

## Article

# New regionalism theory—Indonesia's rural development through a tourism perspective

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**Abstract:** In an effort to bridge the gap of economic and social inequality among the community, rural areas in Indonesia are encouraged to be self-sufficient in generating income. This makes the central government create various policies so that the regional government maximizes the management of its potential as an economic resource for the well-being of its people. One of the ways to manage this potential is to encourage rural areas to create tourism products that can be sold to the public. The Indonesian governments openly use the tourism sector as a tool for the development in many rural areas. Next, efforts to achieve successful development of the district will be closely related to the strategic planning and long-term cooperation of each local government with stakeholders in its implementation. These two points are the basic elements of the new regionalism theory. This theory states that the role of local governments is very important in initiating and making policies for new economic activities for a significant improvement in the quality of their population. Therefore, this study tries to explore how the new theory of regionalism can include rural development from a tourism perspective as a way to stimulate the fading economy in rural area of Indonesia. The study found that the new theory of regionalism needs support from various aspects such as social-cultural, community participation, the three pillars of sustainable development namely economic, social, and environmental as well as basic aspects to shape sustainable rural development through tourism.

**Keywords:** new regionalism theory; rural tourism; rural economy; bottom-up approach; rural development

## 1. Introduction

Rural governments in Indonesia were given full authority and funds these days to manage and improve the economic potential and well-being of the people in their areas. Every year the central government allocates huge funds for rural areas. Through this fund, rural areas are asked to do various activities as an economic cause to create jobs, overcome inequality and reduce poverty among their residents. Rural areas are expected to be socially strong, i.e., a place for residents to invest social capital such as building harmony, social cohesion, mutual aid, and social resilience. In terms of culture, rural areas are encouraged to develop quality education and culture that encourages creativity and innovation, the use of social capital and cultural capital, personal development and the affirmation of national identity and increasing the role of social, religious, family, and public institutions. While in economic terms, rural sovereignty is the ability to maintain, manage and optimize economic functions and natural assets (Kementerian Keuangan Republik Indonesia, 2020).

Rural funds provide a boost to change and the formation of some new socio-economic activities in rural areas in Indonesia. Rural agricultural activities in Indonesia are large and require systematic management of natural resources to regulate settlements from economic activities (Sunyoto, 2015). The continuous management of natural resources is done for the conservation of the environment and to achieve the long-term well-being of the population. Therefore, the local community should be the main shareholder in all the management of existing resources in the area (Donnges, 2003). This means that local community involvement in local economic development activities (LED) should be a priority.

Therefore, recent public sector policy initiatives in Indonesia indicate an ideological shift towards a more pro-active government role, particularly at the local/regional level, in shaping tourism development. This ideological shift, embodied in the emerging New Regionalism policy framework, anticipates a devolved tourism planning mandate that fosters long-term strategic and collaborative planning of the sector. This, in turn, will direct the scale, type and contribution of tourism development towards broader area development policy objectives focused on the promotion of sustainable communities.

Therefore, starting in 2017, in response to the policy made by the central government, the majority of regional governments gave priority to the economic development of the population based on tourism as one of the development strategies in the district. This strategy was chosen because of the various benefits promised from tourism activities for the local economy and also the confidence in improving the quality of life of the population (Ibanescu et al., 2018; Lepp, 2007; Lin et al., 2017; Woo et al., 2015). This strategy begins by encouraging villages to create new economic sectors that can improve the quality of life of local residents. As a result, many villages chose to develop tourism activities in response to this strategy. However, an area must first understand the economic, social and political context if it wants to feel the role of tourism development significantly (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002).

New regionalism theory approach explains that various activities in an area are designed and formed based on their potential (localism), taking into account the uniqueness and problems that occur therein (Hettne and Soderbaum, 1998). It involves a spontaneous process of realizing various economic ideas and activities, from the lowest levels and from within the region itself. Developing economy of rural areas aims to improve the economy and life of the regional communities in question (Koster, 2007), which is often neglected due to distance and location factors. Each community in a particular area also has its own social, political, and economic characteristics. The decline of traditional industry in rural areas is forcing local communities to make a transition to a new economy that promises to improve their quality of life and welfare.

