

NYIMAK

Journal of Communication

Nyimak: Journal of Communication | Vol. 9 | No. 2 | Pages 172 - 316 | September 2025 | ISSN 2580-3808



Published By:
Department of Communication Science
Faculty of Social and Political Science
Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang

Journal Address

Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik

UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH TANGERANG

Jl. Perintis Kemerdekaan I No. 33 Kota Tangerang, Banten 15118

Website : <http://jurnal.umt.ac.id/index.php/nyimak>

Email : journalnyimak@fisipumt.ac.id

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Participatory Communication for Equity of Access in the Management of Ketapang Aquaculture Ecotourism

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ABSTRACT

This research is prompted by the reality that despite significant growth in Indonesia's tourism sector, the utilization of natural resources, especially in coastal areas, is still not fully optimized and is susceptible to corporate control, which can displace local communities. This situation is further complicated by issues of unequal access and power dynamics that hinder fair ecotourism management. The study's primary goal is to identify stakeholders and analyze the function of participatory communication in managing the Ketapang Urban Aquaculture (KUA) ecotourism site to ensure equitable access. Adopting a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative methodology, data was collected through a combination of in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and direct field observations. The findings reveal that, while the KUA project has been successful in terms of physical development, significant gaps remain at the community level, including the absence of structured community development programs and a low level of environmental awareness. Participatory communication serves as a crucial tool for bridging the diverse interests of various parties and boosting community involvement, which has been shown to mitigate conflict and strengthen solidarity among stakeholders. Consequently, this research advocates for a more inclusive communication approach to enhance sustainable ecotourism management.

Keywords: *Participatory communication, local community, stakeholder analysis, ecotourism*

ABSTRAK

Riset ini dilatarbelakangi oleh fakta bahwa meskipun sektor pariwisata Indonesia telah berkembang pesat, pemanfaatan sumber daya alam, khususnya di wilayah pesisir, masih belum optimal dan rentan terhadap dominasi korporasi yang dapat meminggirkan masyarakat lokal. Kondisi ini diperburuk oleh masalah ketidakadilan akses dan kekuasaan yang menghambat pengelolaan ekowisata yang adil. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memetakan pemangku kepentingan dan menganalisis peran komunikasi partisipatif dalam pengelolaan Ekowisata Ketapang Urban Aquaculture (KUA) untuk mewujudkan keadilan akses. Menggunakan paradigma konstruktivisme dan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, FGD, dan observasi lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun proyek KUA berhasil mencapai pembangunan fisik, ada kesenjangan signifikan di tingkat komunitas, seperti kurangnya program pengembangan masyarakat dan rendahnya kesadaran lingkungan. Komunikasi partisipatif menjadi elemen utama untuk menjembatani kepentingan berbagai pihak dan meningkatkan partisipasi masyarakat, yang terbukti dapat mengurangi konflik dan memperkuat solidaritas antar pemangku kepentingan. Oleh karena itu, riset ini merekomendasikan strategi komunikasi yang lebih inklusif untuk perbaikan pengelolaan ekowisata yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi partisipatif, komunitas lokal, analisis stakeholder, ekowisata

Submitted: 2025-02-06

Revised: 2025-08-29

Accepted: 2025-09-10

Available Online: September 2025

CITATION: Anam, K., Abdurrahman, A. I., Pratama, R. A., & Amalia, A. (2025). Participatory Communication for Equity of Access in the Management of Ketapang Aquaculture Ecotourism. *Nyimak Journal of Communication*, 9(2), 172-185.



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INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Travel & Tourism Development Index at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in May 2022 released tourism rankings for 117 countries around the world. As a result, Indonesia was ranked 32nd, an improvement from its previous position of 44th (Uppink & Soshkin, 2022). This 12-place increase indicates that the Indonesian government is considered successful in issuing sustainable and resilient development policies in the Travel & Tourism (T&T) sector, which can contribute to the development of a country. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) noted that the contribution of tourism activities to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 reached 3.6 per cent, a significant increase from 2.40 per cent in 2021 (Kemenparekraf, 2022).

