



Analyzing local community participation and barriers in tourism village development: A case study of Mekarlaksana Village

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ABSTRACT

Background: Local community participation plays a significant role in the development of tourism villages, yet various barriers may hinder its effectiveness. Previous studies have examined community involvement in tourism but have not sufficiently addressed the specific stages and levels of participation in the context of tourism village development. This research aims to analyze the stages of local community participation and identify their level of participation in Mekarlaksana Village's tourism village development, as well as the obstacles they face. **Methods:** This study employs a qualitative research approach, collecting data through interviews with six local community members to assess their level of participation and the challenges they encounter. **Findings:** The findings indicate that the local community's participation in Mekarlaksana Village development is at the 4th level, 'consultation', according to Arnstein's (1969) "Ladder of Citizen Participation." This level is characterized by community awareness, knowledge, and perceived benefits. The study also highlights that the uneven development of the tourism village and the lack of perceived economic benefits are significant barriers to further community involvement. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that although the community has reached the 'consultation' level of participation, there is still potential for increased involvement, especially in decision-making and management of the tourism village. Overcoming the identified barriers will be crucial for enhancing local participation and ensuring more equitable benefits. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This article contributes new insights into the specific barriers and stages of local community participation in tourism village development, offering a fresh perspective on participatory tourism management within rural settings.

KEYWORDS: local community participation; tourism village development; Arnstein's ladder; community involvement; development barriers.

1. Introduction

Tourism has become one of the rapidly growing economic sectors in various countries, including Indonesia. In its development, there has been a paradigm shift from mass tourism to a form of tourism that is more sustainable and community-based. One manifestation of this shift is the emergence of the concept of tourist villages, which offer authentic experiences and direct interaction with rural life (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). Tourist villages not only serve as new destinations for tourists but also as a potential development tool for rural communities (Nabila, 2016).

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The concept of community-based tourism (CBT) serves as a fundamental foundation for the development of tourist villages. Sustainable tourism development is the primary goal of responsible tourism, with Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as one of its approaches (Rahmafitria & Rahmafitria, 2018). Suansri (2003) defines CBT as tourism that positions local communities as key actors in tourism activities, giving them the right to participate in decision-making, environmental and cultural management, and economic benefit distribution. More than just a model for tourism development, CBT is seen as a tool for community development and environmental conservation that emphasizes sustainability (Rahmafitria & Nurazizah, 2016). Understanding and knowledge of CBT programs play a crucial role in shaping individuals' motivations and decisions to participate.

As an implementation of CBT, tourist villages have unique characteristics that distinguish them from conventional forms of tourism. Hermawan (2016) states that a tourist village is an area closely related to the local environment or local wisdom, including customs and local culture, which is managed as a tourist attraction in accordance with its local capacity and potential. Sugiarti (2008) adds that tourist villages offer significant benefits in the development of rural resources, creating new economic opportunities without sacrificing the community's cultural identity.

Local community participation is a key element in the success and sustainability of tourist villages. Prasiasa (2012) identifies local community participation as one of the main components of tourist villages, along with local norms, customs, and culture. Juwita et al. (2017) highlight the importance of community involvement throughout the entire process of tourist village development. Efforts to transform social realities within the community are continuous through dynamic participation processes (Hutapea et al., 2014). Rifkin (1996) defines participation as a process in which individuals or groups are actively involved in decision-making or the implementation of a project or program. In the context of tourist villages, participation includes community involvement in planning, development, management, and evaluation of tourism activities (Linggarjati, 2019).

To analyze the level of community participation, the Ladder of Citizen Participation theory proposed by Arnstein (1969) provides a relevant conceptual framework. This theory divides community participation into eight levels, ranging from manipulation to citizen control. It enables researchers to identify the level of community participation and analyze the stages of local community involvement as well as the barriers to participation in the development of Mekarlaksana Tourist Village.

Mekarlaksana Tourist Village, located in Cikancung District, Bandung Regency, West Java, serves as an interesting case study to apply these concepts and theories. With an area of approximately 717.4384 hectares and a population of 7,098 people, the village offers diverse tourism potential, including mountainous and plantation scenery, preservation of local culture, ancestral traditions, performing arts, and a variety of MSME products. Although the tourist village development initiative began in 2020, Mekarlaksana Village was officially recognized as a tourist village in 2022 and is still considered an emerging tourist village.

However, in its development, Mekarlaksana Tourist Village faces significant challenges regarding community participation. Despite efforts by the management and the Tourist Awareness Group (POKDARWIS) to involve the community, the response has not been fully positive. Out of a total population of 7,098, only around 250 people actively participate in the development of the tourist village. This phenomenon raises questions about the factors influencing the level of community participation and the strategies needed to enhance it.

