

Green Tourism Implementation Strategy in Ecotourism Development in Garut Regency

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Abstract: Garut Regency holds considerable potential for ecotourism development, yet faces a persistent implementation gap characterized by poor infrastructure, environmental degradation, and weak policy enforcement, despite supportive regulations. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the internal and external factors influencing Garut's ecotourism and formulate integrated green tourism strategies to address this gap. Employing a qualitative descriptive case study approach, data were obtained through literature review and policy document analysis, including scholarly articles, local policy documents (e.g., RIPPDA, strategic plans), and other credible secondary sources. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis within a SWOT framework. The findings indicate that while Garut benefits from diverse natural and cultural resources and a rising interest in green tourism, infrastructural deficiencies, substandard services, environmental threats, and lax law enforcement offset these strengths. To overcome these barriers, four strategic directions are proposed: (1) strengthening governance and policy enforcement, (2) promoting community-based ecotourism, (3) developing green infrastructure and service quality standards, and (4) executing authentic green marketing initiatives. This study underscores the urgency of closing the implementation gap. It offers actionable recommendations for stakeholders including government, communities, and the private sector to promote authentic and sustainable ecotourism practices at the local level.

Keywords: development strategy, ecotourism, Garut regency, green tourism, SWOT analysis.

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Introduction

Tourism has transformed into one of the most vital economic sectors in the world, especially for developing countries. This sector has proven capable of driving economic growth, creating jobs, and improving infrastructure (Arianti, 2014; Rahmi et al., 2024). For example, developing tourism in many regions, including Indonesia, has contributed significantly to regional income and created new job opportunities for local communities (Pribadi et al., 2021; Sulistyono et al., 2023). However, the conventional tourism development paradigm, which is oriented towards economic profit, often ignores the negative impacts on the environment and the socio-cultural fabric of local communities. Poorly planned tourism activities can negatively impact environmental conditions and the community's social life (Satria, 2023; Kurnianingtyas & Pratama, 2024).

A global shift toward sustainable tourism has emerged in response to these ecological and social crises. This concept has given rise to various derivative approaches, such as sustainable tourism, green tourism, and ecotourism, which are now increasingly popular among environmentally conscious traveler segments (Andrea, 2024). Green tourism, for example, focuses on implementing environmentally friendly practices and ensuring that the tourism industry is economically profitable and contributes to

environmental conservation (Riswano & Rachmat, 2023). Furthermore, including ecotourism elements that involve local communities in managing and implementing tourism activities is crucial to maintaining a balance between economic benefits and environmental sustainability (Lavenia et al., 2024).

Thus, sustainable tourism development requires collaboration between all stakeholders, including the government, communities, and tourism industry players, so that the resulting benefits can be felt evenly without sacrificing the sustainability of the environment and local culture (Sugiarto & Gabriella, 2020; Wibowo & Belia, 2023). In the future, to achieve this goal, more in-depth research and development are needed to find practical approaches in tourism management and assess their impact on the environment and society (Satria, 2023; Kurnianingtyas & Pratama, 2024).

Although often used interchangeably, there are fundamental differences between green tourism and ecotourism. Green tourism is defined as any form of tourism activity striving to be environmentally friendly. However, due to its broad scope and lack of strict standards, the term is often susceptible to greenwashing, where industry players use the "green" label as a marketing ploy without being based on substantive conservation efforts (Shang et al., 2023). This leads to confusion among tourists about what being environmentally responsible truly means in the context of tourism.

In contrast, ecotourism is a more specific subcategory with stricter principles, defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, supports the well-being of local communities, and involves interpretation and education" (Wahono et al., 2025). This definition emphasizes three inseparable pillars: environmental conservation, economic and social empowerment of local communities, and education for tourists and communities (Anuar et al., 2019). Ecotourism aims to provide direct benefits to local communities and the environment, which aligns with the principle of sustainability, which focuses on economic development that does not damage natural resources (Purwoko et al., 2022).

Overall, the main difference between green tourism and ecotourism lies in the level of commitment and practices adopted to achieve sustainability. Green tourism tends to be general and often a result of marketing. At the same time, ecotourism is more focused on clear and measurable principles that contribute to environmental conservation and empower local communities (Ridlwan et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important for industry players to adopt a more substantive and responsible approach to ecotourism so that tourism can positively impact the environment and communities.

In Indonesia, the risk of misuse of the ecotourism label is becoming increasingly apparent. The term "ecotourism" is often used loosely and serves more as a marketing label to attract tourists than as a reflection of actual practices on the ground (Weaver, 2005). Many destinations carry the "ecotourism" label but significantly neglect crucial elements such as limiting visitor numbers to maintain environmental sustainability and failing to authentically involve local communities in planning and management (Pynanjung, 2018). This phenomenon, essentially a form of greenwashing, can damage a destination's credibility in the long term.