However, the utilization of natural resources, particularly in coastal regions, remains suboptimal. The Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy has acknowledged that only 15% of the top 50 tourist villages are situated in coastal areas (Kemenparekraf, 2022). This is a paradoxical situation, given Indonesia's status as the world's largest archipelagic nation. This disparity highlights a fundamental problem: the vulnerability of coastal ecotourism to corporate domination. Such a situation can lead to "ocean grabbing," where large corporations effectively seize control of coastal resources, thereby marginalizing local communities and depriving them of economic benefits. This issue is compounded by deep-rooted challenges related to power dynamics and unequal access to resources, which hinder the equitable management of these areas. As a report by WALHI (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia) indicates, coastal ecotourism is particularly susceptible to this due to its often being managed under an "open-access" paradigm, which lacks clear, enforceable regulations. The WALHI report shows extreme inequality, where the allocation of space for extractive industries reaches 3,590,883.22 hectares, while the space for fishermen's settlements and mangrove ecosystems is only 53,712.81 hectares (Ridwanuddin & Saragih, 2023).

Ribot, Jesse & Peluso, Nancy (2003) clearly explain that access is not merely formal ownership, but rather the ability of actors to derive benefits from a resource, whether material or institutional. When this ability is unequal, or when power is concentrated in the hands of a few, inequality of access arises and triggers conflict. Various case studies in Indonesia have proven this thesis, such as the conflict over territory and resources in Sri Mersang Beach, Kuala Lama Village, which experienced coordination challenges between stakeholders and the local community, thereby hindering the transition to the tourism sector (Meilinda Suriani Harefa et al., 2025). Furthermore, the institutional dynamics of Napabhale ecotourism in Lohia Village faced not only operational obstacles (infrastructure provision) but also structural and cultural obstacles caused by unequal access to communication between the

elite and the local community (Ishak & Hos, 2025). Ostrom (1990) explains that one of the failures in natural resource management is the lack of recognition and protection of local institutions, followed by the inability to design rules that are appropriate to local conditions, the lack of law enforcement and effective sanctions, and the failure to define clear boundaries and membership.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as travel to natural destinations with a responsibility to preserve the environment and improve the welfare of local communities there are three components that must be emphasised in ecotourism management: conservation, community and sustainable travel (Bricker, 2017). Over time, and with the increasing public interest in nature-based travel, ecotourism has transformed from nature travel for conservation purposes to a business that benefits local communities. Thus, the new definition of ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that can create a tourism industry (Epler Wood & Halpenny, 2001). One form of coastal-based ecotourism is mangrove management, as practised by the community of Ketapang Village, Mauk District, Tangerang Regency, which has successfully optimised the potential of its village as a mangrove area that can become a village tourism destination and revitalise the village economy (Friess, 2017; Mulyadi et al., 2010; Wardhani, 2011).

The Tangerang Regency Government, through Regent Regulation No. 89 of 2022, is developing the Ketapang Urban Aquaculture Area (KUA) in Ketapang Village, Mauk District, as part of the implementation of the Gerbang Mapan Programme, which is being developed using an ecotourism approach. The development of Ketapang Urban Aquaculture (KUA) as mangrove-based ecotourism aims to prevent abrasion, support the empowerment of coastal communities through cultivation, culinary arts and MSME empowerment, and the rehabilitation of residential areas. Currently, the management of ecotourism is entrusted to PT Mitra Kerja Raharja, a Regional Owned Enterprise (BUMD) of Tangerang Regency as a holding company established through Local Regulation No. 19 of 2006, which is engaged in various business sectors, including agribusiness, agriculture and infrastructure management. As an ecotourism site, KUA has undergone a transformation to represent the definition of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), which supports the three pillars of ecotourism: conservation, community and sustainable travel. The first phase was realised through a series of solid conservation programmes. KUA focuses on the restoration and maintenance of mangrove forests, a fragile coastal ecosystem. The second phase, “supporting the welfare of local communities,” is strategically implemented through the integration of communities into the entire ecotourism value chain. KUA has transformed the role of the Ketapang Village

community from passive objects to active agents involved in daily operations. Residents are involved as tour guides, fisheries managers, and MSME actors who sell local processed products such as dodol buah pedada. This model creates jobs and direct income for the community, diversifies livelihoods beyond the traditional fisheries sector, and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for the sustainability of the destination.

