The Tourism Office's Role In Developing The Lowita Beach Tourism Awareness Group's Competence

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Purpose of the study: The aim of this study is to identify the role of the tourism office in developing the competence of the tourism awareness group in Lowita Beach, Pinrang Regency. It also aims to explore strategies used to enhance their competencies. **Methodology:** This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The research was conducted at Lowita Beach, Pinrang Regency. Data analysis involved data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Informants included tourism office staff and members of the tourism awareness group. **Main Findings:** The Tourism Office of Pinrang Regency has implemented various strategies to develop the competence of the tourism awareness group in Lowita Beach, including training in technical, theoretical, and conceptual skills. However, participation and support from the Youth and Sports Division remain insufficient. While progress has been made, further innovation and capacity building are needed to meet national tourism village standards. **Novelty/Originality of this study:** This study offers an in-depth look at the actual role and strategic implementation of local tourism governance in developing community-based tourism actors. It highlights the importance of structured competency development for sustainable tourism growth and contributes new insights on how local government support influences tourism village success.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most dynamic sectors contributing significantly to national and regional economic growth. In Indonesia, a country composed of thousands of islands with abundant natural and cultural resources, tourism holds strategic potential to drive local development, especially in coastal and rural areas [1]-[3]. The government's decentralization policy has provided local governments with authority to develop tourism autonomously, as regulated under Law No. 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism. This autonomy has encouraged various regional governments to formulate and implement tourism development strategies tailored to their unique potential [4], [5].

One critical aspect of sustainable tourism development is community involvement. In recent years, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia has emphasized the importance of community-based tourism (CBT), particularly through the empowerment of *Kelompok Sadar Wisata* (Pokdarwis) or Tourism Awareness Groups. These groups function as community-level organizations responsible for

promoting tourism-friendly behavior, supporting tourist destinations, and acting as local facilitators between government initiatives and community participation [6], [7].

Pinrang Regency in South Sulawesi is one of the areas with promising coastal tourism potential, especially Lowita Beach [8]. Despite its inclusion in the 100 Best Tourism Villages in Indonesia 2022, Lowita Beach failed to break into the Top 50 due to several deficiencies, one of which was inadequate human resources and community competencies in managing tourism activities. This reveals a gap between potential and performance, specifically in the realm of community competence and organizational readiness [9], [10].

The Tourism Office of Pinrang Regency has a vital role in bridging this gap. As the governing body, it is expected to facilitate training, guidance, and policy implementation aimed at enhancing the competency of Pokdarwis and the surrounding communities [11]. However, early observations suggest that while programs are in place, their effectiveness and strategic impact remain under-examined. Questions persist regarding the extent to which the Tourism Office fulfills its developmental role and the kind of strategies employed to foster sustainable community-based tourism.

The study is focuses on a localized effort to improve tourism governance and destination management through capacity-building among grassroots tourism actors. It highlights how the tourism office plays a pivotal role in empowering the Tourism Awareness Group (Kelompok Sadar Wisata) through training, mentoring, and facilitation [12]-[14]. The study emphasizes the collaborative relationship between local government and community-based tourism stakeholders, but it does so within a narrow geographical and institutional context. The discussion centers more on the operational role of the local tourism office rather than the broader competencies or professional standards required of tourism officers themselves. In contrast, the study *"Competencies of Tourism Officers in the Philippines"* takes a macro-level approach by seeking to develop a comprehensive competency model for tourism officers in the context of public governance [15], [16]. It identifies the critical skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to effectively manage tourism destinations in a structured and accountable manner. This research contributes to the development of a formalized framework for public sector tourism professionals, aiming to standardize competencies across various governance levels. However, the study remains largely conceptual and does not investigate how such competencies translate into real-world interactions with community tourism groups or how they are applied in the micro-dynamics of destination development at the grassroots level [17]-[19].