A relevant example can be found in Garut Regency, where the Kamojang Eagle Conservation Center was deemed not to comply with ecotourism principles fully, despite being located in a strategic area for such development (Ramdan & Ikhwana, 2017). This location's development demonstrates a gap between designation and practice, posing a fundamental challenge to authentic ecotourism development. Furthermore, research suggests that ecotourism success should be measured by the increase in visitors and its positive impact on the environment and local communities. Therefore, strong

collaboration between managers, the government, and the community is necessary to create genuine ecotourism (Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021).

The implications of this situation suggest that ecotourism development in Indonesia needs stricter regulations to ensure that destinations that claim to be ecotourism destinations truly implement effective sustainability principles. Policies are needed to support and ensure transparency in the management, governance, and reporting of ecotourism practices, allowing tourists to make informed decisions when choosing a destination (Nazwin & Hidayat, 2022).

Garut Regency, long known as the "Switzerland of Java," is an interesting location for this research. This region possesses exceptionally comprehensive tourism potential, often summarized by the acronym "Gurilaps" (Mountain, Jungle, Sea, Beach, Situ). This potential spans a broad spectrum, from iconic natural attractions such as Mount Papandayan, Kamojang Crater, Santolo Beach, and Situ Bagendit; unique cultural and historical attractions such as Cangkuang Temple and Kampung Pulo; to pioneering tourism villages that are beginning to show signs of development, such as Sindangkasih Tourism Village (Tetep et al., 2021). However, behind this potential lies a significant implementation gap. Various studies and reports have highlighted chronic problems hindering the realization of this potential, such as poor basic infrastructure, including inadequate road access and minimal amenities (Malik et al., 2019; Hazita et al., 2022). In addition, the low quality of human resources and services, minimal community participation, and severe threats to environmental degradation due to illegal activities and weak law enforcement are determining factors (Malik et al., 2019).

This implementation gap is a key research issue. Although the Garut Regency Government has a formal policy framework through Regional Regulation (Perda) No. 2 of 2019 concerning the 2019-2025 Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA), which targets the development of competitive and sustainable nature-based tourism, the ideal vision in this planning document has not been translated into effective action on the ground. This is characterized by failures in the execution, monitoring, and implementation of existing regulations (Mulyana & Indriani, 2023). Suboptimal tourism management capacity in Garut Regency creates challenges for policy implementers in aligning potential with established objectives (Prawira et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to: (1) analyze internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) that comprehensively influence the development of ecotourism in Garut Regency; and (2) formulate an integrated and implementable green tourism strategy to bridge the gap between potential and reality, thereby promoting the realization of authentic and sustainable ecotourism in the region. Through a holistic and participatory approach, this study seeks to generate constructive solutions for addressing tourism development challenges while empowering local communities as key stakeholders in ecotourism advancement (Mauluddin & Rosita, 2022).

To sharpen the research focus, this study is guided by the following research questions.

1. *What internal and external factors influence the development of ecotourism in Garut Regency?*
2. *How can an integrated green tourism strategy close the implementation gap in Garut's tourism development?*

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. This approach was chosen to enable an in-depth and holistic understanding of a complex

phenomenon within its specific context (Adharani et al., 2020). The unit of analysis in this study is ecotourism development in Garut Regency, which is examined through the various dynamics that influence it.

Data collection in this study relied entirely on secondary data obtained through extensive literature review techniques. This study did not involve primary respondents or participants, as it relied solely on secondary data sources. The data sources were classified into three main categories. The first source was peer-reviewed scientific journal articles, covering previous research on tourism in Garut Regency, as well as the concepts of green tourism and ecotourism (Nugraha et al., 2024). The second was government policy documents that serve as the formal basis for tourism development, particularly Garut Regency Regulation (Perda) No. 2 of 2019 concerning the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA) (Nugraha et al., 2024). The third was other supporting data sources, such as research reports, news from credible mass media, and tourist reviews from digital platforms, providing a user perspective.

The data analysis technique used was qualitative content analysis combined with the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis framework. The SWOT framework was chosen due to its relevance and effectiveness, as demonstrated in several previous studies examining tourism development strategies in Garut Regency (Nugraha & Hariyanto, 2024). The analysis process involved identifying, classifying, and synthesizing information from various data sources into four SWOT quadrants. The results of this mapping then served as the basis for formulating an integrative strategy through a TOWS analysis, which systematically links internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) with external factors (opportunities and threats) to produce comprehensive and implementable strategic recommendations.