The regional governments aim to emphasize social and economic growth through, new economy activities, tourism which involves various stakeholders. This raises a lot of speculative interest in the development process that prevents it from achieving success. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore how the new regionalism theory can be used to better understand the increased focus of district/local governments on tourism as a driver of development in their area. Additionally, the study aims to provide a fresh perspective on achieving successful regional development through tourism by applying the new regionalism theory.

## **2. New regionalism theory in various fields**

Previously, new regionalism theory has been used for several approaches such as the core-periphery model (McCann and Simmons, 2000), urban areas and learning areas (Sagan and Halkier, 2016), government strategies in various sectors and levels (Bienefeld, 2000; Wood and Valler, 2004), equity in urban regions (Amin, 1999; Porter, 2003), new regionalism theory related to policy and practice (Hettne and Soderbaum, 1998; Söderbaum, 2003). It is also associated with new political entities or units based on regional dynamics (Baysoy, 2020), the external enhancement of sustainable aspects (Everingham et al., 2006) and globalization and the reconstruction of the political economy space (Macleod, 2001; Mittelman, 1996). The theory of new regionalism has also tried to be linked to tourism in terms of planning (Koster, 2007) and public policy (Shone, 2008; Shone and Memon, 2008).

Given the history of the application of this theory, it is clear that the regionally oriented planning movement of the last decade represents a wide range of viewpoints, and that they have faced formidable institutional and political obstacles if they are to have any practical impact. However, most recent regional initiatives share common characteristics that tend to underline the new concept of regional planning. If we look at the main elements of the new regionalism, it consists of a focus on specific areas and spatial planning; responding to the problems of postmodern metropolitan areas; a holistic approach that integrates planning and environmental specializations, equity (power versus coercion) and economic objectives; emphasizing physical planning: structure and process; dealing with migrant problems: harmonization of cooperation; and often practice normative or activist sessions (Ortiz-Guerrero, 2013; Wheeler, 2002).

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that implementing the new regionalism theory approach, there needs to be alignment with the related development issues of the area. In this case it is against the scope of rural areas. In other words, we need to relate this theoretical approach to a specific set of economic, social, cultural, and natural conditions that exist in rural areas. It is therefore important to suggest how policy makers should consider the potential role that this theoretical approach may play in the development process of rural areas from a tourism perspective.

## **3. New regionalism theory, regional development and tourism development**

In explaining the relationship of the new regionalism theory as a sustainable regional development approach through tourism, it is important to first identify whether tourism can be the main key in dealing with the issue of economic decline in an area (Shone, 2008). The use of this theoretical framework is based on the philosophy of 'returning to the district' (Shone and Memon, 2008). This basic paradigm promises a more integrative bottom-up approach. However, it also presents a complex and difficult planning framework from the perspective of tourism stakeholders, planners and practitioners (Milne and Ateljevic, 2001). In developing the economy of rural areas, communities are pressured by their diverse needs, namely demanding a better life (Koster, 2007), but are often faced with the problem of their

position which deepens and makes communication and access difficult. In addition to having its own social, political, and economic characteristics shaped by their history. The pressure from the decline of traditional industrial development in rural areas, forcing local communities to make a transition to a new economy that promises to improve their quality of life and well-being.

Rural areas, if seen specifically, are areas that have the following characteristics, namely: 1) low population density, 2) landscape and land use dominated by agriculture and forestry and 3) traditional social structure and lifestyle (World Tourism Organization, 2021). It is recognized to have a complex capacity with various functions consisting of those with different interest groups and often faced with the desire to claim the right to use the local area (land) for the purpose of improving well-being (McAreavey and McDonagh, 2011). Rural areas also experience many negative impacts from development such as depopulation, deagrarization, demographic aging and masculinization of the population as well as lower educational and economic potential of the population compared to urban areas (Kantar and Svržnjak, 2017). With the characteristics found in rural areas, the development strategy through tourism with various activities should be able to harmonize the environment, culture, and lifestyle of the local community. This can be done by developing products from the environment, cultural history, other resources and local wisdom (Bramwell and Lane, 1993; Koodsela et al., 2019; Paresishvili et al., 2017; Sanagustín Fons et al., 2011; White et al., 2006).

