Community Empowerment in Traditional House Preservation through Tourism Activities in Saribu Rumah Gadang Region

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ABSTRACT
The majority of the population in West Sumatera Province in Indonesia is Minangkabau tribe. This tribe has traditional houses known as Gadang house (Rumah Gadang). The main function of these traditional houses is as residence, a place for community meetings, as well as a place for some traditional ceremonies. Lately, the existence of Rumah Gadang is increasingly diminished. That becomes a concern for many parties involved in maintaining, preservation and existence of the future of Rumah Gadang, especially in the Saribu Rumah Gadang region. This study aimed to determine the process of community empowerment through tourism activities, which could make Rumah Gadang as tourism attraction and accommodation or homestay at the same time. The economic impact is expected to improve the community well-being and to support the preservation of the Rumah Gadang itself.

Keywords: Community empowerment, preservation of traditional house, Rumah Gadang, Saribu Rumah Gadang region

Introduction
Tourism has been recognized as the largest industry in the world, in terms of contribution to the increase of foreign exchange and employment. These expectations are based on the fact that employment and business opportunities in the tourism sector are broad (Cukier, 1996; Cukier, 2006). Employment and business opportunities in the tourism sector have long and tide relations. Moreover, connections and interactions between all players in the field of tourism, whether educated or not, being government employees or villagers are one of its most recognizable features (Cukier, 1996). With such a wide range of characteristics, the tourism business has become a major sector in economic development in various countries. Efforts to develop the tourism sector in Indonesia is supported by Law No. 10/2009 which states that the existence of attraction in this area will be very beneficial in terms of increasing revenue (GDP), improving people lives, expand employment opportunities, increasing environmental concerns and conserving nature and culture. The three main contributions to the economic development of a country (or specific region) are expanding employment, increasing income (and foreign exchange), and equal development between regions (Damanik, 2005). This can be realized if both central and local government showed seriousness in the management of the tourism sector. Tourism development leads to increased local government revenue and fair distribution of incomes. Therefore, it is a model of tourism development that involves the participation of the local communities, a term known as a “community-based tourism” (Suansri, 2003).

Moving on to the hope of community involvement in the development of tourism, the government of Southern Solok tries to develop their tourism potentials. One of such tourism development area is Saribu Rumah Gadang region. Majority of people that live in Southern Solok belong to Minangkabau tribe, followed by a small number of Javanese and other tribes.
The Minangkabau people have a traditional house, known as Rumah Gadang (The Big House) with a very distinctive form of the pointed roof that resembles buffalo horns.

The carved real buffalo horns can be found on the outside wall of the building. Rumah Gadang is usually built on a plot of land owned by the parent family in the tribe and inherited to women in the clan. Rumah Gadang serves as a place for tribe meetings, for holding ceremonies, and a gathering place for the clan. Nowadays, the existence of Rumah Gadang is a distant memory in many villages in Minangkabau region.

The local government of West Sumatera administer an initiative called Project for Inventory and Development of the Regional Cultural Values (1991:118) that showed that the number of Rumah Gadang in the villages in West Sumatera is declining because the buildings were old and without maintenance and local people tend to construct and live in modern homes instead in Rumah Gadang. Usman (1990: 27-34) explained that there are 521 villages in West Sumatera but the number of villages that still maintain the Rumah Gadang is less than 150 villages (28.79%). This illustrates the rapid extinction of Rumah Gadang, while at the same time people lost their awareness to taking care of the existing Rumah Gadang.

