

# Strategy of Sustainability and Green Tourism Innovation in Tengah Sawah Gubug Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

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Tourism destinations often struggle with sustainability and innovation challenges, as observed in Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug, Grobogan, Central Java. This research employs a qualitative approach to explore the issues of under-maintained facilities, limited accessibility, and lack of innovation, which have contributed to declining visitor numbers. Data were collected through interviews with visitors and management, field observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal several critical issues: inadequate facility maintenance, dependency on seasonal visitors, and a lack of innovative attractions. These factors undermine the destination's competitiveness and sustainability. To address these challenges, the study recommends routine maintenance, the introduction of innovative attractions, improved accessibility, and collaborative funding strategies involving private sector partnerships. This study concludes that the application of an approach focused on sustainability and innovation can transform Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug into a model for green and rural tourism development through environmental practices, community involvement, innovative attractions, policy frameworks.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the sectors that has a major contribution to the local economy, especially in creating jobs and increasing community income. One form of tourism that is growing rapidly is nature-based tourism or what is known as green tourism. This concept emphasizes sustainable, environmentally friendly tourism management and involves local community participation. The Tengah Sawah Gubug tourist attraction, located in Grobogan Regency, Central Java, is one of the nature-based tourist destinations that utilizes the beauty of rice fields as its main attraction.

However, over time, the appeal of this tourist attraction has declined due to various problems that hinder its development and sustainability.

One form of tourism that is growing rapidly is nature-based tourism or what is known as green tourism [1]–[4]. This concept emphasizes sustainable tourism management through green tourism. The Tengah Sawah Gubug tourist attraction, located in Grobogan Regency, Central Java, is one of the nature-based tourist destinations that utilizes the beauty of rice fields as its main attraction. However, over time, the appeal of this tourist

attraction has declined due to various problems that hinder its development and sustainability [5]–[8].

A rice field area in Ngrombo Hamlet, Depok Village, Toroh District, Grobogan Regency, has now developed into a sudden tourist destination that attracts attention, especially local residents. This tourist destination has succeeded in attracting hundreds of visitors every afternoon, who come to enjoy the natural beauty of the rice fields that are still natural. One of the unique things about this tour is that access is free of charge, so it increasingly attracts the attention of visitors from various circles.

In addition to enjoying the view of the rice fields, visitors can also feel the fresh atmosphere of the flow of water in the irrigation channels that flow on the edge of the rice fields. Various local traders also take advantage of this opportunity by providing a variety of food and drinks to complement the visitor experience. One of the most anticipated attractions is the passing of the train around the location, which provides a unique added value to this tourist destination.

Theoretically, the concept of green tourism has been widely discussed in tourism literature. According to [9], [10], tourism sustainability depends not only on environmental conservation, but also on innovation and effective management. In this context, tourist destinations must be able to adapt to changing tourist needs and introduce new, relevant attractions. Empirically, research [11], [12] shows that rural tourism destinations often face challenges such as lack of innovation, poor accessibility, and minimal involvement of local communities. These findings are relevant to the condition of the Tengah Sawah Gubug Tourism which has stagnated due to lack of facility maintenance, minimal innovation, and dependence on seasonal visitors.

This study aims to evaluate the condition of the Tengah Sawah Gubug Tourism and to offer solutions based on the concept of green tourism that focuses on sustainability and innovation. Based on interviews with managers and visitors, as well as direct observation, this study identified

several key issues that require attention, such as poorly maintained facilities, limited accessibility, lack of new attractions, and inadequate funding. By considering these aspects, this study provides strategic recommendations to improve tourism appeal through routine maintenance, development of innovative attractions, infrastructure improvements, and collaboration with the private sector.

As a support, the following table presents a SWOT analysis [13]–[15] Gubug Middle Rice Field Tour to provide a comprehensive overview of the current situation:

Table 1. SWOT of the Central Sawah Gubug Tourism

Aspect	Description
<b>Strengths</b>	Strategic location, affordable entrance fee, interesting natural tourism potential.
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Poorly maintained facilities, limited accessibility, minimal innovation.
<b>Opportunities</b>	Potential for collaboration with the private sector, increasing tourism promotion.
<b>Threats</b>	Dependence on holiday season, decrease in number of visitors.