The research gap between these two studies lies in the disconnection between macro-level competency modeling and micro-level implementation within local tourism ecosystems. While the first study offers valuable insights into community empowerment and the tourism office's facilitating role, it lacks theoretical grounding in the professional competency standards that shape tourism governance [20], [21]. Conversely, the second study proposes a well-structured model of competencies, but it does not explore how these are operationalized in specific community settings or how tourism officers actually engage with tourism actors on the ground. This opens a critical space for future research that links institutional capacity frameworks with grassroots empowerment strategies to create a more integrated and practical model of tourism governance [22]-[24].

This study presents a novel contribution by highlighting the direct, operational role of local tourism offices in developing the competencies of grassroots tourism actors, particularly the Tourism Awareness Group at Lowita Beach. Unlike broader studies that focus on high-level policy or competency frameworks, this research offers grounded, empirical insights into how capacity-building is implemented at the community level. Its uniqueness lies in its focus on local institutional engagement, context-specific mentoring strategies, and participatory empowerment [25]-[27]. By documenting real-life collaboration between public tourism authorities and community stakeholders, the study enriches existing discourse on tourism governance by providing a micro-level perspective rarely explored in competency-related literature.

The findings of this study have practical implications for regional tourism planning, public sector training design, and the formulation of inclusive tourism policies. It demonstrates that effective destination management begins with empowering local actors and strengthening the institutional capacity of tourism offices to serve as facilitators of grassroots development [28]-[30]. This implies that any national or regional tourism competency framework must account not only for technical skills but also for soft skills such as community engagement, communication, and facilitation. The study's insights can inform the development of localized training modules, cross-sector partnerships, and community-inclusive tourism strategies in similar emerging destinations.

This research carries urgency as many rural and emerging tourism areas, such as Lowita Beach, face the risk of underperformance due to untrained human resources and limited institutional synergy [31], [32]. As tourism continues to expand into peripheral regions, the lack of structured, ongoing support from local tourism offices can result in unsustainable practices, community disengagement, and underutilization of local potential. Addressing this issue is critical for ensuring that tourism growth is inclusive and community-driven rather than extractive. The study responds to this pressing need by drawing attention to the strategic role of local institutions in bridging national development agendas with grassroots realities.

In conclusion, this study provides a critical and context-rich understanding of how local tourism offices can serve as catalysts for building competence among community-based tourism actors. By examining the case of the Tourism Awareness Group in Lowita Beach, the research offers a practical blueprint for fostering collaboration,

developing human resources, and aligning local initiatives with broader tourism development goals [33], [34], [35]. It highlights the importance of institutional presence, structured support, and localized strategy in advancing sustainable and inclusive tourism. Future efforts in tourism governance must build upon such localized evidence to create models that are not only theoretically sound but also practically viable and socially embedded.

2.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of the Tourism Office in developing the competencies of the Tourism Awareness Group (*Kelompok Sadar Wisata*) at Lowita Beach, Pinrang Regency. Descriptive research is appropriate for exploring and interpreting phenomena based on facts and realities in the field without manipulating variables. This design allowed the researcher to investigate social interactions, experiences, and the effectiveness of strategies implemented by the local government.

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who were directly involved in tourism development activities at Lowita Beach. The key informants consisted of officials from the Pinrang Regency Tourism Office, core members of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), and selected local community members. Their roles, experience, and responsibilities in tourism activities made them relevant sources of information.

Table 1. Research Subjects

Informant Type	Position/Role	Number of Participants
Government Officials	Tourism Office staff	3
Community Representatives	Pokdarwis leaders/members	4
Supporting Stakeholders	Local community/tourism practitioners	3

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were made at the research site to observe tourism activities and the community's involvement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow flexibility in exploring each informant's experiences, challenges, and opinions. The documentation technique involved collecting reports, photos, meeting notes, and relevant policies from the tourism office and local government archives.

The main instrument in this study was the researcher herself, as is common in qualitative research. However, supporting instruments were also used, such as interview guidelines, field notes, voice recorders, and a camera for documentation purposes. The interview guide was structured based on the research objectives and focused on themes such as competency development, institutional roles, and strategy implementation.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes four stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data display, and (4) conclusion drawing and verification. During the data reduction process, irrelevant data were filtered out to focus on meaningful patterns. The data display involved organizing information into matrices and descriptive summaries. Finally, the researcher interpreted the findings and drew conclusions based on the research questions.

