

Building environmental awareness through cultural activity: A study of the Madek Mare in West Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract

The Madek Mare is a traditional fishing practice unique to the Rambitan region of West Nusa Tenggara. Locals engage in this activity when the sea water recedes, often spending one to five days on the beach in traditional huts. However, as this activity occurs in a tourist area, some believe it detracts from the beach's natural beauty. This study examines the Madek Mare as a tradition that fosters local environmental awareness, highlighting practices that benefit both the environment and the community. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the research included in-depth interviews with local residents, representatives from the Injourney Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), which manages the coastal tourism area in Lombok, and officials from the West Nusa Tenggara Provincial Tourism Office. The findings indicate that this cultural tradition serves as a constructive learning tool for fostering environmental awareness in coastal regions. Through the Madek Mare tradition, residents engage with nature, gain insights into value systems rooted in local culture, and cultivate a social framework that promotes environmental preservation. Additionally, the activity fosters community cohesion. To enhance the Madek Mare as a valuable ecotourism attraction, collaboration between the local community and government is essential to preserve the practice while advocating for environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

Keywords

Environmental awareness, Environmental knowledge, Cultural activity

Introduction

The coastal region of Lombok in West Nusa Tenggara Province is currently under development by the Indonesian government as a designated special economic zone. This strategic initiative aims to enhance the tourism sector in West Nusa Tenggara, which possesses significant potential, while concurrently fostering economic growth. Various facilities are being established to position Lombok's coastal area as a recognized international tourist destination, including essential infrastructure, hotels, restaurants,

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and a range of services for visitors. However, the swift pace of development presents considerable challenges for the government, as it may adversely affect local communities and pose threats to environmental sustainability [1].

Previous studies indicate that the development and expansion of tourist areas can negatively impact environmental quality through pollution and the accumulation of tourism waste [2][3]. Previous research has also indicated concerns regarding the potential ecological impacts of tourism development within the coastal regions of Lombok. Such concerns encompass issues such as pollution, the decline of biodiversity, and the physical degradation of coastal habitats [4]. The development of tourist areas can also represent a substantial threat to local customs and cultural traditions, which may be perceived as incompatible with the standards of world-class tourism. Consequently, it is imperative to recognize and address this concern to safeguard the distinct identity and heritage of local communities [5]. These local traditions possess a rich heritage and traditional values that harmonize with nature. They also present an opportunity to develop ecotourism attractions. Ecotourism can be defined as a form of tourism, that is centered around natural environments and incorporates elements of rural culture [3][4].

One cultural activity with significant potential as an ecotourism attraction is the Madek Mare tradition. This traditional cultural activity, observed in the Rambitan region of West Nusa Tenggara, involves locals engaging in various activities by the beach when the sea water recedes. For five days, community members inhabit traditional huts along the beach, where they catch and process fish and other seafood using environmentally friendly methods. This practice has been upheld for decades, with knowledge of traditional fishing techniques being passed down through generations.

This study contends that the Madek Mare represents a cultural activity that illustrates the process of developing local environmental awareness. It emphasizes practices that benefit the environment and serve the community. Environmental awareness is connected to environmental commitment, which is positively associated with pro-environmental behavior [6]. Several factors contribute to the growth of environmental awareness. These include access to natural spaces that facilitate meaningful interactions with nature, the presence of sustainable economic sectors, the promotion of tradition-based value systems, and external pressures to maintain a clean environment [7].

Cultural activity such as the Madek Mare tradition has a significant part in fostering environmental awareness and preserving local heritage [8]. In cultural activity, each member of society plays an active role in maintaining the preservation of the environment. So that environmental awareness becomes a shared responsibility for all members of society [9]. Therefore, cultivating environmental awareness through local cultural traditions is essential, as these traditions, upheld for decades, embody a harmonious relationship with nature. These traditions also educate and inspire the community to recognize the importance of preserving our natural and cultural heritage

[10]. This study explores how the rich traditions of the Madek Mare activity function as productive tools for enhancing environmental awareness and cultivating ecological consciousness within the community.

Method

This research used a descriptive qualitative method, conducting in-depth interviews and direct observation of the Madek Mare ritual in West Nusa Tenggara. The study involves participants from different elements including local residents, representatives from Injourney Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) that manages the tourism area on the coastal of Lombok; and representatives from the West Nusa Tenggara Provincial Tourism Office. Data was collected in September and October 2024. The collected data was analyzed using the pattern matching method, which involves comparing or matching the collected data pattern with a predefined pattern [11].

Results and Discussion

Results

The Madek Mare, or Memadeq, tradition constitutes a significant cultural practice among farmers in the Pujut District, particularly in the Rambitan area, observed annually around September, which corresponds to the fifth month of the Sasak calendar. This tradition has been categorized by informants as a communal gathering activity occurring along the coastline, serving as a form of respite for farmers in anticipation of the upcoming planting season. The term 'Madek Mare' translates to "activity at sea" in the Sasak language.

During the tradition, residents from various villages within the Rambitan area engage in camping on the beach for a duration ranging from one to five days. Participants collaboratively bring essential camping equipment, which includes materials for tent construction, sleeping gear, fishing apparatus, and cooking utensils. The Madek Mare tradition is perceived as pivotal for fostering social bonds and enhancing communal ties among villagers. Notably, participation is inclusive, as individuals engaged in other occupations and school-aged children seek permission to partake in this communal event.

While camping, participants collect and process an assortment of seafood, including fish, shellfish, sea urchins, and octopus, for communal consumption. This gathering also serves as a social venue for young people, wherein males seeking partners can showcase their poetic and rhyming skills in the Sasak language, known as Betandaq. Over time, the expression of these skills has increasingly incorporated technological devices, reflecting changes in cultural practices among the youth.