The number of Rumah Gadang was increasingly reduced and that becomes a concern for many parties such as the local government and stakeholders, and express the urgent need of actions for preserve Rumah Gadang for the future. One step that can be an alternative for protecting the existence of Rumah Gadang is tourism development through community empowerment in the region. By making Rumah Gadang as one of its attractions, it will impact the economic improvement of the local community, as well as the preservation of the Rumah Gadang itself. The development of tourism in Saribu Rumah Gadang area can not be separated from the active role of the community as well as an effort to empower local communities to improve the welfare and preserve its culture. According to Kartasasmita (1997: 11-12), community empowerment is an effort to increase the dignity of society from poverty trap and retardation. The empowerment of the community requires a process which refers to a series of actions or steps that are carried out chronologically and systematically to transform the less-empowered into empowerment (Sulistiyan, 2004: 77). The purpose of tourism development through community empowerment can be realized when the development is not only focused on the economic aspects but social and cultural as well.
The objective of this study is to examine the process of community empowerment in the preservation of the Rumah Gadang in Saribu Rumah Gadang area by focusing on three main components; institutions, actors, and products. These three main components are expected to provide an overview of community empowerment in the Rumah Gadang preservation through tourism. There is a local institution, named Tourism Awareness Group (Kelompok Sadar Wisata or Pokdarwis) which manage the course of tourism activities and hold the internal cooperation that will assist the development of Saribu Rumah Gadang. This institution can not be run without involvement of the local people groups as actors who directly run the program. Both of these components offer products as tourist attractions in this area. By offering the tourism activities in this area, tourist will have an overview about the local cultures in particular the traditional house used for homestay. Another objective of this study is to provide recommendations for community and maximize the empowerment for the sustainability of Rumah Gadang.

The method used in this research is qualitative research which aims to gain a general understanding of social reality from the participant's perspective. Understanding is not predetermined, but will be appear after an analysis of the social reality done. This research is descriptive with qualitative approach. The data used are primary data and secondary data. Primary data is obtained by observation and interview. Observations were made on (1) community activities in tourism management; (2) daily activities of the community in the Saribu Rumah Gadang area and (3) physical condition (place) of research covering the environment, tourism object, tourism facilities and infrastructures. The interview form conducted by the researcher is a semi-structured interview in which the subjects know that they are being interviewed and also know what the intent and purpose of the interview are. Participants selected in the data collection through interviews are people who are considered to know about the process of community empowerment in the area of Saribu Rumah Gadang. Secondary data is obtained from literature study that is collecting data from a number of literatures in the books, journals, magazines, newspapers or other papers relevant to the topic of research, written documents, drawings or shaped works related to aspects studied and data from the internet. Methods of data analysis include data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion.

Results and Discussion

Development of a given area or region into a tourist destination cannot be separated from the role of government in the form of policy support. According to De Kadt (2009), tourism development policy was initially intended for economic growth with a combination of strengthening the local communities and the sustainable development so that the negative impact of the contact between tourists and local communities do not damage the original condition. The government's role in regional development and policy planning regarding cultural heritage is very important in terms of maintaining the preservation of the indigenous cultural heritage, especially the Rumah Gadang. The district government of Southern Solok put concerns on the Rumah Gadang development, as it will bring benefits to the local community and will preserve the Rumah Gadang from extinction. According to Syahrie (2010), community engagement will foster a sense of belonging to the preservation of cultural heritage. This is consistent with the statement of Suansri (2003) that one of the benefits of community-based tourism development is the preservation of the environment. The development of Saribu Rumah Gadang region as a tourist destination is aimed at the close participation of the local society in the management of tourism in this area. Ahimsa-Putra (2011) states that economic responses appear as community activities in capturing business opportunities from the tourism sector.
**Community Empowerment Process**

The process of community empowerment in the preservation of the Rumah Gadang in the Saribu Rumah Gadang area started from the visit of Meutia Farida Hatta Swasono, the State Minister of Women Empowerment in the United Indonesia Cabinet during the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2008 to Nagari Koto Baru. Meutia Farida Hatta marveled at the beauty of The Nagari Koto Baru which having so many Rumah Gadang. During the visit, Meutia gave the nickname of the area as Saribu Rumah Gadang area. Saribu means a thousand in local language, it gives an idea of the iconic number of Rumah Gadang in this area even though it is not the real number. Since then the name attached to the present. Saribu Rumah Gadang Region began to be developed into a tourist destination in 2014 and became an icon of Southern Solok tourism. Once it launched as a priority destination, the number of tourist in Saribu Rumah Gadang Region for 2014-2017 is estimated to approximately 2,000 visitors (Southern Solok Department of Tourism, 2017). The increasing number of visits from year to year had an impact on community development in the region. The growth of tourists to Saribu Rumah Gadang Region might offer an opportunity for the community to develop more accommodation facilities that transform Rumah Gadang into a homestay in accordance with the spirit of Old Minangkabau. Homestays development began in 2016 in close cooperation with the Association of Indonesian Travel Sales of West Sumatera (ASATI). Saribu Rumah Gadang Region was ASATI’s pilot project for local community-development based tourism and provides guidance to the local society by delivering management service education.