Several barriers have been identified, including: (1) the extent of local community participation in the development of Mekarlaksana Tourist Village, (2) the stages of local community participation in the development of Mekarlaksana Tourist Village, and (3) the obstacles to local community participation in the development of Mekarlaksana Tourist Village. This situation reflects the complexity of implementing the CBT concept and highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics of community participation in the context of tourist village development.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the level of local community participation in the development of Mekarlaksana Tourist Village using Arnstein's (1969) participation theory framework. In addition, the study seeks to identify the stages of community participation and the barriers faced in the participation process. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for tourist village managers in designing more effective policies to increase community participation, as well as contribute to the development of strategies that can enhance the sustainability and success of tourist villages in Indonesia.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study method to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of community participation in developing Mekarlaksana Tourism Village. This approach is chosen to intensively and comprehensively analyze the specific case of community participation at the location. Participants include local residents of Mekarlaksana Village aged 18-60 years from various occupational backgrounds, including farmers, entrepreneurs, neighborhood leaders, homemakers, students, and unemployed individuals. The study is conducted in Mekarlaksana Village, Bandung Regency, West Java, Indonesia, situated at approximately 7°7' South Latitude and 107°36' East Longitude, at an altitude of 900-1500 meters above sea level. This location is selected for its scenic natural landscapes and cool climate, making it a promising tourism village.

Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, field observations, literature reviews, document analysis, and internet-based searches. The factors analyzed are based on Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), which categorizes participation into eight levels with three main indicators: awareness, knowledge, and benefits. Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process includes transcribing interviews, categorizing data, and integrating information into an analysis matrix to identify the level of community participation. Research instruments include interview guidelines, observation sheets, and supporting documents. Interviews are conducted with respondents' consent, using a consent form stating their agreement to be interviewed and recorded. This approach allows researchers to gather rich, contextual data, facilitating a comprehensive description and in-depth analysis of community participation dynamics in tourism village development.

To measure the community participation level in Mekarlaksana Village, Arnstein's (1969) theory is applied, where each level of participation has distinct criteria across the three indicators: awareness, knowledge, and benefits. The following table explains each level in detail:

Table 1. Levels of participation

Participation Level	Explanation
Manipulation	Involvement is due to coercion, with limited understanding of potential benefits.
Therapy	Involvement remains coercive, though there is an emerging understanding of benefits.
Informing	The community understands the benefits but lacks opportunities to voice opinions or suggestions.
Consultation	Voluntary involvement, experiencing some benefits with the ability to suggest ideas, though without guarantees of full realization.
Placation	Voluntary involvement with increased benefits, more ideas accepted, and many suggestions realized.
Partnership	Community-initiated but still involves related parties due to shared roles.
Delegated Power	Community initiates planning, operation, responsibility, and maintenance with support from related parties.
Citizen Control	The community independently initiates all stages, from planning to maintenance and funding.

Based on Table 1, each level of participation is outlined according to Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, detailing specific characteristics of each level.

Table 2. Criteria for participation stages

Participation Stage	Indicator	Awareness	Knowledge	Benefit Recognition
Manipulation	Coerced	Minimal awareness	Limited knowledge	Lack of awareness of benefits
Therapy	Coerced	Beginning basic knowledge	Awareness of potential benefits	
Informing	Voluntary	Understands activities	No opportunity to voice opinions	Aware of program benefits
Consultation	Voluntary	Increased involvement awareness	Ability to provide input, limited response realization	Perceives benefits (not yet significant)
Placation	Voluntary	Greater role in decision-making	Improved benefit realization	
Partnership	Initiative	Equal role with related parties	Increasing benefits	
Delegated Power	Initiative	Role in planning, execution, and accountability with support	High benefit realization	
Citizen Control	Full Initiative	Comprehensive knowledge and independence in maintenance and funding	Community manages benefits for progress	

Table 2 provides detailed indicators for each participation stage based on Arnstein's Ladder, including awareness, knowledge, and benefits. This breakdown serves as a guide to identify the levels of community participation in Mekarlaksana Village's tourism development.

3. Results and Discussion

This study comprehensively analyzes the dynamics of community participation in the development of Mekarlaksana Tourism Village. It examines the level of community participation, stages of participation, as well as obstacles or challenges encountered in the village's tourism development. Using a qualitative approach, this research aims to deeply understand how the local community is involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of tourism development programs in their village, Mekarlaksana Village.