Environmental consciousness is prominent throughout the Madek Mare tradition, as evidenced by the natural materials utilized during camping. Residents demonstrate a commitment to sustainability by employing coconut leaves for roofing and pandan

leaves as tent bases. Fishing practices involve the use of specific types of wood that contain natural toxins, which are environmentally sustainable and non-detrimental to marine life. While participants catch a variety of seafood, including octopus, shellfish, and sea urchins, a principle of moderation is upheld; residents collect only what is needed for immediate consumption during the event, refraining from taking surplus seafood back to their respective villages.

Although the tradition encompasses participants from various communities, individuals from each village are familiar with designated campsite locations. Furthermore, there is an established norm of environmental stewardship among participants, who are committed to cleaning their campsites thoroughly. No refuse is permitted to be left behind after the event, ensuring that the beach remains unpolluted post-camping. This collective adherence to ecologically responsible practices mitigates potential conflicts regarding campsite usage among different villages.

The findings of this study suggest that the Madek Mare tradition significantly contributes to fostering environmental awareness among local residents, promoting a harmonious relationship with nature. Participants of this tradition utilize natural materials that minimize ecological harm in their daily practices. Various activities associated with the Madek Mare tradition demonstrate an educational approach to sustaining the environmental ecosystem, particularly in terms of sustainable seafood harvesting, where individuals are encouraged to collect only what is necessary and avoid overexploitation.

Furthermore, the tradition instills a strong sense of environmental stewardship, as community members are committed to maintaining cleanliness in their coastal areas. They adhere to practices that require the removal of all camping equipment and refuse, ensuring that the beach remains pristine upon their departure.

The Madek Mare tradition also encompasses agricultural practices aimed at preserving soil fertility. Farmers within the community engage in following, allowing periods of rest for their fields and gardens to maintain ecological balance. Additionally, this cultural practice enhances community awareness regarding land use boundaries, wherein residents are cognizant of their rights and the limitations imposed on land usage. This awareness is crucial in mitigating potential conflicts among community members, as it delineates acceptable practices and promotes cooperative land stewardship among residents.

Discussion

The Madek Mare tradition is a longstanding practice among the Sasak people living in the Rambitan area of West Nusa Tenggara. Regarded as a communal activity that takes place before the planting season, this tradition embodies various values of local wisdom that promote environmental awareness. Research has shown that the activities associated with the Madek Mare tradition have been passed down through generations, imparting practices that foster a harmonious relationship with nature. These practices

include maintaining ecological balance, ensuring environmental cleanliness, preserving soil fertility, and understanding land boundaries. As a result, the Madek Mare tradition serves as an essential expression of local wisdom that encourages commitment to and pro-environmental behavior within the community. This aligns with the findings of Niswatin, Wasino, & Suyahmo, et al., who note the importance of environmental awareness in such practices [10]. However, in contrast to the findings presented in the study, the Madek Mare tradition demonstrates that environmental awareness must extend beyond the realms of education and socialization; rather, it requires practical application in everyday life. From an early age, individuals within this culture are encouraged to adopt and embody a sustainable and environmentally conscious lifestyle. This practice is subsequently internalized, forming a distinctive cultural value that sets the Madek Mare tradition apart from other cultural practices.

The Madek Mare tradition serves as an important educational tool for enhancing environmental awareness in coastal regions. It encourages residents to interact meaningfully with their natural surroundings, fosters an understanding of local cultural values, and nurtures a supportive social framework that promotes community engagement in environmental preservation efforts. This perspective aligns with prior research indicating that cultural activities fostering environmental awareness are facilitated by several key factors. These include accessibility to natural spaces that encourage meaningful interactions with the environment, the presence of sustainable economic sectors, the promotion of tradition-based value systems, and external pressures aimed at maintaining a clean and healthy environment [7].

This unique cultural practice strengthens interpersonal connections among residents, contributing to a sense of community cohesion. It fosters closeness through various activities, such as sharing marine catches, relocating residents' encampments, and establishing a collective understanding of land boundaries. The sharing of marine catches among individuals contributes significantly to community cohesiveness and equitable access to food. Specifically, when members of a community participate in fishing activities, they engage in the distribution of their catches, thereby ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to share and consume the available food. This practice prevents the exclusion of any community member, as those who obtain larger quantities of catch are likely to share their excess with others, reinforcing the importance of cooperation and mutual support within the community. These aspects of the Madek Mare tradition set it apart from many other cultural practices. Furthermore, this unique relational dynamic positions the Madek Mare tradition as a strong candidate for development into an ecotourism initiative. This alignment is supported by Kurniasari, Muawanah, and Yuliati, who emphasize that the tradition is a distinctive representation of the interconnectedness between individuals and their maritime and terrestrial environments. However, it is important to recognize the existing stigma from various sectors that view this tradition as a reflection of the residents' poverty and lack of education [1].

In this context, it is essential for the provincial government, ITDC; which manages the tourism area along the coast of Lombok, and community leaders to work together and collaborate. This collaboration is vital for effectively presenting this tradition, turning it into an attractive tourist destination.

Conclusion

The Madek Mare is a cultural tradition rooted in local wisdom that emphasizes the importance of environmental preservation. Each aspect of this tradition showcases various sustainable environmental practices. This tradition facilitates residents' interactions with their natural environment, fosters an understanding of value systems inherent in local culture, and nurtures a social framework that promotes community engagement in environmental preservation efforts. The Madek Mare tradition has strong potential to be developed into an ecotourism attraction, highlighting a culture based on local wisdom and a commitment to environmental stewardship. To ensure the Madek Mare tradition remains a valuable ecotourism experience, collaboration between the local community and the government is essential for preserving the tradition while promoting environmental care and sustainable tourism.

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