



## Ecotourism Development in Balekambang City Park, Surakarta, Central Java Indonesia

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### **Abstract**

This research is qualitative research. It emphasizes understanding the meaning of the observed phenomenon. The research aims are to determine the ecotourism development in Balekambang. Furthermore, the researchers want to obtain the ecotourism development principles that have been developed in Balekambang as a city park. The data were collected from interviews, observation, documentation, and analysis related documents. They were analyzed by interactive model: data reduction, data presentation, and draw the conclusions which are done by cycle. The results show that tourism development in Balekambang park does not completely follow the ecotourism principles. These principles emphasize people's participation, education, caring, and preservation of the environment. The park management is still limited to the conventional approach by doing paid performances which give an economic benefit. The ecotourism approach is needed to do in Balekambang to keep the preservation of the environment and give benefits for people.

**Keywords:** Balekambang; Surakarta; Ecotourism; Tourism Development

### **Introduction**

Tourism is the biggest industry that grows consistently in years. World Tourism Organization assumes that the number of international visitors will increase to 200% by 2020. Nowadays, modern tourism is influenced by the process of world globalization. It causes the interconnection of sectors, nations, and people in this world.

The tourism sector in Surakarta has huge growth potential. Sector development is needed to actualize the government goals. Interesting tourism marketing can attract more people to come to Surakarta. The number of visitors increases in years. There is a significantly increasing number from 2010 to 2015. It is about 2.197.153.

Based on the Master Plan of Surakarta Tourism Development (2016-2026), Surakarta is included in a Strategic Tourism Area. It means that Surakarta becomes a city that has the main function of tourism

or it has a potential for regional tourism development. Those functions have an important role in some aspects, such as economic, social and culture, empowerment of natural resources, and protection to the biosphere.

Surakarta is being developed into a cultural city. It has various projects and policies, i.e. walking street, BERSERI (Clean Healthy Neat Beautiful) project, and others. One of the government policies regarding city development is reflected in the vision of Surakarta. The vision is to become a tourism city with cultural nuance. It is caused by the diversity of cultural tourism in Surakarta. To support the tourism program and policy, the Surakarta government has taken steps to create an international tourism place in Central Java. This effort is associated with the realization of Tri Krida Utama of Surakarta as a cultural city, tourism city, and sports city. The implementation of these steps is supported by the Solo BERSERI program.

Tourism development in Surakarta follows the tourism development capital. As stated in the Sustainable Tourism Charter (1995), sustainable development is a general development that can be supported ecologically as well as economically, fair ethically and socially for the people. Sustainable development is an integrated and organized effort to develop the quality of life by regulating the supply, development, utilization, and maintenance of resources in a sustainable manner. One form of tourism products as a derivative of the concept of sustainable tourism development is the concept of ecotourism development. Ecotourism is more than a group of dedicated green peace. It is a combination of various interests that becomes one because of the concern of social, economic and environmental problems. How to make the foreign exchange come back home, so that the conservation can finance itself is the branch of green economics of sustainable development (Western, 1999).

Based on various aspects, ecotourism is unique because we can travel while preserving the biosphere and culture. According to the World Conservation Union (WCU), ecotourism is a travel tour to the natural biosphere. It is also done by respecting the cultural heritage and nature, supporting conservation efforts, do not create negative impacts, providing socio-economic benefits, and respecting the participation of residents. The Ecotourism Society (1990) is a kind of travel tour to natural areas. It aims to conserve the environment and preserve the lives and well-being of the local peoples. This ecotourism concept is different from those in Laos. Ecotourism in Laos was written in Lao National Tourism Administration National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan 2005 - 2010. The writing says that ecotourism is tourism activities in rural and protected areas that minimize negative impacts on social resources and ecological. It is directed to nature conservation and cultural resources, rural socio-economic development, visitor understanding, and appreciation for the places they visit.