Referring to previous literature and findings, this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in the development of sustainable tourism at the local level through environmental practice strategies, community involvement, innovative attractions, and policy frameworks. The qualitative approach used in this study allows for in-depth exploration of the dynamics of tourism destination management, resulting in contextual and applicable recommendations. This study is not only relevant for the managers of the Tengah Sawah Gubug Tourism, but can also be a model for similar tourism destinations facing sustainability challenges.

## 2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach [16] with a descriptive design to explore the condition of the Tengah Sawah Gubug Tourism and offer solutions based on the principles of green tourism. The research population includes visitors, managers, and local communities around the tourist area. The sample was selected purposively, involving 15 visitors, 5 managers, and 5 local traders to ensure representation of various perspectives. The data used consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with managers and visitors, direct observation of facilities and the environment,

and focus group discussions with local communities. Secondary data were obtained from related documents, literature, and local tourism statistical reports.

The data analysis technique used is the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis was carried out repeatedly to ensure the accuracy and validity of the research results. Data validity was also strengthened by triangulation of methods through a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis, while reliability was maintained by systematic documentation of the entire research process.



Figure 1. Green tourism sustainability strategy model

This method is designed to provide an in-depth overview of the dynamics of the management of the Tengah Sawah Gubug Tourism and produce strategic recommendations that are applicable in the context of sustainable tourism.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug has great potential as a nature-based tourism destination, but faces various challenges that

need to be addressed immediately. One of the main findings is the lack of maintenance of tourism facilities, such as the photo area and guava garden which are the main attractions. Observations show that this lack of maintenance is due to limited operational funds which only come from entrance tickets. The data collected also indicates that accessibility to the tourist location is still inadequate, especially during the rainy season, which makes the visitor experience less than optimal.

Table 2. Main issues in the Gubug Middle Rice Field Tourism

No	Key Issues	Description	Impact
1	Lack of care	Facilities such as photo spots and guava gardens are not maintained due to minimal operational funds.	Decrease in tourist attractions and number of visitors
2	Limited accessibility	The road to the tourist location is difficult to pass when it rains, reducing visitor comfort.	Visitors are reluctant to return, especially during certain seasons.
3	Lack of innovation	There has been no new attraction development since it opened in 2016.	Tourism is losing its competitive appeal compared to other locations.

These results support the theory of Gössling and Hall (2021), which states that tourism sustainability is greatly influenced by innovation and effective management. In the context of Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug, the lack of innovation has been shown to be one of the main factors in the decline in visitor numbers. This study is also consistent with the findings of Spenceley et al. (2020), which show that rural tourism destinations often fail to utilize local potential due to lack of community involvement and less adaptive management.

#### 1. Environmentally Friendly Practices

Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug is one of the natural tourist destinations that offers the beauty of rice fields and various recreational rides for visitors. However, in its operation, the main challenges faced are waste management and resource conservation that are not yet optimal.

Utilization of Waste as Pond Recovery Material. The Tengah Sawah Gubug Tourism implements an environmentally friendly and sustainable waste management system. This tourist spot does not use a conventional waste management system, but instead utilizes a natural approach in handling its waste. Organic waste from twigs and leaves of plants in the tourist area and guava gardens is used as a natural covering material to restore the quality of the soil at the bottom of the pond. This approach not only reduces the cost of purchasing new land but also creates a nutrient cycle that is beneficial to the pond ecosystem. Meanwhile, the handling of inorganic waste such as plastic waste is carried out with a

collection system by cleaning staff to then be sold to scrap collectors, so that it can be recycled and provide additional economic value.

The natural waste management approach at Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug offers several important benefits for the environment and tourism operations. Economically, this method saves costs, because there is no need to buy new land for pond restoration. Ecologically, the use of organic waste as a soil restoration material supports the sustainability of the rice field ecosystem by improving soil structure and maintaining ecological balance. This approach also contributes to reducing environmental pollution because waste is optimally utilized, not dumped carelessly. This natural restoration method maintains the aesthetic value of tourism because the repaired ponds maintain their natural appearance and are in harmony with the surrounding rice field landscape.

