Raw data from observations, interviews, and documentation was first selected, simplified, and categorized based on natural, cultural, and man-made tourism potential to focus on relevant information. Next, the reduced data was presented in the form of descriptive narratives, images, and thematic categories to identify patterns and relationships within the data. Finally, conclusions were derived from the displayed data and cross-checked against multiple sources to ensure validity and consistency. The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) theory was used as a framework to analyze how the community utilizes its assets, strengths, and potential for sustainable tourism development.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

#### Natural Tourism Potential

Belitar Seberang Tourism Village is blessed with very rich and diverse natural potential, which is the main foundation for tourism development in this region. The most prominent natural uniqueness is the phenomenon of paired waterfalls consisting of Tri Sakti Waterfall with cold water and Puspa Dewi Waterfall with hot water. These two waterfalls flow from different heights and meet at a single point of the stream's confluence, creating a scene that is not only mesmerizing but also scientifically fascinating due to the significant temperature differences within adjacent distances. This phenomenon has been recognized nationally by the Ministry of Tourism in 2022 as the only one in Indonesia, providing strong added value to destination positioning. In addition to the main waterfall pair, the village has seven other waterfalls with their own unique characteristics, including Belirang Waterfall which is the main location for canyoning activities. The existence of natural hot springs at some points is also an attraction in itself, because the water is believed to have mineral content that is beneficial for health. The clear rivers that flow through the village not only beautify the landscape, but also support various water tourism activities such as swimming, nature photography, and the potential for rafting development.

The management of this natural potential is carried out systematically by the community through the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) by applying the principles of conservation and sustainability. Some of the initiatives that have been carried out include the creation of trekking trails equipped with information boards about the local flora and fauna, a program to replant native vegetation around the waterfall area, training for local tour guides to ensure the safety of visitors, and the arrangement of a time-based visit system to reduce congestion at certain points. In addition, communities are also actively involved in monitoring water quality and environmental cleanliness, demonstrating a collective commitment to preserving their natural assets.

#### Cultural Tourism Potential

The majority of the residents of Belitar Seberang Village come from the Javanese tribe, who still maintain local traditions and wisdom for generations. The art of Kuda Lumping or Kuda Kebrad has become the most recognizable cultural icon, not only as an entertainment show but also as a spiritual and social expression of society. These performances are usually performed at important events such as the Bhumi Belerang Festival, wedding celebrations, or welcoming guests of honor. The performance preparation process involves various levels of society, from dancers, musicians, to logistical supporters, thereby strengthening social networks and community solidarity. In addition to performing arts, this village also has cultural heritage



in the form of traditional knowledge about natural resource management, especially in the manufacture of palm sugar. The Nira House serves as a living laboratory where tourists can learn the entire palm sugar production process, from tapping sap from the euca tree, cooking in large pans, to printing and packaging. This activity not only educates visitors about local wisdom, but also pays tribute to traditional skills that may be endangered in the modern era. According to one of the key informants, the process of making palm sugar also contains philosophical values of patience, precision, and harmony with nature.

#### **Potential of Artificial Tourism**

The development of artificial tourism facilities and attractions in Belitar Seberang Village shows the community's adaptability to the development of contemporary tourism trends. Forrest Gump Glamour Camp is a form of accommodation that integrates the concept of glamping (glamorous camping) with local wisdom in architecture and layout. The use of local materials such as bamboo, wood, and woven leaves dominates the design of the building, creating an authentic yet comfortable impression for visitors. Its strategic location near Tri Sakti Waterfall allows guests to enjoy the natural beauty firsthand while still getting adequate lodging facilities. In addition to accommodation, this village also develops a handicraft center that produces various typical souvenirs such as woven bamboo with traditional motifs, miniature Kuda Lumping, palm sugar in attractive packaging, and herbal products made from local. The marketing of these products is carried out through various channels, including traditional markets (Arenan Market), stalls in tourist areas, and digital platforms managed by local youth. The development of these micro-businesses not only adds economic value from tourist visits, but also becomes a medium for the preservation of traditional skills. Other artificial tourism activities under development include cultural workshops where visitors can learn to dance Kuda Lumping or make handicrafts, farming experience packages in palm orchards and organic vegetable gardens owned by the community, as well as night tours with storytelling concepts about the legends and history of the village. These initiatives show the creativity of the community in creating diverse and immersive tourism experiences.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal that the development of Belitar Seberang Tourism Village has implemented an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach comprehensively and adaptively. The ABCD approach emphasizes the identification, mobilization, and development of assets that the community already owns, both tangible and intangible, as the foundation of development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). In Belitar Seberang Village, these assets include not only natural and cultural resources, but also social networks, local knowledge, and the spirit of mutual cooperation which is an important social capital.

#### **Natural Asset Management: Integration of Conservation and Economic Utilization**

The management of natural assets in Belitar Seberang Village shows how the community can utilize natural resources for economic welfare without sacrificing their sustainability. The approach used integrates the principles of ecotourism, where tourism activities are designed to minimize negative impacts on the environment while providing direct benefits to local communities. A participatory management system, through Pokdarwis, ensures that decisions about facility construction, visitor restrictions, and environmental maintenance are made collectively taking into account local knowledge of the local ecosystem.