3.1 Level of community participation

Community participation is a crucial factor in the development of a tourism village, as it is one of the core components of a tourism village. Individuals or groups of people actively participate in decision-making and the execution of existing programs. In this context, the participation of the local community is deemed essential for the sustainability of the tourism village, ensuring that it proceeds as intended according to prior plans, particularly in the development of a tourism village.

To identify the level of community participation in Mekarlaksana Village, the researcher uses Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation theory, referring to a table of classifications on participation levels, along with an indicator table to determine the level of community participation in Mekarlaksana Village.

The researcher conducted interviews with local community members in Mekarlaksana Village to ascertain the extent of their participation in developing the tourism village. A total of six community members were interviewed directly, with the help of a tourism village manager who facilitated the interview process, which took place at a villa in Mekarlaksana Village.

The interviews were conducted in an open and structured manner over one day, specifically on March 27, 2024. The researcher's questions were guided by a pre-prepared interview guide. For each stage of participation, the researcher divided the analysis into three indicators: awareness, knowledge, and benefits. These indicators assist the researcher in identifying the level of participation of each community member.

The study found that the level of community participation in Mekarlaksana Tourism Village has reached the fourth level of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, namely "Consultation." This conclusion is based on three main indicators. Awareness, community members voluntarily participate in activities, recognizing the potential benefits of their involvement. As expressed by one respondent (EG): "Initially, I accepted the invitation to come to the village to discuss the establishment of the tourism village, feeling confused about what a tourism village is, and thus reluctant to attend. However, once I attended and understood the concept, I became interested in participating and felt I would miss out if I didn't get involved." This statement illustrates that local community members have started to voluntarily participate because they feel they would miss out if they did not engage in every activity, whether it is in community empowerment programs, visitor preparations, or other activities. Local residents feel left out if they miss out on outreach events and similar programs, as they lose out on new information, learning, and insights. From this explanation, it can be concluded that the awareness of the local community in Mekarlaksana Village is at the Consultation level.

Knowledge, the community receives information through outreach programs and has developed the ability to express their opinions, even though there is no guarantee that their suggestions will be fully implemented. This is reflected in the statement of the respondent (AD): "I, along with other community members, often engage in discussions led by the head of the neighborhood association, discussing what we want, what should be developed, and what we want to change. After gathering our opinions, the head of the neighborhood association conveys them to the management. Some of the ideas we put forth are realized, while others are not, but we still receive a positive response from the management." Based on this argument, it can be concluded that the community's knowledge aligns with the Consultation level.

Benefits, the community has started to experience social and environmental benefits, although the economic benefits have not been substantial. The social benefits include increased community bonds and a sense of kinship with tourists, while the environmental benefits are reflected in heightened awareness of cleanliness. As stated by respondent (EG): "I feel happy when visitors come to the village; I feel like I have a new family. Especially when many students come, it feels like welcoming children returning from afar. Together with the other residents, we warmly welcome everyone who comes, and we do activities together, eat together, and even go to the fields together. When they leave, we feel sad and miss them. Some even come back here or just call to keep in touch with us." In addition to social benefits, the residents of Mekarlaksana Village also experience environmental benefits, such as improved cleanliness of the village environment, including the cleanliness of home yards and interiors. One respondent (AN) said, "Since this has become a tourism village, the cleanliness of the village has improved. The management often reminds us about cleanliness, saying we need to keep our surroundings clean, neat, and beautiful, as it would be embarrassing if our village were dirty and seen by visitors. This has motivated us to be more diligent in maintaining the cleanliness of our environment." Based on these benefits, it can be concluded that the local community in Mekarlaksana Village is at the Consultation level.

Based on the findings obtained by the researcher, according to the three indicators—awareness, knowledge, and benefits—it can be said that the level of participation of the local community in Mekarlaksana Village is at the fourth level, namely Consultation. At this level, the community has the awareness to participate voluntarily, has the knowledge to express their opinions based on existing knowledge, and recognizes the benefits of being designated as a tourism village, with the community beginning to feel the benefits, though they are not yet substantial.

These findings align with the objectives of this study, which are to analyze the stages of community participation in Mekarlaksana Village and identify the level of community participation. The stages of participation in this village are consistent with Arnstein's (1969) theory, although not all stages have been fulfilled. The level of community participation in Mekarlaksana Village is at the fourth level, Consultation, where the community is aware of their involvement, equipped with knowledge, has the ability to express their opinions even though there is no guarantee that all of these opinions will be realized, and they are beginning to experience some benefits, although not significantly.