Through this approach, it is expected that the research results will contribute tangibly to ecotourism development in Garut Regency and serve as a valuable reference for stakeholders in formulating more effective, evidence-based policies (Gavrilović & Maksimović, 2018). By considering the findings of the analysis, relevant solutions can be proposed to preserve ecosystem sustainability while improving the welfare of local communities (Chen, 2024).

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Results and discussions

Results

Analysis of the collected secondary data resulted in a comprehensive mapping of various internal and external factors influencing the ecotourism development landscape in Garut Regency. These factors include strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced in the development of the ecotourism sector. All of these elements are systematically summarized in a SWOT analysis matrix (Table 1), to provide a clearer, more structured picture that can serve as a basis for formulating effective and sustainable development strategies in the region. Utilizing this SWOT approach allows stakeholders to identify priorities, maximize existing potential, and anticipate challenges that may arise in the implementation of future ecotourism policies.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis Matrix for Ecotourism Development in Garut Regency

| Internal Factors | | External factors | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
| Complete and Diverse Natural Assets of "Gurilaps": Has the potential of mountains (Papandayan, Guntur, Cikuray), jungles (Leuweung Sancang), sea & beaches (Santolo, Rancabuaya), and lakes (Bagendit, Cangkuang) which are very varied. | Poor Infrastructure and Accessibility: Roads leading to many tourist destinations are damaged, narrow, and prone to landslides, and there is minimal availability of adequate public transportation. | Growing Trend of Interest in Green Tourism: The market of global and domestic tourists seeking authentic, eco-friendly and responsible tourism experiences continues to grow significantly. | Serious Environmental Degradation: Forest encroachment, illegal gold mining, and water pollution directly damage the main natural tourism assets and threaten their sustainability. |
| Unique Cultural and Historical Heritage: The existence of Cangkuang Temple as the only restored Hindu temple in West Java, Pulo Traditional Village, and unique traditions such as the Garut sheep agility art. | Inadequate and Unmaintained Facilities (Amenities): Many public facilities such as toilets and gazebos were found to be in a state of disrepair, there was a lack of trash bins, and supporting facilities such as | Central and Provincial Government Policy Support: The existence of national priority programs for the development of tourism and tourist villages that can provide funding, | Weak Regulatory Enforcement (Regulatory Failure): Regional Regulations related to environmental protection (e.g. Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2018) exist but are not enforced effectively, with |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| | camping areas did not meet standards. | technical and promotional support. | sanctions tending to be only light warnings. |
| Supporting Regional Policy Basis: The mission of sustainable tourism development has been formally stated in the 2019-2025 Garut Regency RIPPDA and the Disparbud Renstra. | Low Quality of Human Resources and Services: Lack of friendliness and professionalism from management, as well as the rampant practice of extortion which damages the image of the destination. | Potential for Multi-Party Collaboration: Opportunities to establish strategic partnerships with academic institutions for research and community service, as well as attract investment from the private sector for facility development. | Low Public Awareness and Participation: Apathy among some communities towards tourism, focus on subsistence economy, and even involvement in environmentally damaging activities for economic reasons. |
| The Existence of Pioneering Tourism Villages: The existence of embryos of ecotourism development through tourism villages such as Sindangkasih Tourism Village and Kamojang Ecopark which can be used as pilot models. | Weak Destination Management: Lack of structured Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in many tourist villages, as well as poor waste management systems at the destination level. | Local Economic Empowerment: Huge potential to create new jobs (guides, homestay managers) and micro-enterprises (culinary, crafts) that directly increase the income of local communities. | Greenwashing Risk: The potential use of the "ecotourism" label without authentic practices can damage a destination's reputation and credibility in the eyes of discerning and concerned travelers. |
| | Less Effective Promotion and Marketing: Still relying on conventional promotion methods and lack of utilization of innovative and narrative-based digital marketing strategies. | | Potential for Social Conflict and Cultural Erosion: The unfiltered entry of foreign culture and unhealthy business competition can cause social friction and erode local wisdom values. |

Source: Processed by researchers from various sources (2024)

Discussions

The SWOT analysis reveals a scenario in Garut that mirrors challenges observed in other ecotourism regions, where abundant natural and cultural assets are offset by serious infrastructural and institutional weaknesses. This finding aligns with broader studies of green tourism in Indonesia, which note that rich tourism potential often coexists with poor infrastructure and inconsistent policy enforcement (Islahuddin & Ismail, 2024). For example, research on urban green tourism initiatives identified inadequate infrastructure and weak implementation of regulations as critical barriers to sustainability. Our results support these trends and underscore the need for a proactive, integrative strategy. Rather than reacting piecemeal to problems, effective ecotourism development must simultaneously leverage strengths and address weaknesses – an approach consistently advocated in sustainable tourism literature. Nazwin and Hidayat

(2022) emphasize that true ecotourism success depends on balancing multiple dimensions (social, economic, environmental, and institutional) in a holistic evaluation. This directly parallels our four strategic pillars, which integrate governance, community empowerment, green infrastructure, and authentic marketing to ensure all these dimensions are addressed in Garut's ecotourism development. In this way, our study's strategic framework both reflects and adds empirical weight to existing theories calling for comprehensive sustainable tourism planning.