These findings are in line with research conducted by Dyah (2020) on the development of tourist villages in Sukawening, which emphasizes the importance of strong local institutions in the management of natural tourist destinations. In addition, innovations in the development of tourism activities such as canyoning and preparation for white water rafting show the ability of the community to create added value from existing natural assets, in accordance with the concept of value-added tourism described by Murphy (1985). However, what distinguishes Belitar Seberang Village is the existence of a unique natural phenomenon (paired waterfall) which is a competitive advantage that is difficult for other destinations to imitate.

#### **Cultural Preservation: From Heritage to Tourism Products**

The process of transforming cultural heritage into tourism products in Belitar Seberang Village is carried out with sensitivity to the original meaning and context. Kuda Lumping is not only performed as a spectacle, but also accompanied by an explanation of the symbolic meaning of the movements, costumes, and music. Similarly, the activities at Rumah Nira are not just demonstrations of techniques, but also convey the philosophy of the relationship between humans and nature in the local culture. This approach ensures that the commercialization of culture does not lead to trivialization or distortion of original meaning.

According to Suwantoro (2004), cultural packaging as a tourism product can be an effective strategy for preservation

as well as improving the local economy, as long as the community of cultural owners holds control over representation and narrative. In Belitar Seberang, this can be seen from the active role of the community in determining when, where, and how cultural performances are performed. The UNESCO study (2018) on intangible cultural heritage also confirms that community participation in cultural heritage management is key to sustainability, both culturally and economically.

#### **Facility Innovation: Adapting to Trends on a Local Basis**

The development of tourist facilities such as Forrest Gump Glamour Camp and craft centers shows how communities can respond to global tourism trends without losing their local identity. The concept of glamping, which is usually associated with luxury destinations abroad, is adapted using local materials, traditional architecture, and community-based management. This kind of adaptation creates an attractive differentiation for the tourist market looking for an authentic yet comfortable experience. Gautama's research (2020) concluded that strengthening the capacity of local human resources is an important foundation in creating a competitive tourism business. At Belitar Seberang, this is reflected in the various trainings that the community attends—ranging from accommodation management, guiding, to digital marketing. In addition, the development of micro-enterprises such as souvenir production has created economic diversification that reduces dependence on the traditional agricultural sector, while providing opportunities for vulnerable groups such as women and youth to participate in the tourism economy.

#### **Sustainability Challenges and Strategies**

Despite having made significant progress, Belitar Seberang Tourism Village still faces various challenges that need to be overcome to ensure long-term sustainability. Ecological challenges are mainly related to environmental pressures due to increased visitor numbers, which have the potential to lead to degradation of water quality, soil erosion, and disturbance to the local flora and fauna. To overcome this, it is necessary to strengthen the management system based on environmental carrying capacity, including periodic monitoring and impact evaluation. Institutional challenges include the need to increase the capacity of Pokdarwis and BUMDes in aspects of financial management, strategic planning, and network development with external stakeholders. Ongoing training and mentoring by relevant parties can help address this capacity gap. In addition, the development of supporting infrastructure such as road access, waste management systems, and sanitation facilities still needs to be improved, especially to anticipate future visitor growth.

In terms of marketing, even though it has utilized social media, there is still room for strengthening digital content and expanding market reach, including penetration into the international tourist segment. Collaboration with online travel platforms, influencers, and tourism media can help increase the visibility of destinations. However, in this marketing expansion, it is necessary to consider the balance between the growth of the number of visitors and the carrying capacity of the destination.

#### **Model Development and Replication Opportunities**

Belitar Seberang Tourism Village has several strategic opportunities for further development that can strengthen its position as a sustainable destination and at the same time increase its economic contribution to the community. Development of specific tour packages that can reach more diverse market segments. Wellness tourism can be further developed by utilizing natural hot springs that contain minerals, combined with meditation, yoga, or traditional therapy activities in the midst of a soothing natural environment. The edu-ecotourism package can be designed for students, students, and researchers who want to study twin falls ecosystems, geothermal geology, biodiversity, as well as community-based conservation practices. The development of this package requires collaboration with experts from various disciplines to develop an interesting and educational field curriculum.

Collaboration with higher education institutions, both at the regional and national levels, can have a significant impact. This collaboration can include joint research activities to map the potential and challenges of tourism village development, the development of innovative tourism and handicraft products, as well as internship or community service programs that allow students to contribute directly to the management of tourist villages. For example, design students can help develop more attractive packaging for palm sugar products, while communication students can help with digital marketing strategies. This kind of cooperation creates a symbiotic relationship of mutualism: villages gain access to the latest knowledge and innovations, while educational institutions gain authentic field laboratories for students and lecturers.

The formation of networks with other tourist villages in the Bengkulu area or even across provinces to create a cluster of destinations that complement each other. These networks can facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and resources between villages, as well as develop shared tour packages that offer a longer and more diverse range of experiences for tourists.

For example, Belitar Seberang Village with its strong natural attraction can be classed with tourist villages that offer unique culture, history, or culinary surroundings. This network can also strengthen the bargaining positions of villages in negotiating with tour operators, governments, and investors.