In managing ecotourism, KUA often faces obstacles and challenges that result in conflicts between local communities and managers. These include high entrance fees to KUA, high rental costs for MSMEs, and access closure policies that lead to local communities rejecting managers, which in turn leads to a decline in the number of visitors to KUA (Jiddan et al., 2025). The management of KUA ecotourism also faces complex communication challenges. Ecotourism management involves many stakeholders with different interests and objectives, such as local communities, the government, managers, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and tourists. Each stakeholder has diverse perspectives, needs, and levels of access to information. Local communities, for example, may prioritise the direct economic benefits of ecotourism, while the government focuses on environmental sustainability and increasing regional income. These differences in interests require effective communication strategies to bridge the gap, avoid conflicts, and achieve harmony in management. The digital divide and limited access to information can also become obstacles in increasing awareness and participation among the public (Scheyvens et al., 2016). The lack of internet access, digital skills, and adequate communication media can hinder the dissemination of information and the involvement of the public in decision-making. In line with this, Ribot, Jesse & Peluso, Nancy (2003) states that access is the ability of actors to utilise material objects, individuals, institutions and even symbols attached to society. Thus, access inequality often triggers access conflicts experienced by actors competing for interests. These conflicts can explain the interests, strengths, and vulnerabilities of different social groups, under the pretext of social justice in the utilisation of natural resources (Turner et al., 2003). The existence of access inequality often hinders resource management, which can be felt by the community. In fact, many ecotourism management initiatives have failed due to the weak performance of ecotourism management institutions. R. Bryant & Bailey (2005) state that the unequal distribution of benefits occurs because of unequal power relations between stakeholders. This can also lead to access conflicts, as has been observed in many cases (Hakim et al., 2015; Jaya & Mahagangga, 2018; Kurniasari et al., 2017; Marina & Hadi Dharmawan, 2011; Prabowo et al., 2010).

For the sake of ecotourism management that prioritises equitable access and power, efforts are needed to strengthen the role of local institutions. The research questions that form the basis of this study include: 1) How are stakeholders mapped in the management of Mangrove KUA ecotourism? 2) How does participatory communication promote equitable access in the management of KUA ecotourism? Referring to this, this study aims to: 1) Examine how stakeholders are mapped in ecotourism management; 2) Analyse the role of participatory communication in ecotourism management in realising equitable access to KUA ecotourism management.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopts a social constructivism paradigm with qualitative approach to understand the subjective meaning of the participants experiences. This method is effective for building a complex understanding of social reality by interpreting diverse views, moving beyond simple descriptions (Creswell, 2009). Primary data was gathered through dept interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and field observations. Additionally, secondary data was collected from varios sources, including government agencies (PT MKR), monoghraps, and scientific literature, to provide comprehensive context.

The research informants were the main stakeholders directly involved in the management of Ketapang Aquaculture Ecotourism, including ecoturism managers, representative from PT Mitra Kerja Raharja, and community members manging MSMEs (Bryson, 2004). This stakeholder centric approach is crucial for understanding the dynamics of participatory communication in development, as it allows for an analysis of how different groups interact to achieve shared golas (Servaes, 2008).

For data analysis, the study employs thematic analysis Braun & Clarke (2006) within the qualitative data. The process involved transcribing all data, followed by an in-depth familiarisation with content, initial coding, and grouping these codes into broader themes. This systematic approach allows for a deeper understanding of the interactions, perceptions, and participatory communication dynamics among stakeholders. Finally, the research validates its findings through data triangulation, a process of cross referencing information from interviews, FGDs, and observations to ensure consistency and comprehensive understanding (Patton, 1999).