Therefore, effective strategy formulation cannot be merely reactive but must be proactive and integrative—maximizing existing strengths and opportunities while simultaneously addressing weaknesses and addressing threats. Based on these findings, this discussion formulates four main strategic pillars as a foundation for implementing the green tourism concept to encourage sustainable ecotourism development in Garut Regency. These four pillars are designed to integrate environmental, social, economic, and institutional approaches to ensure inclusive, adaptive, and highly competitive ecotourism development.

One important finding from the data analysis is the emergence of a paradox in the role of local communities in ecotourism development. On the one hand, communities are the guardians of local wisdom, owners of authentic cultural heritage, and providers of potential labor, which are key elements in creating authentic and sustainable ecotourism experiences. An example is seen in the Sindangkasih Tourism Village, which successfully demonstrates how the community is able to harmoniously manage cultural and natural potential, thus creating a unique, community-based tourist attraction.

However, on the other hand, there is evidence from various sources that suggests that some communities are actually the main actors in environmentally damaging practices. The phenomena of forest encroachment, illegal mining, and low participation in tourism programs are often caused by the subsistence economic orientation that still dominates the mindset of some communities. This paradox positions communities as ambivalent entities—both a driving force and a potential obstacle to ecotourism development.

This situation indicates that local communities act as a double-edged sword: they can be key to the successful implementation of green tourism-based ecotourism, but they can also be a source of failure if not managed properly. Therefore, development strategies that focus solely on "empowerment" without being accompanied by elements of "environmental education, participatory monitoring, and strict law enforcement" risk not achieving the desired goals.

The required approach must be both dualistic and adaptive, encouraging the participation and empowerment of community groups committed to conservation and sustainability, while also providing decisive interventions against destructive behavior through effective regulation, social control, and legal sanctions. This will ensure a balance between incentives and discipline, creating a social ecosystem that supports inclusive and sustainable ecotourism development in Garut Regency.

Strategy Pillar 1: Strengthening Governance and Policy Enforcement

The most fundamental weakness in tourism development in Garut Regency lies not in the absence of policies, but rather in the failure to implement them on the ground. The ambitious vision outlined in the Garut Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA)—particularly the commitment to sustainable tourism development—remains little more than a written discourse that has yet to be fully implemented. Without robust enforcement, oversight, and evaluation mechanisms, this strategic planning document

risks becoming merely an administrative document with no real impact on tourism development.

The gap between planning and implementation, known as the implementation gap, is a serious challenge that must be addressed immediately. Factors such as weak coordination between agencies, limited competent human resources, inadequate operational budgets, and a lack of political will are the main causes of delays in the execution of various policies and programs.

The strategies proposed in this study aim to specifically bridge this implementation gap. This includes the formulation of a transparent monitoring and evaluation system, strengthening the capacity of implementing institutions at the regional level, increasing cross-sector collaboration (government, private sector, and community), and establishing operational regulations that support the enforcement of sustainable tourism principles. Thus, the vision outlined in the RIPPDA (Regional Development Planning Agency) will no longer remain normative but will instead be realized in concrete actions that directly impact the comprehensive and sustainable progress of Garut tourism.

1. Revitalizing the Role of Supervision and Law Enforcement

The establishment of a multi-stakeholder Sustainable Tourism Task Force is needed as a systematic effort to strengthen tourism development governance in Garut Regency. This task force should consist of representatives from the Tourism and Culture Office, the Environmental Office, the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP), the police, academics, and civil society representatives with integrity and a proven track record in environmental and tourism issues.

The primary responsibility of this Task Force is to strictly monitor the implementation of sustainable tourism policies and ensure law enforcement against violations that damage environmental carrying capacity. Specifically, the Task Force is responsible for consistently and firmly enforcing Garut Regency Regulation No. 2 of 2018 concerning Environmental Protection and Management.

Sanctions against illegal practices such as forest encroachment, unauthorized land clearing, and illegal mining are no longer sufficient with administrative warnings alone. They must be enforced with legal sanctions that provide a deterrent effect and create a clear precedent for law enforcement. This is crucial, given that weak regulatory enforcement has been identified as a critical obstacle in various studies and evaluations of regional policies.

The formation of this Task Force is not only a response to current issues, but also a strategic step towards building a collaborative, transparent, and accountable oversight ecosystem. With a cross-sectoral working structure and clear authority, the Sustainable Tourism Task Force is expected to serve as a driving force in maintaining a balance between tourism development and environmental sustainability in Garut Regency.