![Homestay in Saribu Rumah Gadang Region](Source: Author)

The process of community empowerment is carried out through three stages, including the awareness stage, capacity building stage and the stage of empowerment. The first stage is the awareness stage where at this stage the socialization of the name of the Saribu Rumah...
Gadang area is inaugurated to the community. The process of socialization has done by the government (tourism department) by giving understanding to the community about the inauguration of Saribu Rumah Gadang and tourism potential in their neighborhood. In 2014 the government creates a gateway to the Saribu Rumah Gadang region. The development of Saribu Rumah Gadang area into a tourist destination can not be separated from the participation of the community. Therefore, it is necessary for society to have tourism mindset. The development of the Saribu Rumah Gadang into a tourist destination has the support of the local community by their involvement on the area cleanliness for tourist comfort, preserving the culture, providing attraction and activities for tourists, providing accommodation (homestays) and stalls that selling foods, beverages and various souvenirs.

The second stage is the capacity building stage. The government’s participation as one of tourism stakeholder is urgently needed. Governments and communities actually have the same responsibility in tourism development. However, the government should play a role in encouraging and stimulating the society. The role of government in Saribu Rumah Gadang area to increase human resources through guidance, counseling and training in the field of tourism and to groups of people who have business in the area of tourism. The government held a training program for the Pokdarwis, guidance, counseling and training.

The third stage is the empowerment stage. Community empowerment through the development of saribu rumah gadang area at this stage can be seen from the role of government by providing assistance either in the form of loan funds to community groups who have business and physical assistance to improve tourism facilities and infrastructure. Physical assistance in the form of trash help, road guide, street lights.

**Forms of Community Empowerment**

**Community Institution in Saribu Rumah Gadang**

The involvement of the local communities is important as they are a vital component of sustainable tourism development. In this case, institutional is interpreted as a local organization involved in the tourism development. One of such institutions, named Tourism Awareness Group (Kelompok Sadar Wisata, Pokdarwis). With the help of Pokdarwis, Saribu Rumah Gadang Region showed significant community participation in tourism development. Pokdarwis Saribu Rumah Gadang region is groups of people who set the programs for tourism activities where every member of the community have own duties and functions. Pokdarwis is an organization approved by the local government tourism office but is led entirely by the local people. Pokdarwis have a duty to monitor and foster the tourism activities. In addition, Pokdarwis also cooperates with external parties in the framework of the development of tourism in the Saribu Rumah Gadang Region. Pokdarwis Saribu Rumah Gadang Region was formed in September 2015 and consists of 24 people. The formation of this Pokdarwis shows participation and empowerment of the local community in the development of Saribu Rumah Gadang Region as a tourist destination. Local communities have direct cooperation with the Department of Tourism and Culture in term of homestay management and hospitality training, as well as conducting Saribu Rumah Gadang festivals, in order to preserve the local culture and increasing the number of tourists.

**Development Actors of Tourism in the Saribu Rumah Gadang**

Tourism development actors are important component in tourism development. The perpetrator is a homestay owners who has important role in tourism development efforts. Based on the analysis that has been done, researcher classify homestay program in the Saribu Rumah Gadang area into “wait and see participants”. Type of this homestay owners (actors) need to wait and see what the benefits of conducting the homestay program for them. This categorization of actors is done during the research, as researcher found samples of homestay
owner who decided to follow this program due to benefits obtained by previous residents who have followed the homestay program. The direct benefits for the homestay owners is the money which can be used to repair and maintain the Rumah Gadang. Homestay owners have additional income when in the same time Rumah Gadang can be preserved. Therefore, the number of homestay growing by the time since this program stated. Homestay owners can not be referred to “willing participants” based on analysis of researcher, for example most of homestay owners do not install sign board that has been given. However, it can not also be classified as “non-committing participant”, as the homestay owners still have commitment in joining this program. None of them has resigned from this program up to date.