3.2 Participation stages

The study reveals that Mekarlaksana Village has gone through several participation stages. Manipulation, the initial stage where the community is merely the object of programs. Therapy, an effort to "heal" the community from a state of powerlessness, where the management conducts door-to-door outreach to provide the community with basic knowledge about the tourism village.

Informing, the community begins to receive information about upcoming programs. After outreach activities conducted at the Therapy stage, the community becomes more aware of and willingly participates in tourism activities. Consultation (current stage), the community not only receives information but is also given an opportunity to express their opinions regarding upcoming programs. Community members are aware, knowledgeable, and experience benefits, having been equipped with sufficient knowledge (through outreach) and their own experiences by actively participating. This enables the community to express their opinions regarding tourism village development.

This progression demonstrates an increase in community awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the benefits of tourism village development in a gradual and sequential manner. It is important to note that the development of community participation in Mekarlaksana Village has occurred in an orderly manner, as theorized by Arnstein. This suggests that the process of increasing community participation is an ongoing sequence that requires time and consistent effort. To provide a clearer picture of the stages of local community participation in Mekarlaksana Village, a diagram illustrating the development from the Manipulation stage to the Consultation stage is provided. This diagram helps to visualize the process of increasing community participation according to Arnstein's theory.

Based on Figure 1, the analysis of local community participation stages in the development of a tourism village shows that the participation process has developed sequentially according to the theory proposed by Arnstein (1969). This development started from the lowest level of participation and has now reached the fourth stage, namely Consultation.