DISCUSSION

The effective management of natural resources, particularly in the context of ecotourism, is inseparable from broader political and economic forces (R. L. Bryant & Bailey, 1997). The literature consistently emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement, noting that the success of marine spatial planning (MSP) and resource management is contingent on the active participation of all relevant groups (Pomeroy & Douvere, 2008). A participatory framework is therefore crucial for achieving the dual goals of environmental conservation and local economic empowerment (Rahmawati & Cintamulya, 2020). This principle is supported by international case studies, such as the one in Ban Luang, Thailand, where stakeholder collaboration, mutual trust, and collective goal-setting were found to promote a more decentralized, community-led management model (Noppon, 2024). In the same vein, the management of ecotourism in Ketapang Village is characterized by a multi-stakeholder approach that involves the government, local communities, NGOs, and tourists, with each group contributing to a synergistic whole.

Bryson (2004) analytical framework offers a systematic way to assess stakeholder interests. The process begins by identifying each stakeholder's expectations, then uses a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating system to evaluate the project's success in meeting them. This helps pinpoint "quick wins" that can be addressed immediately and long-term strategic issues that require more comprehensive solutions. The findings are then integrated into project planning to ensure the action plan aligns with stakeholder needs.

Applying this framework to the Ketapang Urban Aquaculture (KUA) Ecotourism project revealed a notable gap between the official, top-down development vision and the on the ground reality. The analysis classified the district and village governments as "Key Players" due to their high influence in planning. In contrast, the local community despite being central to the concept of community-based ecotourism was categorized as a "Subject of" or "Crowd," reflecting their limited formal influence.

This analysis highlighted that while the project has achieved "quick wins" like physical development and external recognition, it faces significant long-term challenges. These include a lack of planned community development programmes and low environmental awareness among residents. The management of the Ketapang Ecotourism Village is participatory, involving multiple actors such as the government (through PT MKR), local communities, NGOs, and tourists. Each of these stakeholders plays a distinct yet mutually supportive role.

Table 1. Stakeholder Mapping of Ketapang Ecotourism (Bryson's Framework)

Stakeholder	Interest	Influence Level	Expectations	RAG Rating	Quick Wins	Long-Term Issues
Tangerang Regency & Village Government	To make KUA a regional/national icon; economic & reputational improvement.	High (Key Player)	KUA becomes the best destination, a model for replication.	Green (Green)	Infrastructure development, recognition from World Bank/Bappenas (Jonathan et al., 2023).	Integrating all community elements into the formal structure.
Local Community (Residents)	Economic improvement (aquaculture, stalls); environmental sustainability.	Low (Subject/Crowd)	Increased welfare, stable livelihoods (Jonathan et al., 2023).	Amber (Amber)	Increased income from visitors.	Lack of empowerment programmes, low environmental awareness.
BKM & Pokdarwis	Structured management; active community participation.	Medium (Subject)	To be involved in decision-making, not just as implementers (Jiddan et al., 2025).	Amber (Amber)	Involvement in meetings and initial arrangements (Tim, 2021).	Strengthening institutional capacity, formalizing roles and responsibilities.
Illegal Parking Attendants	To earn income from existing activities.	Informal (Crowd/Subject)	To be recognized and accommodated within the formal system.	Red (Red)	Freedom to operate outside the formal structure.	Governance management, integration into legal & formal systems.

Table 1 illustrates the significant disparity between the success achieved at the macro level by the government and the challenges still faced at the community level. The government's vision to make KUA a regional tourism icon is evident in the statement by the Acting Regent of Tangerang, Andi Ony, who said, "*Kita berkomitmen akan terus mendukung pengembangan wisata tersebut sekaligus menjadi daerah pelestarian mangrove sehingga dapat menjadi ikon bagi Kabupaten Tangerang.*" This vision has been realised through significant infrastructure development and positive recognition from external institutions, which have given it a "Green" rating in their expectations.