2. Mandate for Developing Green SOPs

The regional government, through the Tourism Office, needs to establish a policy requiring every tourist destination manager—especially those carrying the “ecotourism” label—to develop and implement Green Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) comprehensively. These Green SOPs must be designed comprehensively, encompassing three main components: first, environmental management aspects, including waste management based on the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), water resource conservation, as well as energy efficiency and carbon emission reduction; second, excellent service standards based on local wisdom that guarantee tourist comfort, safety, and satisfaction; and third, security and disaster mitigation protocols that are adaptive to local geographic and climatic conditions.

The implementation of these SOPs is a crucial step in building professional, sustainable, and consistent tourism destination governance, aligned with green tourism principles. The requirement to develop and implement Green SOPs indirectly addresses fundamental issues encountered in many tourist villages in Garut Regency, including Sukalaksana Village. The lack of structured SOPs has led to inconsistent tourism services, weak environmental management, and low destination management capacity.

Furthermore, the implementation of this SOP must be accompanied by training mechanisms, technical assistance, and periodic evaluation by the Tourism Office and other relevant agencies. Thus, the SOP will not only serve as an administrative document but also serve as a concrete operational guideline that supports the achievement of competitive, resilient destination quality aligned with the principles of sustainable tourism development.

Strategy Pillar 2: Implementation of Community-Based Ecotourism Models

This strategy is designed to transform the position of local communities—previously often viewed as a potential threat to ecotourism sustainability—into a key force in driving sustainable tourism development. This approach directly addresses the paradox of community roles identified in the previous analysis, namely that communities can play a dual role as agents of conservation and perpetrators of environmental degradation.

This transformation is being implemented through integrated efforts, encompassing environmental education-based empowerment, managerial capacity building, strengthening the role of local institutions, and enforcing social and legal norms against destructive behavior. By making communities active subjects of development—rather than mere objects of policy—this strategy places them at the center of tourism destination governance, while simultaneously opening up broader, more inclusive, and more effective participation.

1. Structured Capacity Building Program

Local governments, in collaboration with strategic partners such as academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and tourism industry players, must consistently organize intensive, participatory, and sustainable training and mentoring programs for communities in potential tourism villages. These programs should not only be technical but also transformative—designed to develop local human resources (HR) that are competent, adaptive, and able to compete in a sustainable tourism ecosystem.

Training materials must be designed comprehensively and contextually, encompassing three main dimensions. First, a deep understanding of the principles of green tourism and ecotourism, to avoid cosmetic greenwashing practices without concrete implementation for sustainability. Second, strengthening practical skills that are directly applicable in the field, such as hospitality services, microfinance management for tourism businesses, and guiding techniques based on nature and local culture. Third, developing environmental management capacity, including composting techniques, organic waste processing, and waste recycling practices as part of strengthening green ecosystems in tourist areas.

This program addresses the urgent need to improve the quality of local human resources, which has been a major obstacle to the development of sustainable tourism villages. Beyond just technical training, this initiative aims to foster ecological awareness, a professional work ethic, and a sense of community ownership in managing tourism destinations in their own areas.

2. Development of Authentic Tourism Products Based on Local Assets

Regional governments, along with development partners, need to encourage and facilitate local communities to design and develop unique, authentic tourism packages based on their natural resources and local culture. This initiative is crucial to ensure that tourism development does not become mired in imitation of other destinations but instead highlights the unique character of each region. The tourism packages developed must reflect local identity, traditional wisdom, and sustainable living practices passed down through generations.

Concrete examples of this approach include: the development of an "Educational Tour Package on the Palm Sugar Making Process" in Sindangkasih Village that directly involves tourists in traditional production activities, a "Cangkuang Temple Cultural Interpretation and Conservation Tour" that combines historical, religious, and ecological elements in one travel narrative, and a "Garut Coffee Agroforestry Tour" that explores sustainable forest-based agricultural practices and the potential of local coffee products as a tourist attraction.

This effort not only increases economic value for the community but also strengthens their position as key actors in the tourism value chain. Furthermore, this approach aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism, which position communities as guardians of cultural heritage and the environment, as well as innovators in creating memorable and responsible tourism experiences.

3. Strengthening Local Institutions

Local governments and relevant stakeholders need to encourage the establishment or revitalization of local institutions, such as Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) and Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), to ensure their optimal function as the primary drivers of community-based tourism destination management. These institutions play a strategic role in ensuring sustainable management, improving the quality of tourism services, and collectively empowering the local economy.