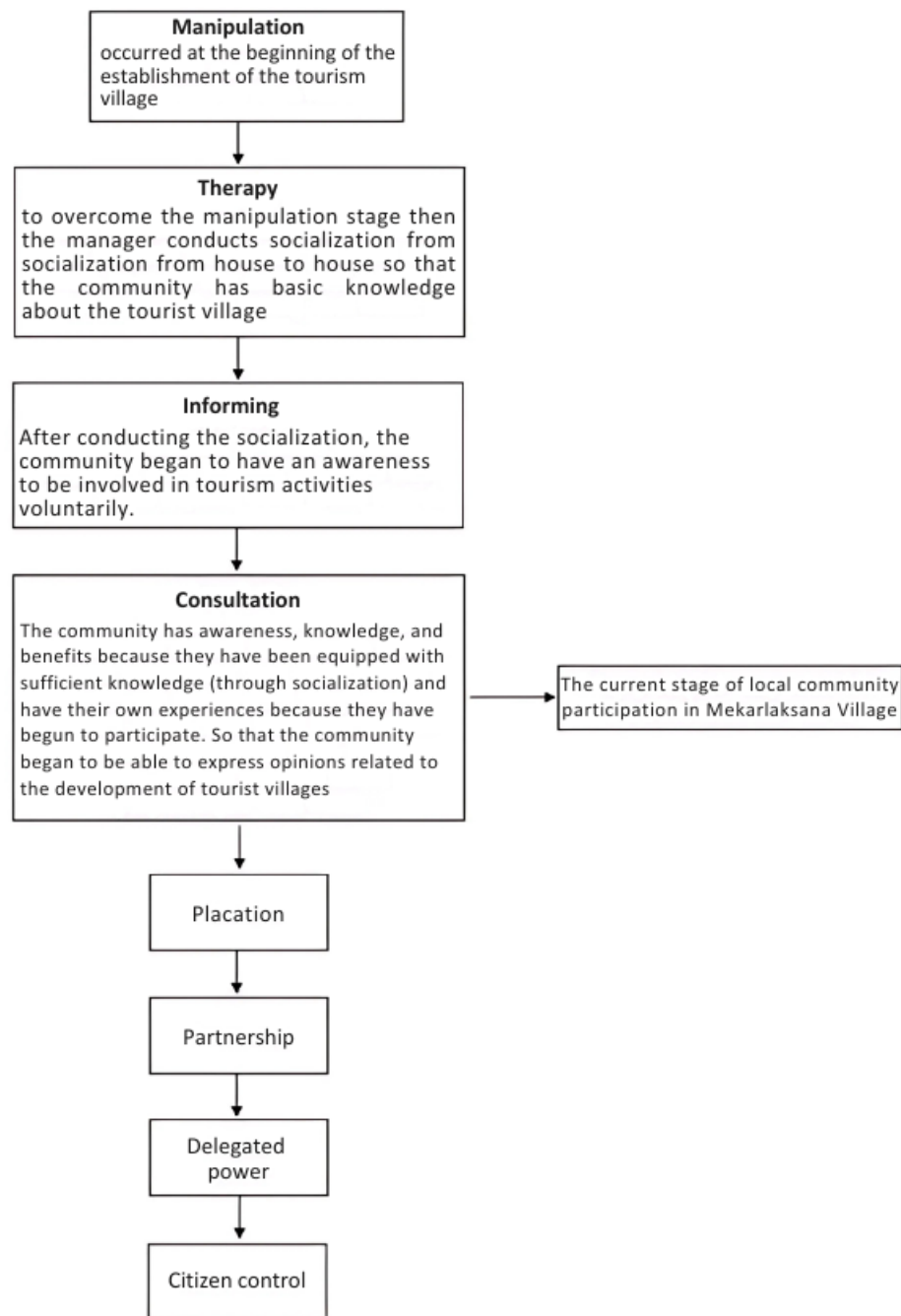


Fig 1. Community participation stages in Mekarlaksana Village

3.3 Participation constraints

Two main constraints were identified in the community participation process, first, uneven development. The first constraint in local community participation in Mekarlaksana Tourism Village is uneven development. This phenomenon can be explained using the Development Gap Theory by Myrdal (1957) and Nurkse (1953), which states that development tends to concentrate in certain areas, leading to gaps between developed and underdeveloped regions. This is reflected in an interview with respondent HI, who said, "In my opinion, the tourism village development is uneven. I, as a community member, feel that only other neighborhoods are being prioritized. One example is internet access, where I and others struggle to get a connection." Furthermore, HI added, "As a result, tourists rarely visit our neighborhood and prefer other neighborhoods that have received more development attention." This situation reflects the regional inequality concept put forward in the

Regional Inequality Theory by Friedmann (1966) and Hirschman (1958), which emphasizes that development tends to concentrate in economic growth centers, causing disparities between developed and underdeveloped areas. This unevenness is also seen in the difference in facilities across different parts of the village. Areas near the main tourist attractions have better roads and more stable networks, while remote areas struggle to access the internet. HI reinforced this argument by stating, "Apart from the difficulty in accessing the internet, the roads to our neighborhood are impassable by cars and can only be accessed by foot or motorbike, as the roads are too narrow." This disparity is consistent with the Development Gap Theory concept, where uneven infrastructure can hinder community participation and overall tourism village development.

Second, lack of economic benefits, the second constraint in local community participation in Mekarlaksana Tourism Village is the lack of economic benefits felt by the community. This constraint was expressed by several interview respondents, including EG, who said, "In my opinion, the tourism village only brings benefits to the management, but I haven't felt any economic benefits so far. Even though we were once told by the manager that the community would eventually benefit economically, we are still waiting for the realization." This lack of economic benefits aligns with the Dependency Theory by Dos Santos (1970), which states that in unequal relationships, the less-developed region tends to be dependent on the more developed region, limiting access to resources and benefits. This phenomenon is reflected in the experience of community members in Mekarlaksana Village who feel they have not yet benefited economically. Even though the community is willing to participate in tourism activities, they do so without significant compensation, which can eventually diminish their motivation and enthusiasm. In conclusion, the constraints in community participation in Mekarlaksana Tourism Village are uneven development and a lack of economic benefits.

4. Conclusions

Based on the research conducted, several constraints were identified regarding local community participation in the development of Mekarlaksana Tourism Village. The main constraint identified is the unequal development of the tourism village, where the benefits from tourism activities have not been fairly distributed among all community members. This has led to feelings of envy among residents and has caused some individuals to be reluctant to participate in the development of the tourism village. Additionally, the local community has not yet experienced significant economic benefits from the existence of the tourism village, which has resulted in a lack of motivation to actively participate in its development.

Regarding the level of local community participation in the development of Mekarlaksana Tourism Village, research findings indicate that community participation is at the fourth level, Consultation, according to Arnstein's theory (1969). At this level, the community has demonstrated a voluntary awareness to be involved in various tourism village development activities. They also possess a basic knowledge of the tourism village concept and are able to express their opinions, although there is no guarantee that these opinions will be accepted or realized by the management.

Although the participation level has reached Consultation, community participation in Mekarlaksana Village has not yet reached higher levels such as Partnership or Citizen Power. The community has started to feel the benefits of tourism village development, particularly in social and environmental aspects; however, economic benefits have not yet been significantly felt. This indicates that there is still room for improvement in terms of community involvement in decision-making, program planning, and independent management of the tourism village. Further efforts are needed from various parties, including the local government and tourism village management, to address existing challenges and encourage community participation to a higher level.

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All authors contributed to the development and completion of the research and manuscript. They were involved in the conceptualization, data analysis, and revision of the manuscript, and all authors approved the final version.

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