Based on Alfonsus Aditya (2017), there are two aspects need to be developed in Surakarta tourism. First, Indonesian tourism lacks innovation, such as the innovation of Javanese villages selling. The people should not need to be ashamed of the Javanese village. Second, tourism can not be uniformed homogeneously because it will decrease the value.

"Solo will be a cultural city" is the motto of the Surakarta government. The government does some projects to realize sustainable tourism development. The revitalization of tourism places such as the city park, the fortress, and the palace is attempted by the government. One of the city parks that is being developed by the Surakarta government is Balekambang Park. The government developed this city park to fulfill the need of an educative-recreative public space for Solo people. Balekambang park is seen as a potential public space, where people will not only enjoy recreational tourism but also educational cultural tourism. It has a high historical and cultural value, as well as the functional aspects. Balekambang has a functional value because of its potency as a tourism area, catchment area and the lungs of the city.

Balekambang is a heritage of Mangkunegaran in the form of a water park. Balekambang Park was originally named Partini Tuin and Partinah Bosch. It was built by KGPAA Mangkunegoro VII on

October 26, 1921. Because of his affection for his daughter GRAY Partini Husein Djayaningrat and GRAY Partinah Sukanta, his daughter's name was enshrined as the name of the park. Balekambang Park was divided into two areas. Mangkunegoro VII divided Balekambang Park by combining Javanese and European concepts, where was not built only to create an element of beauty. There was an important function of that water park, which is as a water reservoir to clean or flush dirty dirt in the city. It is also used as a catchment and lung area of the city. This park used to be used by Mangkunegaran's relatives for recreation. After Mangkunegoro VII passed away, the park was opened for the public. Day by day, the establishment of *srimulat* entertainment, *ketoprak*, discotheques, and massage parlors, made Balekambang more famous than Sriwedari Park and Jurug Park. Unfortunately, the Balekambang condition has receded after the bankruptcy of *srimulat*. The park was no longer neglected and damaged so that the function was declined. Balekambang Park became dirty, haunted, quiet and chaotic. The buildings inside Balekambang were also neglected and damaged. Squatters appeared in the Balekambang area. Activities that still exist were fishing. The nightlife at Freedom Discotheque has immersed the image of Balekambang as a cultural heritage. The declined condition of Balekambang Park also affected tourism in Surakarta.

Based on the historical and functional value, Balekambang as a city park can be an interesting tourism place in Surakarta. Unfortunately, it has not been optimally developed, so the number of visitors to this place is the smallest if it is compared to another tourism place in Surakarta. One of the government policies and programs realization regarding the vision of Solo as a cultural city is by maintaining and preserving cultural heritage objects or areas through revitalizing tourism objects. The policy regarding the Balekambang area is included in the evaluation of the Surakarta Master Plan 1993-2013. It stated that the buildings in Balekambang city park, *srimulat* amusement park, swimming pool, Partinah Bosch recreation area have inadequate facilities. That is why a new regulation is needed in Balekambang park. The revitalization of Balekambang Park is part of preserving the tourism objects, as well as empowering the government assets so that it can create a bigger contribution to the development and Surakarta government.

In general, the Surakarta government focuses on developing the tourism sectors by looking at the potencies of Surakarta as a cultural city. City forest is one of the other potencies that Balekambang Park had. It has an ecological function as a keeper of the quality of the biosphere. The park shade with its fruits and seeds is a good habitat for birds to live. It can persuade birds to flourish. So, birds singing will be heard again in every morning. The city parks can be functioned as a filter for pollutant gases and dust, carbon binders, and also microclimate regulators. A city park is one of the actions in improving the quality of the biosphere. Besides being an aesthetic element of urban space, the city park is also functioned as an ecological element of the city. It is used to protect and regulate the microclimate.

The ecological function of Balekambang city park makes it becomes an important element in urban ecosystems. Vegetation in the parkland is useful for absorbing toxic substances due to burning and vehicles smoke; absorbing water into the soil; and as social facilities. Therefore, the shape and type of vegetation used affects the existence of the city park as a regulator of the city's microclimate. Plants or vegetation must be beneficial for the absorption of pollutants in the air. Balekambang city park is an action in improving the quality of the environment of the city of Surakarta.