Development in rural areas is often related to processes, phenomena, and disciplines that include agricultural development and related activities such as traditional industries, handicrafts, and socioeconomic infrastructure. However, district development strategies instead focus on economic development models for basic industries and resources as well as industrial attraction and location modeling. Rarely does regional development consider tourism as a viable rural industry (Jackson and Murphy, 2006). Meanwhile, in the perspective of regional development, tourism in underdeveloped areas is described as cooperation and integration among the closest communities that share the challenges in developing the economy and deal with any consequences of the economic transition that takes place (Koster, 2007).

However, over time, communities and regions began to realize the wider importance of development rather than the traditional focus on the economy. Therefore, it can be suggested that this recognition has enabled tourism to become part of the district's development strategy in an area. They suggest several reasons for this shift in attitude, including the recent interest of policy makers and researchers in the "triple bottom line", which considers economic prosperity, environmental quality and social justice as indicators of district progress; indicators of quality of life as additional determinants of economic health and well-being; community involvement in the planning and implementation of tourism development and other strategies; as well as the interests of consumers in service-based industries (Rogers and Ryan, 2001; Slaper and Hall, 2011).

Tourism has several characteristics that make it attractive for the implementation of the district's development agenda (Shone, 2008). It is often considered a key component in district development strategies (Butler et al., 1998). Some researchers began to mention the importance of tourism from various aspects that bring positive

effects to rural areas, for example with the development of tourism, increased infrastructure development and tourism-based businesses. This led to major economic and social restructuring in rural areas and an increased supply of alternative employment opportunities. Tourism is also the most decentralized “trend industry” and is built on the natural environment and cultural heritage attractions in most regional areas. It is also labor intensive and can create jobs not only directly serving tourists but also in various related services, construction, and manufacturing industries. Its chained nature between economic sectors is able to stimulate development in other industries related to it. In addition, it helps to diversify the local economy and support existing infrastructure, and can finance the development of new infrastructure which, in turn, can help the establishment of other industries (Beer et al., 2003).

Tourism is a relatively simple and visible form of government intervention in promoting regional economic development. This is due to the perception of low implementation costs compared to other primary or secondary industries. This needs to be encouraged because society is increasingly pursuing modernization and urbanization, hence opportunities for tourism and leisure activities increase in rural areas, which has a direct impact on the social and environmental aspects of the local community. The challenge for district planning and development through tourism in the context of sustainable community development is to reconcile issues of democracy and economic rationality in the planning process; overcoming conflicting policy goals in the field of district development; fostering the cooperation of residents as well as potential tourism competitors; and facilitate the alignment of various ‘visions’ of tourism towards the same goal, so that regional development becomes broader and more objective so that a sustainable community can be achieved (Macleod, 2001; Shone and Memon, 2008). This study will try to see how the new theory of regionalism can include rural development from a tourism perspective as a way to stimulate a declining economy.

#### **4. New regionalism theory from a tourism perspective in indonesia**

The support of local, regional, and central governments is essential for the development of rural areas with the aim of stimulating the economy of local communities. The role of local government is very important for the development of rural areas as a whole (Ahlers et al., 2016; Khongsatjaviwat and Routray, 2015; Živojinović et al., 2019). Their interest is to provide the necessary planning and management framework for rural development, while improving the socio-economic conditions and welfare of the poor in rural communities (Douglas, 2005; Khongsatjaviwat and Routray, 2015; Liu et al., 2020; Opere, 2007). The role of local authorities is to motivate and encourage the mobilization and participation of local residents in the decision-making process at the local level. Through self-help and self-reliance initiatives, skills and resources, local communities are mobilized in development and planning activities where they live. This can reduce the economic burden on the regional government and thus resolve or at least reduce the burden.

Community participation in the desired development activities is very important to achieve effective and sustainable development. Contemporary strategies for rural development have been based on bottom-up processes of self-help and community-

based initiatives (Ćurčić et al., 2021). Economic activities are diversified to move from the activities of the main sector which is agriculture, to the industrial sector, and tertiary activities. In order to improve the quality of life of rural residents, the regulation and modification of the rural environment will be carried out. This includes the preservation of cultural heritage and natural wealth through conservation protection projects, promotion of local architecture, landscape, culture, history and other natural. Based on the above, the maintenance of rural areas, can lead to economic, social, and cultural benefits. This is the initial impact for the development of rural tourism (Fang, 2020).