Good waste management is essential to maintain the cleanliness and attractiveness of this tourist spot, especially since many activities produce waste, both from visitors and from the facilities available. Currently, organic waste from restaurants and guava gardens is still not managed properly, so it has the potential to pollute the environment. Therefore, the application of the 3R concept (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) needs to be implemented, such as reducing the use of single-use plastic, utilizing organic waste for compost,

and separating waste so that it can be recycled more effectively.

The Tengah Sawah Gubug tourist area faces challenges in communicating its waste management system. Lack of clear information to visitors about the use of waste as a natural pond cover can lead to misunderstandings. When visitors do not understand how their waste can be used positively for the environment, they tend to be less concerned and may litter. This lack of knowledge has a negative impact on waste management efforts that have been designed, because visitors do not actively participate in maintaining the cleanliness and sustainability of the tourist environment.

In addition to waste management, resource conservation is also an aspect that needs to be improved in the management of the Tengah Sawah Tourism. One of the main challenges is the wasteful use of water for irrigation and tourism facilities, which should be minimized through the implementation of a more efficient irrigation system and the use of rainwater. In addition, the use of energy for the operation of tourist attractions still depends on conventional electricity sources. The use of renewable energy, such as the installation of solar panels for lighting in park areas and public facilities, can be a solution in energy conservation.

Poor hygiene conditions are also the result of low awareness among the community and tourism managers regarding the importance of good environmental practices. Waste that is not managed properly, as well as tree stumps that are left lying around, reduce the aesthetics of this tourist area. Therefore, an education program and awareness raising for the surrounding community and visitors are needed regarding the importance of

maintaining cleanliness and environmental sustainability. The "Clean Tourism, Comfortable Tourism" campaign can be implemented by involving local communities in waste management and maintaining the cleanliness of the tourist area.

Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug applies an innovative open architecture concept in its building design by utilizing natural lighting through an open building design, this tourist spot has succeeded in maximizing the use of sunlight for lighting during the day. This approach provides various significant benefits, including reducing electricity consumption, due to the reduced need for artificial lighting. Natural air circulation created by the open design provides a comfortable atmosphere for visitors without the need for air conditioning or fans. In addition, this open building concept strengthens integration with the rice field landscape, creating a visual harmony that strengthens the tourist attraction. From an environmental perspective, this design shows a commitment to sustainability by minimizing the use of electricity and environmentally unfriendly materials.

In an effort to increase resource conservation, Wisata Tengah Sawah can develop a sustainable agricultural program that not only functions as a tourist attraction, but also as a means of education for visitors. For example, by holding an educational-based agrotourism program, where visitors can learn about environmentally friendly farming techniques, the use of organic fertilizers, and efficient water management. This not only increases the tourism value, but also strengthens environmental awareness among visitors and the surrounding community.

Overall, waste reduction and resource conservation at Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug need to get more serious attention. With the implementation of more effective waste management, more efficient use of resources, and increased public awareness in protecting the environment, this tourist destination can develop more sustainably. Collaboration between tourism managers, local communities, and local governments is essential so that Wisata Tengah Sawah is not only an attractive recreation spot, but also an example of sustainable environmental tourism.

## 2. Community Engagement

One of the main challenges faced by Wisata Tengah Sawah is the low involvement of local communities in the management and maintenance of tourist sites. This low participation not only hampers the development of tourist destinations, but also causes several problems that reduce the attractiveness of this place. The two main impacts felt due to the lack of community and community roles are limited accessibility and poor cleanliness.

### a. Limited Accessibility

One of the obstacles experienced by visitors is the inadequate condition of the road to the tourist location. The road to Wisata Tengah Sawah is still narrow and not good, making access difficult, especially during the rainy season when the road becomes slippery and muddy. This can reduce the comfort of visitors and make this destination less attractive, especially for tourists from outside the area. The role of local communities in supporting the improvement of road access infrastructure, such as

the provision of mutual cooperation or advocacy with the government, is very important to overcome this problem.



Figure 2. Road access condition is poor

### b. Poorly Maintained Cleanliness

The cleanliness of the tourist area is also a serious concern. Scattered garbage, cut trees left alone, and the lack of consistent efforts to maintain the environment have reduced the appeal of this place in the eyes of visitors. Poor cleanliness not only affects aesthetics, but can also have a negative impact on the sustainability of the surrounding environment. Low public awareness and minimal collaborative management in terms of cleanliness are among the main causes of this problem.