The Surakarta Mayor's plan to revitalize the Balekambang Park will be realized soon. According to the plan, the swimming pool, cultural performances room, various craft exhibitions, and parks will be built. The most important thing is the green park should remain dominant. Besides that, the large trees (> 50 cm in diameter) should be maintained too, so that the visitors feel comfort and freshness.

Balekambang city park has animals such as deers, turkey cocks, ducks, birds, and monkeys. These animals do not live in a cage. They are very attractive and do not harmful visitors. This park also has a lake for saving water. It is opened for fishing every day. On the back of this park, there is the rabbit garden. There are not only rabbits, but also turtles, komodo dragons, monkeys, birds, and many others.

Researchers observe this park in detail. The park has been built and updated, including the ecological functions. The problem is there are some deers in the field that try to find food from the trash. Another problem that the researchers found is each tree has not been given a name description. Based on the phenomena found and the description above, the researchers are interested in conducting a research about ecotourism development.

### ***Methodology***

This research was conducted in Balekambang city park. This park is located in the middle of the city, on Balekambang street, number 1, Manahan, Banjarsari, Surakarta, Central Java Province, Indonesia. This research is qualitative research. The researcher used interviews, observation, documentation, and analysis documents related to the Balekambang city park to collect the data. There are two kinds of data sources in this research. The primary data source is informants. The informants are marketing staff and also general and community staff in Technical Implementation Unit Office of Balekambang Tourism Area. Besides the informant, the researcher also used photos, brochures, websites or online internet from Taman Balekambang as the related documents. The secondary data is the results of previous studies. The researcher used data source triangulation and collection data triangulation to validate the data. Data analysis in this study is interactive analysis. The analysis steps are data reduction, data display, and data verification.

### ***Results and Discussion***

Management of Balekambang city park is handled by the Surakarta Government Tourism Official. Under government tourism, there is an organization called the Technical Implementation Unit for the Tourism Area in Tourism Office. Technical Implementation Unit of Balekambang Park was formed because of several reasons. Those are to carry out part of operational technical activities or certain supporting technical activities of the regional device, Technical Implementation Unit of Balekambang Tourism Area was designated as cultural heritage, regional retribution, public services, Technical Implementation Unit was formed as technical guidelines for Regional Property Management.

Technical Implementation Unit for Surakarta Balekambang Park Tourism Office was formed to preserve some aspects. First, it preserves arts and culture in Surakarta of which has been designated as a Cultural Heritage by the Decree of the Mayor of Surakarta. Second, it preserves and develops the existence of the Surakarta Balekambang Park which has been built since the 7th Mangkunegoro, on 26th October 1921. Balekambang Park is one of the potential places to be developed and managed optimally because it can be visited by the peoples around. The park supports the government programs by becoming an art and cultural park which shows art and cultural performances. Third, it provides opportunities for the art studio or community in Surakarta to perform performances in Balekambang city park. It can be improved the welfare of the art studios which are collaborated with the Technical Implementation Unit of Balekambang Park Tourism Office. The unit gives opportunities for studios and communities to perform regularly, such as ketoprak which is performed every Friday and Ramayana Ballet which is held once a month, on Friday night. These kinds of events support the Surakarta government to increase Regional Original Revenue. It has been regulated by Surakarta Regulation, number 5 by 2016 about Amendments for the Surakarta City Regulation, Number 9 of 2011 about Regional Retribution.

Based on the interview did by the researchers with Mr. DP, the researchers knew that Balekambang city park is a conservation park. It is water conservation that must show water and tree elements, including the cultural heritage of Mangkunegoro relic. Balekambang city park expands its area

of around 3 hectares. Its parking area uses paving stone. Two obligations should be fulfilled by Balekambang Park. First, it must be preserved sustainability. Therefore, visitors will notice the presence of trees and water. The use of paving blocks in Balekambang is to maintain water installations. It also creates animal spots. Balekambang Park gives 6.6 billion in profit. Furthermore, the money is used to repair buildings and parking area. It is also used to pay janitors and ketoprak officers. Second, it must be introduced the Ramayana Ketoprak and other Javanese cultures.