Compared to other fields, tourism brings added value and utilizes resources that are not valued and looked upon by other fields (Kataya, 2021). It is often seen as a key element that allows communities affected by economic restructuring to regain and improve their economic position in the regional and national economy. In addition, tourism in rural areas is included in the category of activity sectors whose evolution begins as an element of the completion of the main activity, then culminates in the complexity of the current form of manifestation that is fully useful for the local community (Rosalina et al., 2021).

Developing rural areas needs to look at everything from an economic, social, cultural point of view so that this implies the initiation and development of rural tourism. At the same time, rural tourism can actively participate in maintaining the viability and stability of rural localities, taking into account that the phenomenon of depopulation is becoming more pronounced, with young people going to cities and leaving their families and rural areas.

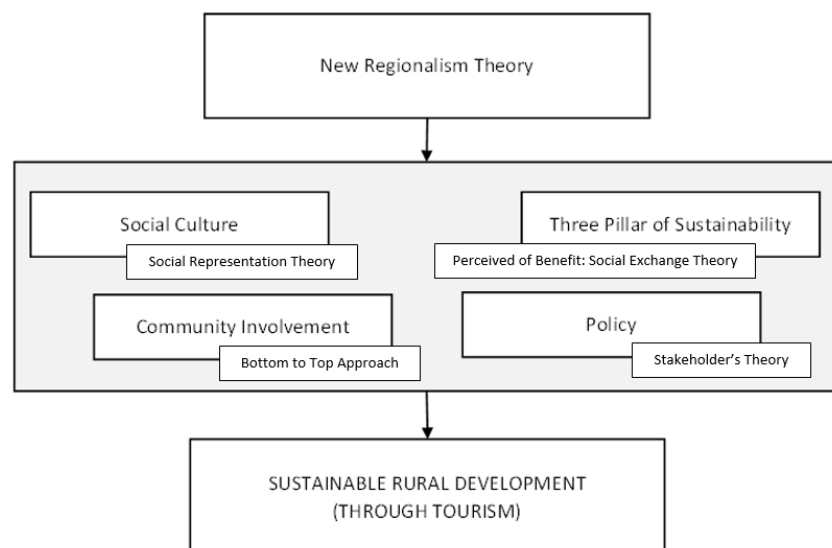
The meeting of the rural environment, a very fragile environment and the dynamism brought about by the phenomenon of tourism, raises the problem of risk posed by restructuring. It can be said that the formation of tourist villages must be an alternative to the problems of agriculture and rural areas. Numerous previous studies have highlighted tourism as an important tool for regional development. This is based on the assumptions of the redistribution effect of tourism expenditure and the spread of tourist attractions and icons in the region. In addition, tourist visitation and spending patterns are held to support social goals around the maintenance of regional populations, service bases, infrastructure and communications. Given these characteristics, it is not surprising that tourism, arguably more than many other economic sectors. It is also actively supported and promoted by the government as a tool for regional economic development (Shone and Memon, 2008).

Rural development currently emphasizes local government and the bottom-up approach (regionalism). It can be said that the new regionalism theoretical approach, when looking at the goal of developing rural areas, mandates local governments as the main responsibility for tourism planning and management. Coordinating tourism development goals with the interests of tourism actors, local governments, stakeholders, local communities, and tourists can be challenging to local authorities. To ensure sustainable tourism in rural area, it is vital to establish alternative policies to address these challenges (Dávid et al., 2024). Therefore, the development of rural areas through tourism needs to be supported by many elements in its implementation.

An idea that can be developed based on the discussion above is how the new regionalism theoretical approach will create sustainable rural development through the

tourism sector in Indonesia. In this idea, the community and all the elements in it are the main factors in influencing the economic development of a region. Community containing society is very important as an intermediate level of social life between personal (individual/family) and impersonal (global/institutional). Economic regeneration emerging from within the community will be followed by positive perceptions and attitudes and will fully support existing policies.