For this institution to function effectively and inclusively, it is crucial to design and implement a fair, transparent, and consensus-based benefit-sharing mechanism. This scheme should clearly define the proportion of profits allocated to the institution's operations, incentives for active members, tourism facility development, and contributions to village funds or community social programs. The principles of transparency and accountability in the institution's financial management must be maintained through regular reports, participatory audits, and active community involvement in the evaluation process.

This mechanism ensures that the economic benefits of tourism activities are distributed equitably across all levels of society, preventing social inequality and potential internal conflict, and strengthening a sense of ownership of tourist destinations. Revitalizing local institutions also opens up broader participation opportunities, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and rural youth, to participate in decision-making and productive economic activities in the tourism sector.

Further analysis revealed a systemic interconnectedness among the various problems facing tourism development in Garut Regency. These problems do not exist in isolation, but rather form a vicious cycle that mutually reinforces and exacerbates each other. This complex pattern of cause-and-effect relationships indicates that failure in one sector will directly or indirectly impact other sectors.

For example, poor road infrastructure leading to a tourist destination—a major physical weakness—will create an uncomfortable experience for tourists. This inconvenience has the potential to trigger negative reviews on digital platforms and social media, which in turn damages the destination's image and discourages future visits. The resulting decline in visits automatically leads to stagnant local income and lowers community motivation to continue developing its tourism potential.

At the same time, weak law enforcement and environmental oversight—reflecting a failure in governance—allow illegal activities such as forest encroachment and illegal mining to continue around tourist areas. These practices not only destroy the ecological appeal that is the main driving force of ecotourism destinations, but also increase the risk of environmental disasters such as landslides and flash floods. When such disasters occur, damage to road infrastructure is exacerbated, reinforcing a chain of pre-existing problems.

This chain of events clearly demonstrates that partial or sectoral solutions, such as simply repairing roads without addressing environmental governance and legal issues, will fail to produce significant change. Instead, the required strategy must be holistic and systemic—one that relies not only on physical or technical aspects but also encompasses institutional, social, environmental, and economic dimensions in an integrated manner. This approach allows for synchronous and sustainable policy interventions to break the chain of structural failures that have hampered the progress of sustainable tourism in Garut.

Strategy Pillar 3: Green Infrastructure Development and Quality Improvement

Based on an understanding of the systemic interconnections between various mutually reinforcing failures, this strategy is designed to focus not only on physical improvements but also simultaneously integrate sustainability principles into every stage of the intervention. This approach aims to break the vicious cycle that has hampered the development of sustainable tourism in Garut Regency.

By combining physical aspects—such as improving road infrastructure, tourism facilities, and basic utilities—with institutional, social, and ecological approaches, this strategy seeks to create comprehensive and long-term change. Each intervention is designed to complement and reinforce the others, such as improving accessibility while enforcing environmental laws, developing destinations while strengthening community capacity, and expanding promotion while preserving natural resources.

Through this integration, it is hoped that a systemic transformation will be created that not only improves surface symptoms but also addresses the deeper roots of the problem—creating inclusive, resilient, and sustainable tourism governance.

1. Investment in Green Infrastructure

Regional government budget allocations in the tourism sector should prioritize not only basic infrastructure improvements such as conventional roads, but also green infrastructure development that supports environmental sustainability principles. This approach reflects a paradigm shift from exploitative development to environmentally friendly and long-term development.

The green infrastructure in question includes, among other things: the construction of Reduce-Reuse-Recycle Waste Processing Facilities (TPS3R) in each tourist destination cluster as a systematic effort to manage waste independently; renewable energy installations such as solar panels for street lighting, public facilities, and tourist

information centers; and the construction of small-scale wastewater treatment systems in lodging and homestay areas to prevent environmental pollution.

This investment in green infrastructure will not only strengthen the ecological carrying capacity of tourist destinations but also create a positive image for Garut Regency as a destination committed to green tourism principles. This approach aligns with best practices implemented in various sustainable tourism destinations at home and abroad, and has proven effective in reducing ecological footprints, increasing energy efficiency, and building trust among tourists who are increasingly concerned about environmental issues.

Furthermore, the existence of this green infrastructure also has the potential to open up opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, such as partnerships with the private sector in green investment projects, involvement of local communities in the operation of environmentally friendly facilities, and integration of educational programs that can strengthen the ecological awareness of the community and tourists.

2. Quality Certification and Standardization

Local governments need to actively encourage and facilitate tourism businesses—such as hotels, homestays, restaurants, and other tourism service providers—to adopt environmentally friendly business practices as part of the transformation toward sustainable tourism. One concrete step that can be taken is to expand access to green tourism certification programs, such as the Green Labeling scheme, CHSE Green, or other nationally and internationally recognized environmental certifications.