However, the table also reveals critical issues at the community level. Local communities (residents), as well as formal organisations such as the Community Empowerment Agency (BKM) and the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), received a "Yellow" (Amber) rating. This indicates that although the study shows that ecotourism has had a positive impact on environmental conservation and economic improvement in the surrounding community, there are still fundamental issues that have not been resolved. Interviews with KUA managers revealed various challenges, such as inadequate sanitation facilities, limited availability of rest areas, and a lack of digital promotion capable of significantly attracting tourists from outside the region. Furthermore, the existence of illegal parking attendants, marked with a "Red" rating, is a symptom of deeper governance problems. This informal economic dynamic

has not been integrated into the formal structure of the project. This problem is reinforced by an interview excerpt with the Operational Director of Ketapang Urban Aquaculture, Mr Reyza, who stated that the promotion and brand awareness of this project is still minimal, and it does not have an official logo, so it is “*kurang dikenal masyarakat luas sebagaimana wisata yang lain* “. This analysis confirms that without an inclusive approach, potential conflicts and instability may arise in the future, which will ultimately undermine the sustainability of KUA. Thus, the table not only diagnoses successes and failures, but also serves as a roadmap for prioritising the necessary strategic interventions, namely through a participatory communication approach.

Participatory Communication for Equity of Access in Ecotourism Managemen

Participatory communication plays an important role in ecotourism management in Indonesia. Research shows that the involvement of local communities, especially through Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), is crucial in the development of tourist destinations (Sobra et al., 2023). The participatory communication process involves the stages of planning, implementation, and utilization of results, with communities participating in monitoring, providing suggestions, and running programmes (Sobra et al., 2023). Government and partner support also contribute to the tourism management stage, especially in the form of facilities, training, and promotion (Notonegoro, 2020). Another study found a positive relationship between participatory communication and social capital with ecological sustainability of ecotourism, indicating that the higher the level of participatory communication and social capital, the higher the ecological sustainability of ecotourism (Jayanegara et al., 2021).

Servaes (2008) emphasizes the importance of a participation-based communication approach to encourage sustainable and community-based development. This approach is very relevant in the management of ecotourism such as Ketapang Aquaculture, which relies on the involvement of local communities, businesses, governments, and tourists to create a balance between environmental sustainability and social welfare. The implementation of participatory communication in the management of Ketapang Aquaculture ecotourism aims to realize access justice for all stakeholders, including local communities, local governments, and tourists. This approach emphasizes the importance of open and collaborative dialogue in planning and developing ecotourism areas. According to Yanuadi, Mulyawati, and Dewi (2024), active community participation in ecotourism management can improve the economic and social welfare of local communities.

The results of Bryson's stakeholder mapping have diagnosed core problems in KUA governance: although physical infrastructure and high-level recognition have been successfully achieved, there are fundamental issues related to community participation and empowerment. Long-term issues such as the lack of community development programmes and low environmental awareness are areas where a top-down approach is inadequate. Therefore, the participatory communication framework of the is an ideal intervention strategy to address these issues and change the "Yellow" or "Red" rating in Bryson's mapping to "Green." The goal is to strategically increase the influence and participation of communities currently categorised as Subjects or Crowds to become Key Players.

Table 2. Matrix of Participatory Communication Strategy for KUA

Long-Term Issues (from Bryson's Analysis)	Participatory Communication Pillar (Reed)	Strategy & Concrete Activities	Success Indicators
Lack of planned community development programmes (<i>Jiddan et al., 2025</i>).	Popular Education & Collective Action	Conduct community-led workshops on sustainable aquaculture & waste management.(Jonathan et al., 2023) Formation of formal work groups.	Increased number of active participants in activities, formation of two or more new collective action groups.
Low environmental awareness among the community (<i>Romli & Purwanto, 2024</i>).	Dialogue & Popular Education	Hold regular dialogue forums to discuss the ecological benefits of mangroves and their link to the local economy.	Increased community knowledge as measured by surveys, increased participation in mangrove planting activities.
Informal governance (ex: illegal parking) (<i>Jiddan et al., 2025</i>).	Dialogue & Collective Action	Conduct open dialogue with illegal parking attendants to understand their needs. Offer integration into the formal system with incentives and training.	Illegal parking attendants integrated into Pokdarwis structure, reduction in conflict incidents.
Lack of optimal promotion (<i>Darmawan et al., 2025</i>).	Community Media	Develop a joint social media account managed by community and BKM representatives. Short training on photography and storytelling.	Increased reach and interaction on social media, presence of authentic narratives produced by the community.