The development model of the Belitar Seberang Tourism Village, which is centered on community participation and the use of local assets, has the potential to be replicated in other villages with similar characteristics, especially those that have natural or cultural potential that has not been optimally exploited. Replication of this model certainly requires careful contextual adjustments, given that each community has unique social dynamics, institutional structures, and ecological conditions. However, some key principles of this model can be universally adopted. The key to the success of this model, which is also a prerequisite for other villages that want to adopt it, lies in:

- a) transformative and inclusive local leadership, capable of inspiring, facilitating, and coordinating various elements of the Community
- b) meaningful community participation in all stages of development, from planning, implementation, to evaluation, thereby creating a sense of shared ownership and responsibility
- c) balanced integration between resource conservation and economic utilization, so that tourism development does not sacrifice environmental carrying capacity and long-term sustainability
- d) the ability to adapt to changing tourism trends, but while maintaining and even strengthening local identity as a key differentiator
- e) Strengthening local institutions (such as Pokdarwis and BUMDes) to be transparent, accountable, and able to manage income and conflicts effectively.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to the development of the theory of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) in the context of rural tourism in Indonesia, especially in areas that are rich in natural resources but still face development challenges. This study strengthens the argument that asset-based approaches are not only effective in the identification and mobilization of local potential, but also play a crucial role in building community resilience to various external changes, such as economic fluctuations, policy changes, or environmental pressures. In the context of Belitar Seberang Village, the implementation of ABCD shows that the focus is not only on tangible assets such as waterfalls and hot springs, but also carefully involves social and cultural assets that are often invisible (intangible assets), such as kinship networks, traditional knowledge, the spirit of mutual cooperation, and local wisdom values. These non-physical assets are the social glue that allows collaboration and community cohesion in managing tourist destinations together. These findings encourage the expansion of ABCD's theoretical perspective in tourism studies, emphasizing that the sustainability of a destination is highly dependent on the strength of its community's social and cultural capital.

Practically, the experience of Belitar Seberang Village offers a very valuable lesson and can be used as a reference for various stakeholders involved in rural tourism development. For local governments, both at the district and provincial levels, this study underscores the importance of formulating and implementing policies that genuinely support community-based development. This support is not only in the form of funding, but more importantly in the form of granting greater autonomy, ongoing technical assistance, and policy arrangements that facilitate licensing and partnerships. The government can also act as a bridge-builder that connects villages with a wider market, responsible investors, and outside sources of knowledge.

For non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donor agencies, the findings of this study emphasize the need for a more respectful and knowledge-based approach to development. Instead of implementing a uniform top-down model, these institutions should act as facilitators that support community-driven initiatives. Mentoring programs should be designed to strengthen existing capacity, not replace it with external systems.

For academics and researchers, this study opens up a wide space for further research. Some of the relevant topics include: the dynamics of community participation in the management of tourist destinations in the long term, analysis of the impact of tourism on social structures and inequality at the community level, a fair and inclusive benefit-sharing mechanism, and tourism village adaptation strategies in the post-pandemic context where there is a significant change in tourist preferences towards open, natural destinations, and sustainable (sustainable and nature-based tourism). Further research can also explore the effectiveness of different models of partnership between communities, the private sector, and government in different contexts.

For the community and other tourism village managers, the success story of Belitar Seberang provides inspiration and an adaptable blueprint. The essence of the message is that the key to development lies in oneself, in the ability to recognize,



appreciate, and manage all one's potential, as well as in the willingness to cooperate and learn continuously. Thus, the practical implications of this research are multidimensional, touching on policy aspects, development practices, research agendas, and of course, community empowerment itself.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the overall analysis, it can be concluded that the development of the Belitar Seberang Tourism Village is a real example of the integrated use of local potential through a participatory approach. This village has succeeded in optimizing three main pillars, namely natural potential with twin waterfalls and its unique hot springs, cultural potential through the art of Kuda Lumping and palm sugar production at Rumah Nira, as well as artificial potential in the form of glamping lodging and typical handicrafts. The management carried out collaboratively by Pokdarwis and BUMDes shows the effectiveness of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which places the community as active actors in each stage of development. Theoretically, this study reinforces the evidence that the ABCD approach is not only relevant, but also effective in building community resilience and achieving tourism sustainability. These findings confirm that social, cultural, and local network capital have a crucial role equal to physical assets in creating resilient and competitive tourist destinations. From a practical point of view, there are several important implications. For village managers and Pokdarwis, it is necessary to strengthen managerial capacity, digital marketing, and innovation of tourism packages such as wellness tourism. For local governments, policy support that provides space for local participation and autonomy is a key factor, along with the facilitation of infrastructure and networks between tourist villages. Meanwhile, the central government can make this model a reference in a more structured rural tourism development program. Although it provides an in-depth picture, this study has limitations in terms of limited site coverage and has not quantitatively measured the economic impact. Therefore, further research is recommended to examine aspects of long-term impacts, conduct comparative studies with other villages, and explore tourist preferences and innovative financing models to support replication and adaptation of similar models in other regions.

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