To overcome these impacts, concrete steps are needed that involve the local

community more actively. Education and awareness programs related to the importance of good accessibility and cleanliness as basic elements of a tourist destination need to be encouraged. The community can also be involved in activities such as regular mutual cooperation programs, tourism awareness campaigns, and training on community-based tourism management. By increasing participation and a sense of ownership of this destination, Wisata Tengah Sawah can provide a more quality and sustainable tourism experience for visitors.

### 3. Innovative Attraction

Wisata Tengah Sawah is located on Jl. Semarang – Purwodadi, Dukoh, Gubug, Gubug District, Grobogan Regency, Central Java 58164. To find this location easily, you can search for it on Google Maps with the keyword WTS Wisata Tengah Sawah. This destination is one of the favorite tourist alternatives for local tourists in the Grobogan area. As a stopover and recreation destination, Wisata Tengah Sawah offers a suitable atmosphere to relieve fatigue from daily routines, both for local people and visitors from outside Grobogan Regency. Opened since June 2016, this tour is a choice for various groups, especially the community. The entrance ticket price is very affordable, which is only IDR 5,000 on weekdays and IDR 8,000 on weekends. In addition, with affordable prices and various activities offered, Wisata Tengah Sawah is the perfect choice to spend time with family or friends, while enjoying the calm and refreshing rural atmosphere.

The uniqueness of the Tengah Sawah Tourism lies in the view of the vast and beautiful expanse of rice fields, which can be enjoyed from the observation post. In addition, this place provides various interesting rides and facilities, such as: mini cross motorbikes for children with a ticket of Rp. 10,000, a restaurant serving delicious regional dishes, a fishing pond for visitors who want to relax while fishing, a planting area, where visitors can try planting various types of plants, such as the Citra type of water apple, guava, and others.



Figure 3. Fish Therapy Place



Figure 4. Adult Water Bike



Figure 5. Tourist Train



Figure 6. Children's Swimming Pool



Figure 7. Courage Test Stage Figure



Figure 8. Guava Agrotourism

Based on the image above, Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug offers a variety of interesting attractions for visitors from various circles. One of the rides that is quite popular is fish therapy, where visitors can enjoy the sensation of relaxation by soaking their feet while small fish bite dead skin cells. To enjoy this ride, visitors only need to pay IDR 5,000 per session. In addition, for those who like water tourism, there are water bikes (water rickshaws) for adults that can be used to go around the lake for IDR 15,000.

For families who come with children, there is a tourist train and a safe and fun children's pool. In addition, one of the unique attractions of this place is the Panggung Uji Nyali, which is located right in the middle of the lake. This stage is often used for various performances, including live music. Uniquely, visitors who have the courage and talent to sing can perform on stage by paying IDR 3,000 per song.

Wisata Tengah Sawah also has a Guava Garden, which is a favorite for visitors who want to experience the sensation of picking fruit directly from the tree. With an entrance ticket of IDR 10,000, visitors can enjoy fresh guava fruit to their

heart's content, but access to this garden is seasonal depending on the harvest season. In addition to interesting tourist attractions, Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug is also equipped with various supporting facilities for the comfort of visitors. Some of them are a large parking area, a restaurant with a variety of menu choices, comfortable seating, a beautiful garden area, a gazebo for relaxing, and a playground suitable for children. With a combination of interesting attractions and adequate facilities, Wisata Tengah Sawah is a suitable destination for family vacations or a place to relieve stress from daily activities.

The Tengah Sawah Tourism offers several attractions such as fish therapy, water bikes, guava gardens, and the Panggung Uji Nyali, the variety of attractions available is still relatively limited. Most of the attractions only focus on relaxing activities, such as enjoying the scenery, taking pictures, or enjoying simple rides. In fact, the great potential to utilize the educational aspect, especially in the field of agriculture, is actually very possible to be developed. By optimizing the concept of agricultural education, this place can provide a more in-depth experience for visitors, such as learning about farming techniques, land management, or other interactive agricultural activities. This can not only increase the tourist attraction, but also provide added educational value for visitors, especially families and students.

Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug faces several significant challenges in its efforts to develop its innovative tourist attractions. Limited human resources are the main obstacle, with only 9 employees remaining, making it impossible to have a special team to design new concepts or conduct research on current tourism trends.