A community-based approach is at the heart of many rural development plans through tourism in Indonesia. Because in it there is an awareness that develops into cooperation, trust, and local networks. This is an important ingredient in providing the right combination for a successful tourism development outcome. The proposed form of combination includes socio-culture (social representation theory), the concept of community involvement (bottom-up approach), perception of the benefits/three pillars of sustainability (social exchange theory) and policy (stakeholder theory) as shown in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** The proposed rural development framework through tourism with a new regionalism theory approach.

Source: Developed by Authors (2024).

The concept of tourism in rural areas is a new form as a result of the dominance of other countries, liberation and debate manifesting its form as common knowledge that develops in society (Nugroho et al., 2021). The planning, implementation and impact of rural tourism will get various responses from all parties including the local community. This is because tourism in rural areas is one of the causes of socio-economic and local cultural changes as well as significant rural landscape changes (Randelli and Martellozzo, 2019; Sanagustín Fons et al., 2011). Various response results that appear will change the original/ first thoughts of the population towards tourism itself (Li et al., 2020). This change in thinking is related to “social representation”, which is defined as a general knowledge system created by referring to a group of perceptions, concepts, and explanations that occur in everyday life and permeate the scope of interpersonal communication (Rateau et al., 2012). It analyzes

how social subjects, groups, and society as a whole construct and transform meaning rooted in existing knowledge and everyday experience.

Rural development through tourism is also related to the three pillars of sustainability that can be linked to the theory of social exchange by Homans (1958). The three pillars of sustainability discuss how economic, social, and environmental aspects are linked to the perception of benefits from society. This theory explains how the social, attitude, perception, and level of individual support towards tourism development is affected by the personal cost-benefit analysis of each individual based on their level of association with the matter (Andereck et al., 2005). This theory says that there is an exchange of activities, tangible or intangible and more or less beneficial or costly, between at least two people. However, he is not only limited to material exchange but also the symbolic value of rural tourism that is formed from the various thoughts and hopes of the host community (Nunkoo et al., 2013).

As a result, the host community's perception of the benefits and prices that will be obtained produces differences in the attitude of each individual on its development (Cropanzo and Mitchell, 2005). It can be said that local residents are more concerned with economic objectives than social, environmental and physical aspects in carrying out tourism activities (Abdollahzadeh and Sharifzadeh, 2015; Andriotis, 2005). Tourism activity as a result of economic diversification in rural areas, makes it a mechanism for retaining the population especially for the young because of its ability to generate new jobs quickly and the need for high standards for those jobs (Muller and Jansson, 2007). But however many positive effects that tourism promises, they are also aware of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental costs that are created and sacrificed to create tourism (Özel and Kozak, 2017).

The two theories discussed above will play a very important role in estimating the size of how community involvement activities begin. This is because the desire to get involved in society arises because of the interest to get involved in a certain field, and for those who have been involved, they are still effective in improving it again, because they believe that involvement activities promise better returns (Li et al., 2020). Community involvement is very helpful to avoid negative socio-cultural changes that may occur as a result of rural tourism development, as well as maximizing economic benefits by redistributing the benefits obtained (Idziak et al., 2015). It is an important factor to ensure the sustainability of community-based rural tourism (Ćurčić et al., 2021; Sakata and Prideaux, 2013; Salazar, 2012). Therefore, emphasis is placed on maximizing community involvement in rural tourism development, apart from social, economic, and environmental factors (Sakata and Prideaux, 2013; Saufi et al., 2013). However, community participation in tourism is not without challenges, because it appears when there is a "sense of belonging" (Han and Hyun, 2018). And that feeling is very important to develop the readiness of the local community in participating in the development of tourism activities (Mayaka et al., 2019). The involvement of local residents in tourism can be seen from two sides, namely from the perspective of the decision-making process and from the benefits of tourism (Anggraheni et al., 2018). Previously, Scheyvnes (1999) stated that it can be formed with four dimensions which are economic (related to income and employment); psychology (taking into account community pride and self-esteem); social (community cohesion and well-being); and politics (a shift in the balance between the powerful and the powerless, between the



dominant and the dependent, for greater political equity). So, the local community needs to be involved in the management of rural tourism development, with the aim of ensuring that all issues related to the community are taken into account during the development of tourism (Lekaota, 2015).