For the next, the researchers interviewed Ms. Sri Wardhani Poerbowidjojo, the head of the Environment Agency. The researchers got information that the use of DLH for Balekambang Park is to work together with the Tourism Area, for example, to fulfill the lack of tools to plant trees or plants requested by the Technical Implementation Unit of Balekambang Park. DLH acts as a breakdown of the environment, city cleanliness, and environmental conservation which has several activities, such as world environment day, climate village, the green peace movement in schools. In short, DLH has no role in Balekambang city park management.

Balekambang Park has a very strategic place to be developed as an eco-tourism place because of its ecological functions. Formerly, the government was only focused on developing Balekambang Park into a recreation and cultural park. The government has not invested in developing Balekambang as ecotourism yet. Balekambang Park has various places and events, such as the art building, open stage, ketoprak festival, rabbit park, and so on. It has a historical value that is very thick for the city of Surakarta. It is known by two daughters of Mangkunegaran as an icon of Balekambang Park. Partini and Partinah are remembered as the forerunner of Balekambang Park. The water park was named Partini Tuin and an artificial forest or city park named Partinah Bosch.

The ecological function of Balekambang city park is as the keeper of environment quality. The shade of the park is a good habitat for birds. Related to the ecological function, Balekambang park can be functioned as a filter of pollutant gases and dust, carbon binders, micro-climate regulators. Lush and leafy trees of which absorb and process carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), sulfur oxides (SO<sub>2</sub>), ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), carbon monoxide (CO), and plumbum (Pb) which are 80% caused air pollution to be oxygen. So, the air is ready to be breathed by people. The plants and forests as the lung of the city are expected to decrease the volume of pollutants in the air. The greening program needs to start as soon as possible. Plants can absorb CO<sub>2</sub> as the breathing residue. The metabolism of plants will produce O<sub>2</sub> that we use to breathe. Every hour, a hectare of green leaves will absorb eight kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub>. It is appropriate to CO<sub>2</sub> exhaled by 200 people at the same time. Because of the pollutant reduction in the air, people could avoid the risk of infertility, upper respiratory tract infections, stress, nausea, vomiting, headache, fetal death, mental retardation of children, and skin cancer.

Mr. Sumeh, as the head of the Balekambang Park, explained the reason why ecotourism has not been implemented: "The problem is not just because of the funding but also the support from a related government official. It should be supported by sufficient human resources. The residents need to participate inside. All people are responsible for realizing ecotourism. Furthermore, Mr. Jokowi as the Indonesian President does not permit to built a building anymore. "

The head of the Government Tourism Official said that in general the park rules has not been implemented but those who visit the Balekambang Park have done it. People take the vehicles outside, they do not smoke during ketoprak performances, street vendors are urged to reduce plastic rubbish and socialize not to throw litter. Officers are required to clean up the park before and after the performances. There will be an outbound area and open stage in Balekambang. The park is the best ecotourism that Solo ever has. Balekambang Park does not have a target, but hopefully, it can give 13 billion profit by 2020. The plan to name trees and plants known as LH. The ecotourism job description created by DPRD. The performances in Balekambang involve art studio inside and another group or art studio. Murals or art

drawings are still being considered for Balekambang Park. Unfortunately, it does not appropriate for ecotourism.

On the previous manuscript entitled *Application of SWOT Analysis in the Surakarta Balekambang Park Tourism Supply Components*, Furi (2012) explained that Balekambang's IFAS (Internal Factor analysis Summary) score is 3.30 and EFAS (External Factor analysis Summary) score is 3.45. IFAS and EFAS scores are included in internal and external matrix quadrants. The result was that Balekambang Park is in quadrant I. It means that Balekambang is in the growth position (urgent). The space matrix stated that Taman Balekambang was in an aggressive position. The suggestion in this research is that Balekambang Park should improve the quality of its bid aspects and create a good development plan to increase the number of visitors. This manuscript shows that Balekambang Park is appropriate for further developing. It should improve the quality of the supply aspects. The most appropriate offer component is ecotourism.