The research was carried out in several stages. First, a preliminary observation and literature review were conducted to define the research focus and formulate the problem. Then, the researcher obtained research permits and established contact with key informants. The data collection phase followed, which included field visits, interviews, and collecting relevant documents. Afterward, data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to the analysis model. The final phase involved writing the report and drawing conclusions supported by empirical data.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study based on field data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, followed by a comprehensive discussion. The findings are organized into two main aspects: (1) the role of the Tourism Office in competency development and (2) the strategies implemented to support tourism-aware communities. Supporting tables and field documentation are used to enhance understanding.

3.1. The Role of the Tourism Office in Competency Development

Based on interviews with the Tourism Office of Pinrang Regency and members of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), it was found that the role of the government is central in shaping tourism sustainability at Lowita Beach. The Tourism Office acts as both facilitator and initiator in enhancing community capacity through technical guidance, workshops, and the introduction of tourism promotion programs.

However, the level of effectiveness varied depending on the type of program. For example, while several training sessions were conducted, they were irregular and lacked follow-up evaluations. Pokdarwis members

expressed that although initial training was helpful, more structured and ongoing capacity-building initiatives are necessary. The role of the office can be categorized as follows.

Table 2. Role of the Tourism Office in Competency Development

Role Type	Description
Facilitative Role	Providing access to training and promotional tools
Regulatory Role	Issuing policy support and tourism development plans
Educational Role	Organizing awareness programs for the community
Supportive Role	Distributing resources and promoting local tourism

The data above shows that the government does play a role, but its consistency and intensity need improvement. This aligns with findings in [2], which indicate that the success of community-based tourism is directly linked to how persistent and participatory the local government support is.

3.2. Strategy Implementation for Pokdarwis Competency Development

In addition to general support, specific strategies were found to influence competency development. The Tourism Office used three main strategic pillars, Technical Skills Development: Including training on how to manage homestays, guide tourists, and use digital marketing tools. Theoretical Understanding: Educating members on tourism policy, sustainable tourism principles, and hospitality standards. Conceptual Empowerment: Encouraging Pokdarwis to initiate their own tourism-related programs and innovations.

Despite these efforts, the study revealed gaps between policy and practice. The lack of regular monitoring, insufficient budget allocation, and limited collaboration with external tourism stakeholders were seen as challenges.

"We attended training two years ago, but after that, there was no follow-up or evaluation. We need consistent support." – Pokdarwis Member, Interview, 2023.

This observation is consistent with research by Wibowo [3], which emphasized that competency development must be long-term and iterative to be sustainable. Furthermore, Mulyasa [4] stressed that empowering tourism actors requires combining practical skillsets with conceptual understanding and attitude formation.

3.3. Impact on Tourism Development at Lowita Beach

The final impact of these roles and strategies was observed in the development performance of Lowita Beach. While visitor numbers have increased moderately, and infrastructure has improved, the community's readiness to manage larger-scale tourism remains low. Figure 1 below illustrates the trend in visitor numbers at Lowita Beach over three years. Despite a positive growth trend, Lowita Beach failed to reach the Top 50 of the Indonesia Tourism Village Awards in 2022. One of the major reasons cited was the lack of human resource preparedness, especially in terms of standardized service quality and sustainable tourism management. This confirms that while progress exists, innovation, professional capacity, and institutional alignment must be improved. Community-based tourism development must be rooted in strong local governance, continuous training, and participatory planning.