**Tourism Products Development in the Saribu Rumah Gadang**

Cooperation among the institutional and actors in the Saribu Rumah Gadang area should have a product to offer for tourist as attraction to invite more tourist to come. In this case they have Rumah Gadang as homestay which physically leased by tourists and all activities related become tourist attractions. Homestays in this region utilize Rumah Gadang as accommodation for the visitors, where each house is able to accommodate 15-25 guests at the same time. In this area, there are 10 houses used as homestays. Homestay is generally managed by the owner of the house and generates benefits for the owner. The profit they made could be used to renovate their Rumah Gadang, therefore the preservation functions of the Rumah Gadang is achieved as well as the local economic growth. Another benefit of renting the house is that the owner could manage the maintenance of Rumah Gadang. Below is the distribution map of homestays in Saribu Rumah Gadang area.

![Distribution Map of Saribu Rumah Gadang Homestays](image)

**Figure 3 in Saribu Rumah Gadang** (Source: Author)

The concept of visiting this area is that the tourists are encouraged to stay along with the owner of the Rumah Gadang and sleep in the provided living room which is completed with mattresses, blankets, and pillows. The male and female tourists (if not married) are separated inside the house. The most interesting part of living in Rumah Gadang is the direct interaction between tourist and the home owners and tourist will be invited to have "bajamba", a traditional banquet where meals are served in banana leaves placed on the floor. To extend the tourist length of stay, local community utilizes attractions as serving dance, martial arts, culinary specialties, and people's daily activities to introduce Minangkabau local culture, traditions and beliefs. The price for a night is Rp 200,000 per person (around USD 14) and include breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Each of the bedrooms is usually equipped with simple
facilities according to the ability of the owner of the homestay, generally in the form of a small table, clothes hanger, mirror, and shared bathroom between tourist and the owner.

Interaction with the owner of the homestay become the main factor for tourist to feel comfortable. From the survey that has been done with the homeowners, the relationship between the owner of the homestay become very close to the visitors. The interactions and relations between the owner and visitors are very well established, especially with the domestic tourists. Regarding foreign tourists, language barrier becomes the main obstacle for the homeowners. While staying at the Rumah Gadang, tourists may enjoy the beauty of the architecture of the Rumah Gadang, local people's daily life, traditional arts, and culinary. The community offers famous traditional cuisine such as pangek banana, rendang which is very well known worldwide. Other attractions offered is genuine traditional arts such as dance, traditional ceremonies, and the martial arts called pencak silat. All of those mentioned above can be performed by the tourists along with the homeowners. Tourists can witness and experience unique activities which only exist in the Saribu Rumah Gadang Region.

Conclusion
The development of Saribu Rumah Gadang Region as a tourist destination is based on the existence of Rumah Gadang which existence is under significant threat nowadays. That danger, the main concern for all parties involved in tourism development, raise a serious fear about the sustainability and the presence of The Rumah Gadang in the future. One feasible step and alternative is the efforts of preserving Rumah Gadang through community-based tourism. The reason is that the tourism activities will generate economic improvement for the local communities and positive impacts over the indigenous traditions in term of conservation of Rumah Gadang. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage the community to protect the existence of Rumah Gadang by using economic approach while at the same time sustain their cultural heritage and uniqueness.

Saribu Rumah Gadang area as tourism destination has some tourism attractions such as: traditional house architectural called Rumah Gadang, unique cultures, and natural beauty. Involvement of local community in tourism management is one of society empowerment effort. The process of community empowerment is carried out through three stages, including the awareness stage, capacity building stage and the stage of empowerment. There are three forms
of community empowerment in Saribu Rumah Gadang area: (1) Institution, a local organization that oversees and manage tourism activities in Saribu Rumah Gadang area, they are called as Tourism Awareness Group (Kelompok Sadar Wisata, or Pokdarwis). Pokdarwis is responsible for carrying out all tourism activities in Saribu Rumah Gadang area, such as: culture, art, culinary, and homestay. In addition, Pokdarwis also play an active role in establishing cooperation with external parties to support the development of tourism in this area; (2) the owners of homestay as actors in the tourism development in Saribu Rumah Gadang area. The direct benefits for the homestay owners is the money which can be used to repair and maintain the Rumah Gadang; (3) tourism products in Saribu Rumah Gadang area includes Rumah Gadang as homestay for tourists accommodation and tourism activities such as traditional dancing, traditional cooking, traditional martial arts as tourists attractions.

References
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