On the other hand, Susilo (2013) entitled *Image Formation of the Balekambang Taman Surakarta as an Art and Cultural Park (A Qualitative Descriptive Study of the Image Formation of the Balekambang Taman Surakarta as an Art and Cultural Park Through the UPTD Balekambang)* explored that Balekambang Park implementer and manager supports the Government's program by making this area becomes an Art and Cultural Park. It is done by organizing a variety of arts and cultural activities. Balekambang Park can be enjoyed by many people. It formed a positive image of people's views. Technical Implementation Unit for the Tourism Area in Balekambang Park supported arts and cultural programs. This Tourism place is the right place for communities or art groups to perform their works. They can shape the image of Surakarta's Balekambang Park through activities held. The technical Implementation Unit encouraged the formed of the Arts and Cultural Tourism Area through this kind of event. Balekambang Park has a positive face. There are good impressions and expectations from the peoples about the existence of Balekambang Park through activities and culture. This manuscript shows that Balekambang Park is being processed to be the Art and Culture Park. There is no concept of ecotourism inside. It implied in the way the manager pays attention to the historical function and cultural events carried out in this city park.

The next, Yuniarti (2015) entitled *Feasibility Analysis Administration of the Solo Eco-Cultural City Policy (Case Study of the Provision of Green Open Space in Surakarta)* found that the implementing authority of the policy overlaps. The overlapping occurred on the Government Cleanliness and Gardening Official with the Environment Agency. The form of overlapping is in the provision and maintenance of city parks. On the agency side, they are very committed to create city parks. This is caused by policy implementers felt that there are applicable regulations that must be obeyed. If the tasks and responsibilities can not be carried out properly, it will bring poor value. On the aspect of the ability, the number of human resources has not been sufficient. The low quality of facilities caused the city parks can not provide optimal benefits for people. The funds that have been prepared are still lacking. The government does not provide alternative fund and monitoring access in the supply and maintenance process. Therefore, the process is hampered. Organization support is weak, so they are not engaged in work. The low quality of administrative aspects triggered the hampered of city park created in Surakarta. The provision of city parks must be able to reach the ideal target. Furthermore, Balekambang Park should have further development as the first eco-tourism site in solo. This park is appropriate to be developed because of its strategic place, in the middle of the city. It also has unique plants and trees aged 100 years old.

The researchers are sure that Balekambang will become one of the ecotourism and recreation areas in the future. It can be functioned as an educational place to study large trees and rare plants. Of course, ecotourism must be concerned while maintained the greenness in the middle of the city. It accordances with the new Surakarta tagline, "Eco-Cultural City". Balekambang city park will be a place for education, motivation, vacation, and a research center for students.

## Conclusion

From the research result, it can be concluded that Balekambang city park has not applied the concept of ecotourism directly and officially. Balekambang Park still lacks human resources. Government Tourism Office and Technical Implementation Unit have not entered yet the most special section for ecotourism. It focuses on the concept of culture that has performed several times, such as ketroprak, open stage, and many others. Balekambang Park acts as a preserver of trees and plants. According to the Technical Implementation Unit, Balekambang Tourism Park does not understand the concept of ecotourism in depth. It has not been promoted as an ecotourism place by the government or Technical Implementation Unit for the Tourism Area. Collaboration with the private sector in terms of ecotourism is still unclear. This park must begin to apply the ecotourism concept through education, environmental conservation, environmentally friendly, and community participation. An organization structure must be added to the ecotourism section. The employees of this section must be well knowledgeable about ecotourism to master its concept and run out ecotourism activities in Balekambang city park.

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