Whereas in the case of tourism planning, the involvement of stakeholders is usually characterized by great diversity, including representatives of the tourism industry, tourists, entrepreneurs, communities, administrative bodies, non-government organizations (NGOs), experts and local residents (Wanner and Probstl-Haider, 2019). The stakeholder theory was popularized by Freeman in 1984, who defined that a stakeholder is any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives. The approach from this theory states that stakeholders have great potential to have a positive or negative impact on what is planned or carried out in the local community (Nicolaidis, 2015). This approach, in turn, will produce development strategies and tourism results that are more transparent and better accepted (Chartady et al., 2024; Hartley and Wood, 2005). It increases equity in decision-making, brings together marginalized groups and helps to understand multiple (potentially conflicting) interests and navigate district-specific issues. Furthermore, it is an educational media to generate understanding about the issues and politics of the area concerned (Tosun, 2000).

This theory becomes important due to the involvement of many different stakeholders and the challenges that arise in achieving various goals in tourism (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). The idea of stakeholder involvement in the tourism industry has grown in popularity due to the belief that it can play a positive role in the development of sustainable tourism (Bramwell and Sharman, 1999; Selin, 1999). Stakeholders also have the potential to create policies that affect local communities, conflict management and increased competitiveness (McComb et al., 2016). Simply put, it can be positive or negative on many components that enable the development of sustainable rural areas.

Based on the framework proposed in this study, rural tourism development based on the new regionalism theory approach involves several aspects of support, namely socio-cultural, community involvement, sustainability and policy. These aspects are parallel to various relevant theories in the context of sustainable rural development through tourism such as social representation theory, stakeholder theory, social exchange theory and the concept of population involvement. The success of rural development through tourism has a positive impact on local residents through direct experience, social interaction and media propaganda, thus shaping individual perceptions of rural tourism which is called social representation (Ying, 2004). These social representations will guide and control the individual's behavioral response to the effects of tourism, as well as the consequences of their actions, in turn, will modify the individual's original social representation of tourism. Local residents who have a high belief that tourism can significantly increase their life satisfaction may show a positive attitude towards tourism development (Woo et al., 2015). Therefore, increasing the life satisfaction of the population is an important thing that policy makers should pay attention to, because it really supports the success of every tourism development plan (Cheng and Xu, 2021; Ramkissoon, 2020). In addition, sustainable

tourism development has an influence on residents' satisfaction with their lives (Butler, 2019).

The framework of sustainable rural development through tourism proposed by this study also takes into account the factors of stakeholders involved in the development and management of rural tourism. Stakeholder support and involvement must prioritize an approach for communication skills, collaboration and competitive advantage in planning a well-received tourism strategy as well as its ability to avoid conflicts that arise during implementation (Amoako et al., 2022; Kadi et al., 2015). As example, strategies in government policy, such as empowering communities, rigorously enforcing regulations, and promoting intercultural dialogue, can help mitigate cultural conflicts and preserve the appeal of rural areas as tourist destinations (Salam et al., 2024). According to Wilson et al. (2001) see it as a key success factor, particularly for rural development through tourism, in bringing those directly and indirectly involved in the tourism sector together. Fraser et al. (2006) stated that the benefits of participation are most felt if stakeholders are truly incorporated into various decision making and made more relevant for policy makers.

## 5. Conclusion

The new regionalism theory approach for the development of rural areas from the perspective of tourism in Indonesia is proposed to do an integrative approach from the bottom up for the development of the area based on the cooperation and collaboration of stakeholders. Because the realization of integrative regionalization solutions is often full of conflicting roles and competing agendas, thus reflecting the tension between democracy and economic rationality. This approach creates new conflicts, due to the dominance of the more powerful party to get more benefits from the resources. Therefore, tourism that is built in rural areas must look at many key supporting aspects to be able to minimize conflicts and guarantee the success of its development. Additionally, the findings suggest that the Indonesian government—at central, regional, and local levels—should develop targeted programs that address the unique needs of the villages aiming to establish new tourist destinations. Ultimately, these insights can guide policymakers in crafting sustainable tourism strategies that not only enhance rural development but also mitigate common challenges that lead to tourism project failures in these areas.

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