This certification has a highly strategic dual function. First, it serves as a standardization tool and improves the quality of tourism business services, encompassing energy efficiency, waste management, water conservation, and environmental education for guests and staff. Second, it serves as a credible and value-added marketing tool to attract eco-conscious travelers, a segment currently showing a growing trend globally.

To ensure this program's effectiveness, local governments can provide incentives in the form of technical training, assistance with the certification process, and discounts on local taxes or levies for businesses that successfully obtain the green label. Furthermore, collective promotion of certified destinations through digital channels, tourism events, and national networks will strengthen Garut's competitiveness as a leading ecotourism destination with integrity.

By encouraging the adoption of green certification, Garut Regency not only strengthens its commitment to responsible environmental management, but also paves the way for the development of an innovative, professional, and long-term sustainable tourism industry ecosystem.

The discussion also extends to the importance of green infrastructure development as a means to break the vicious cycle hindering Garut's ecotourism. Our findings point out that inadequate infrastructure leads to negative tourist experiences, environmental strain, and subsequently a decline in visits – a cycle that perpetuates under-development. This observation is supported by general tourism research: poor infrastructure and environmental neglect are known to diminish destination competitiveness and tourist satisfaction, which in turn can reduce tourism revenue and local support (Ismail et al., 2019). In Garut, the need for infrastructure upgrades is coupled with the need for sustainability, and here our study's recommendations align with both local and international research. Empirical evidence from Garut itself underscores these points. A recent study by (Adiatma and Rukma, 2024) on Situ Bagendit (a natural tourist attraction in Garut) found that rising tourist numbers, unaccompanied by proper infrastructure, led to problems like water pollution and waste

accumulation. They recommend improving waste management systems and environmental regulations, which directly supports our proposal for facilities like Reduce-Reuse-Recycle waste processing (TPS3R) in tourist areas (Adiatma & Rukma, 2024). By citing this local evidence, we strengthen the argument that Garut's ecotourism development requires tangible green infrastructure investments to handle current environmental impacts. This is in line with (Gavrilović and Maksimović's, 2018) findings that green innovations in the tourism sector such as renewable energy usage and effective waste treatment can significantly reduce the ecological footprint of tourism and bolster a destination's sustainable image. Our strategic pillar calls for exactly such innovations, suggesting that Garut is following globally recommended practices for sustainable tourism development. Moreover, integrating infrastructure improvements with environmental management reflects a systems approach; literature on sustainable destinations often notes that infrastructure development must go hand-in-hand with conservation efforts to be truly effective. In summary, our discussion on infrastructure not only identifies a critical local issue but also demonstrates that our solutions are grounded in empirical and theoretical precedent about the value of sustainable infrastructure in tourism.

Strategy Pillar 4: Authentic Green Marketing and Branding

This strategy is specifically designed as a concrete effort to combat greenwashing practices—the manipulative use of sustainability claims without concrete implementation—which can undermine public trust and undermine the essence of sustainable tourism. Through a measured, transparent, and evidence-based approach, this strategy aims to build Garut's image as a tourist destination that is honest in practice, credible in policy, and attractive to tourists who value authenticity and environmental responsibility.

This image strengthening is achieved through verified certification, community involvement in environmental conservation, and consistent and educational communication to the public. Thus, Garut is positioned not only as a physically beautiful destination but also as a role model for the application of genuine green tourism principles—not merely symbolic or cosmetic.

1. Evidence-Based Marketing

A complete overhaul of Garut Regency's tourism promotion narrative is needed. Instead of relying on generic slogans like "Garut Beautiful and Natural," which tend to be clichés and fail to distinguish Garut from other destinations, the promotional narrative must shift to an evidence-based storytelling approach. This approach emphasizes telling real, authentic, and inspiring stories that reflect real-world sustainability practices.

One form of implementation is by utilizing social media as the main channel to display micro-storytelling content in the form of short videos, documentary photos, or community testimonials. For example: a short documentary video entitled "From Trash to Fertile: The Story of Compost in Sindangkasih Village" which shows how local communities process organic waste into compost for their coffee plantations, or "Preserving Water Heritage: The Story of the Cangkuang Temple Tourism Group in Preserving the Lake Ecosystem", which showcases community-based environmental conservation efforts.

This kind of narrative will create a destination image that is not only visually appealing but also engages tourists emotionally and ethically. Marketing built on true stories about environmental conservation, community empowerment, and cultural preservation will be far more effective in building trust, expanding the reach of a

sustainability-conscious audience, and strengthening Garut's position as a truly green tourism destination.

More than just selling beauty, Garut tourism promotion must be a medium for education, advocacy, and inspiration—one that elevates local realities as the main narrative force.