The unstable financial conditions post-pandemic also hamper investment in employee competency development, such as training or bringing in tourism experts. Furthermore, there is minimal collaboration with external parties, due to the management model applied. Without support from the community, academics, or related organizations, this tour has difficulty in developing innovations that can increase its appeal.

Lack of innovation in developing new attractions and activities also causes the tourism experience offered to tend to be monotonous, especially for visitors who have been there before. Without updates or fresh attractions, the attraction of this place is at risk of decreasing, especially for new tourists who want a more unique and different experience. Presenting creative activities such as environmentally-based educational programs, interactive workshops, or seasonal events can be a solution to attract visitors, while providing a more memorable impression. Increasing digital e-commerce marketing is also an innovative solution for tourism marketing[17]. The right innovation, Tengah Sawah Tourism has the potential to become a more dynamic and sustainable destination.

#### 4. Policy Framework

The Tengah Sawah Gubug tourist attraction has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as reflected in the drastic decrease in the number of employees from 23 to only 9 people. This challenge is compounded by the private ownership structure that limits community involvement in its management. Without a cooperative system or community cooperation, decision-making and management remain centered on the owner. The

post-pandemic economic situation that has not fully recovered requires the owner to continue to limit the recruitment of workers, thereby reducing employment opportunities for the surrounding community. The absence of a structured collaboration program is also an obstacle, because there is no mechanism that allows the community to participate in the form of business partnerships or the provision of tourism support services.

Sustainable environmental management in Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug requires a clear and targeted policy framework. One of the main steps that can be implemented is to strengthen cooperation with environmental organizations in nature conservation and waste management efforts. Environmental organizations such as environmental care communities, nature conservation NGOs, and waste management groups can be involved in educational programs for the community and visitors about the importance of maintaining cleanliness and reducing the environmental impact of tourism activities. With this partnership, Wisata Tengah Sawah can develop ecotourism-based programs, such as organic waste management training, increasing awareness of the use of environmentally friendly plastics, and implementing a waste recycling system in the tourist area.

In addition to cooperation with environmental organizations, government policies also play an important role in supporting the sustainability of this tourist destination. The Grobogan Regency Government can encourage the implementation of green policies, such as the implementation of sustainable tourism standards that require tourism managers to provide separate trash bins, wastewater management systems, and the use of

environmentally friendly energy in their operations. In addition, assistance and incentive programs for environmentally-based tourist destinations can also be implemented, for example by providing grants or subsidies for tourism managers who are committed to preserving nature.

Infrastructure development policies are also needed to improve accessibility to tourist locations. Improving the quality of roads to Wisata Tengah Sawah, building a good drainage system to overcome problems during the rainy season, and providing environmentally friendly public facilities, such as toilets with good waste management systems, will greatly assist in creating a comfortable and sustainable tourist destination. With collaboration between environmental organizations, supportive government policies, and the active role of the community, Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug has the potential to become an example of a green tourist destination that not only provides economic benefits to the region, but also maintains ecosystem balance and comfort for visitors. The success of this policy is highly dependent on the synergy of all parties in supporting responsible and sustainable tourism practices.

One recommended solution is the introduction of new relevant attractions, such as agricultural-based education or traditional games, which can attract more visitors from various groups. In addition, improving road

access infrastructure can increase tourist comfort and satisfaction, in accordance with the basic principles of green tourism that support environmental sustainability and positive experiences for visitors. This strategy can also open up opportunities for collaboration with the private sector, such as sponsorship or partnerships with local communities, to increase operational funding.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug has great potential as a nature-based tourism destination, but faces significant challenges including lack of facility maintenance, limited accessibility, and minimal innovation. With improvements including routine facility maintenance, development of new educational attractions, and improvement of road infrastructure, this destination has the potential to significantly increase its appeal. The contribution of this study is not only limited to the development of Wisata Tengah Sawah Gubug, but also provides practical insights for managers of similar tourism destinations facing sustainability challenges. By implementing strategies based on literature and empirical findings of green and rural tourism development models through environmental practices, community involvement, innovative attractions, policy frameworks. Further research on the potential for revitalizing nature-based tourism destinations can be maximized to support the local economy and environmental conservation.

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