The study is found that the active involvement of the local tourism office significantly influences the improvement of community-based tourism actors' competencies. The results emphasize the importance of direct institutional support, mentoring, training, and facilitation provided to the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) [36], [37]. The research underscores how practical engagement, such as workshops and coordinated planning with the tourism office, fosters awareness, responsibility, and skills related to sustainable tourism management at the local level. However, the findings are specific to community actors and do not investigate the foundational factors that shape the competencies of future tourism professionals entering the public sector. In contrast, the study *"Development of Regional Tourism: Factors Affecting the Formation of Professional Competence in Future Professionals in Tourism"* centers on identifying the core factors such as educational curricula, practical training, industry exposure, and socio-cultural awareness that contribute to the formation of professional competencies among students and future tourism professionals [38], [39]. The findings highlight how systematic academic and institutional structures play a fundamental role in shaping tourism workforce readiness. However, the study remains forward-looking and theoretical, lacking direct application or real-time observation of how these competencies manifest in practice once individuals are embedded within public or community-based tourism institutions.

The gap between these two studies lies in the disconnection between future-oriented competency formation in academic settings and the practical, ongoing development of competencies in real-world community tourism contexts [40], [41]. While the Lowita Beach study provides empirical insight into how competencies are built and enhanced through local institutional support for existing actors, it does not explore how foundational

training or pre-professional education influences these outcomes. Conversely, the second study thoroughly analyzes the early formation of competencies but does not examine how these translate into actual practice within regional tourism governance or community-based operations. Bridging this gap would require integrated research that connects educational preparation with professional application in the field, particularly within local tourism ecosystems.

This study offers a distinct contribution by providing real-world evidence of how local government agencies, particularly tourism offices, play a critical hands-on role in the ongoing development of competencies among community-based tourism actors. Unlike studies that focus on future professionals or theoretical competence models, this research examines active, on-site engagement in the form of direct training, capacity-building, and facilitative partnerships [42]-[44]. Its novelty lies in demonstrating how tourism governance is enacted in real-time through localized institutional intervention, providing a rare lens into how professional competencies are practically cultivated outside formal education systems and in grassroots tourism environments.

The findings of this study imply a pressing need for tourism development strategies that go beyond academic preparation and extend into practical, continuous capacity enhancement for those already operating in the field [45], [46]. It reinforces the idea that the professionalization of tourism should not be limited to classroom settings but should include robust government-led mechanisms for on-the-ground training and support. This has significant policy implications: tourism offices must be empowered, resourced, and trained themselves to function not merely as administrators, but as educators and catalysts of local tourism development. Bridging education with field-based competency enhancement can ensure a more adaptive and skilled tourism workforce [47], [48].

A key limitation of this study is its narrow scope, both geographically and demographically. By focusing solely on the Lowita Beach Tourism Awareness Group in Pinrang Regency, the research findings may not be easily generalized to other regions with differing institutional capacities, cultural settings, or levels of tourism maturity [49]-[51]. Moreover, the study primarily considers the outcomes of external interventions (i.e., from the tourism office), without sufficiently investigating the internal motivational factors, prior skill levels, or long-term impacts on the group's autonomy and innovation capacity. The absence of comparative analysis with future tourism professionals also leaves a gap in understanding how foundational competencies interact with field-based learning.

Future research should consider a comparative and multi-site approach to explore how tourism offices in different regions with varying tourism capacities and governance structures contribute to community competency development. Expanding the scope beyond a single awareness group would allow researchers to identify patterns, differences, and shared challenges in institutional support mechanisms. Additionally, future studies should integrate perspectives from both community actors and tourism officers to examine reciprocal learning processes, power dynamics, and the long-term sustainability of capacity-building efforts. It would also be valuable to bridge academic and professional training by investigating how pre-service education and in-field mentoring interact in shaping the competencies of tourism practitioners across different levels from grassroots groups to public officials.

4.   CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Tourism Office of Pinrang Regency plays a significant but still limited role in developing the competencies of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) at Lowita Beach. While facilitative, educational, and supportive efforts have been made, they lack consistency and structured follow-up. The strategies applied technical, theoretical, and conceptual development have shown potential but are not yet sufficient to elevate the community's capacity to national tourism standards. Therefore, the role of the government needs to be strengthened through more sustainable, participatory, and continuous competency development programs to effectively support tourism growth at the local level.

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