2. Collaboration with Green Influencers

Local governments and tourism industry players need to establish strategic partnerships with travel bloggers, vloggers, and social media influencers who have a proven track record, integrity, and credibility in sustainable tourism, ecotourism, and nature adventure. This collaboration is not merely a promotional tool, but part of a more authentic and persuasive communication strategy to build a positive destination image.

These content creators possess the ability to convey travel experiences narratively, personally, and visually, reaching a wider audience without a patronizing or commercial approach. Through their reviews, testimonials, and travel documentation—whether in the form of vlogs, Instagram posts, or blog articles—they can convey true stories about the uniqueness, conservation values, and local experiences of Garut's tourist destinations.

This type of content tends to be more trusted and appreciated by the ecotourist and millennial traveler market segments than conventional, one-way advertising. To increase its effectiveness, this collaboration must be selectively curated, involving influencers who are not only popular but also have values and audiences relevant to green tourism principles.

Furthermore, this collaboration can be expanded into integrated digital campaigns, familiarization trips (famtrips), or storytelling projects that showcase aspects of sustainability in Garut, such as environmental conservation, agroecotourism practices, and local community empowerment. Thus, this strategy will not only increase the destination's visibility but also build a strong, credible, and inspiring narrative about Garut tourism in the public eye.

Finally, our study's findings on authentic green marketing and branding address a gap between mere promotion and genuine sustainable practice. The emphasis on authenticity in marketing is strongly supported by prior studies that warn against "greenwashing" in tourism. (Shang et al., 2023) note that the term green tourism has often been misused as a marketing label without substantive conservation action, leading to tourist confusion and skepticism. Our discussion concurs with this critique – indeed, one motivation for Pillar 4 is to combat precisely those manipulative sustainability claims that undermine public trust. We argue that Garut should build its destination image through verified environmental certifications, community-based conservation success stories, and educational promotion, rather than generic slogans. This approach finds resonance in the literature on sustainable tourism marketing. Tourists, especially the environmentally conscious segment, are more likely to be attracted and loyal to destinations that can demonstrate real sustainability efforts (Andrea, 2024). For example, research has shown that evidence-based storytelling creates a more compelling narrative and emotional connection with eco-travelers than conventional advertising. By aligning Garut's marketing with actual green practices on the ground, our strategy ensures that promotion does not outpace reality – a principle supported by both theoretical and empirical work on destination branding integrity. In practice, destinations that have adopted transparent and honest marketing about their sustainability initiatives have seen improved tourist trust and destination. Thus, our findings support earlier studies in the call for authenticity over mere rhetoric in tourism marketing, and our

recommendations put those principles into actionable steps. In doing so, this study's discussion contributes to filling the gap noted by (Shang et al., 2023) moving from "greenwashing" towards genuinely green branding and provides empirical justification that Garut's strategy to execute authentic green marketing is not only novel for the region but also grounded in established best practices in sustainable tourism promotion.

Conclusions

This study concludes that the key to Garut Regency's successful transformation into an authentic and sustainable ecotourism destination does not lie in discovering new potential—such potential is already abundant. Rather, the primary challenge lies in bridging the wide implementation gap between well-formulated policies and on-the-ground realities. A paradigm shift from rhetorical planning to coordinated, concrete action through an integrated strategic approach is essential. The four strategic pillars proposed—strengthening governance, implementing community-based ecotourism, developing green infrastructure, and executing authentic green marketing—are designed to work synergistically to address existing weaknesses and threats while leveraging Garut's natural and cultural strengths and emerging tourism opportunities.

Based on the analysis, several policy and practical recommendations are formulated.

For the Garut Regency Government

1. Allocate a specific and measurable budget for community capacity-building programs and green infrastructure development—not merely conventional infrastructure.
2. Establish and empower an effective environmental law enforcement task force with a clear mandate to impose strict sanctions on environmental violations in tourism areas.
3. Mandate the adoption of Green Standard Operating Procedures (Green SOPs) for destinations seeking ecotourism branding and promotion.

For Local Communities and Village Institutions (Pokdarwis/BUMDes)

1. Proactively engage in all phases of tourism planning, implementation, and evaluation at the regional level.
2. Strengthen transparent and accountable local institutions, especially in designing fair and inclusive benefit-sharing mechanisms to maintain social harmony.

For Private Business Actors

1. Adopt environmentally friendly business practices as part of corporate social responsibility and long-term strategy.
2. Invest in green certification as a means of product differentiation and competitive advantage to attract environmentally conscious markets.

Future Research Directions

Given the study's reliance on secondary data and qualitative analysis, future research should include field-based validation of the proposed strategies. Quantitative studies are also recommended to measure the tangible impacts of green tourism implementation. Furthermore, participatory research focusing on models of community engagement in ecotourism would provide deeper insights into sustainable, bottom-up development pathways.

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