Based on an in-depth analysis, participatory communication is essential to bridge the gap between the success of physical development and the sustainability of the Ketapang Ecotourism project. Although the infrastructure has been well organised and has even received praise from institutions such as the World Bank, it is acknowledged that “there is no planned community development programme to fill activities in the area”. This situation poses a significant risk to the project’s continuity, as the sustainability of ecotourism is highly dependent on active community participation and awareness. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed from a one-way communication model (from the government to the community) to a more horizontal and empowering model.

A participatory communication approach, rooted in Paulo Freire’s theory of liberating education, is essential to address these issues. This concept emphasises that true participation is the “ability to think critically” for the community, not merely the ability to adapt. In the context of Ketapang Ecotourism, this means changing the position of the community from “objects” who only receive treatment to “subjects” who can express their own desires and creativity. The significance of this approach is highlighted by research emphasizing that involving the community directly in decision-making and ecotourism planning serves as a strategic means of fostering collaboration among all stakeholders.

The three main pillars of this approach, dialogue, public education, and collective action can directly address the identified issues. First, dialogue serves to build trust and mutual understanding. Despite considerable public interest, significant challenges persist, particularly in relation to the limited awareness regarding the critical importance of mangrove ecosystem conservation. Through dialogue, managers and communities can exchange ideas, map problems, and develop critical awareness collectively. Second, popular education offers solutions to these problems. Unlike traditional education, this approach starts from the community’s life experiences and recognises that “*everyone teaches, everyone learns*”. This will help residents understand how mangrove conservation and aquaculture can sustainably support their economy. Third, Collective Action transforms established awareness into concrete action. Issues such as the presence of illegal parking attendants or a lack of promotion can be addressed by encouraging the community to act collectively, rather than seeking individual solutions. An interview with the manager, Mr Reyza, who stated that the project is “less known to the general public than other tourist attractions” due to the absence of a logo and brand awareness, shows that there is an urgent need to involve the community in jointly building the project’s identity and promotion. By implementing these pillars, the community will have an authentic voice that allows them to control the narrative and ensure equitable access in terms of physical and narrative representation.

CONCLUSION

Bryson's stakeholder mapping and Reed's participatory communication strategy offer a concrete framework for understanding and managing the complexities of Ketapang Ecotourism. The results of this research conclude that although the project has been successful at the macro level, with infrastructure development reaching 90% and recognition from international institutions, there are significant gaps at the community level. Bryson's analysis clearly identifies long-term issues, such as the lack of community development programmes and low environmental awareness, which have the potential to project's sustainability.

Thus, this research recommends a strategic shift from the dominant top-down development model towards an empowering bottom-up approach. Participatory communication, with its main pillars dialogue, popular education, and collective action becomes a specifically designed intervention solution to address the identified weaknesses. The goal is to transform the KUA from a mere "development project" into a "movement" owned and managed by the local community, thereby realising true access to justice and sustainability. This synthesis shows that the success of a development project is not only measured by physical achievements, but more importantly by how effectively the project empowers communities to become active subjects in their own journey

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, due to its qualitative nature, the findings cannot be generalized to a broader population. Second, the focus on a single case study at Ketapang Aquaculture Ecotourism limits cross-context comparisons. Future research is therefore advised to apply a similar approach to other ecotourism sites to identify similarities and differences in participatory communication dynamics. Additionally, future studies could integrate quantitative methods to more comprehensively measure the socio-economic impacts of participatory communication, providing a more holistic and in-depth understanding.

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