

Empowering Communities Through Sapta Pesona to Enhance Tourism Service Quality in Candi Belahan Village

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Article history

Submitted: 2025/11/01; Revised: 2025/11/07; Accepted: 2025/12/10

Abstract

Candi Belahan Village in Gempol District, Pasuruan Regency, possesses unique historical and cultural tourism potential that remains underutilized due to limited community awareness of tourism service standards. This community service program aimed to empower local tourism actors by implementing *Sapta Pesona* principles—safety, orderliness, cleanliness, coolness, beauty, friendliness, and memorable experiences—to enhance the quality of tourism services and strengthen destination management. The program was conducted from July to August 2025, utilizing a participatory training and mentoring approach that involved 30 local participants, including members of the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*), traders, and local guides. Activities consisted of preliminary assessment, training, field mentoring, and evaluation to encourage behavioral and environmental transformation. The results indicated a substantial increase in participants' understanding and application of *Sapta Pesona*, with post-training assessments showing marked improvement in knowledge and service practices, along with enhanced cleanliness, orderliness, and the development of thematic photo spots reflecting local identity. Collaboration between the community, *Pokdarwis*, and the village government strengthened collective ownership and coordination in managing the tourism area. Overall, the program not only improved tourism service quality but also demonstrated a replicable model for community-based tourism development that may inform broader village tourism policies and future capacity-building initiatives.

Keywords

Candi Belahan Village; Community Empowerment; *Sapta Pesona*, Sustainable Tourism; Tourism Service Quality



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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a strategic role in supporting local economic growth and community welfare. In tourism village development, the active involvement of local communities is essential for ensuring the sustainability and competitiveness of destinations (Sunyoto et al., 2024; Syahputra & Taqiyah, 2025). Community capacity, which includes natural and human resources, forms the basis for effective tourism management and supports local economic development (Bashori, 2023). Strengthening public awareness and service quality is therefore necessary to improve destination readiness and visitor satisfaction (Moerni et al., 2023; Santoso et al., 2022).

One of the national frameworks for tourism development is the *Sapta Pesona* concept, consisting of seven principles: safety, orderliness, cleanliness, coolness, beauty, friendliness, and memorable experiences (Hadi & Widyaningsih, 2020). Consistent application of these principles has been shown to enhance visitor satisfaction and strengthen destination identity (Mukti et al., 2025; Wisnawa et al., 2019). Meanwhile, natural tourism remains an important potential for regional development, particularly for destinations with outdoor attractions and cultural heritage assets (Virgiawan et al., 2022).

Candi Belahan Village, located in Wonosunyo, Gempol District, Pasuruan Regency, possesses significant historical and cultural potential through the presence of the 11th-century Belahan Temple and its natural spring (Zulaikah et al., 2024). The village is home to 4,512 residents, with a large portion, approximately 531 individuals, working primarily as farmers. Despite its strong cultural tourism assets, the community continues to face challenges in tourism management, visitor services, and cultural heritage preservation, hindering efforts to develop the village as a professional and sustainable tourism destination. Preliminary observations indicate that tourism services in the village remain suboptimal. Key challenges include limited community understanding of the *Sapta Pesona* principles, low service competence, and inadequate environmental management, particularly in terms of cleanliness and aesthetics. Previous studies have shown that structured training and mentoring can significantly enhance community competence in implementing *Sapta Pesona* (Martina et al., 2024; Megananda & Ismail, 2023; Septiana et al., 2023). However, such initiatives have not yet been carried out in Candi Belahan Village. This highlights the need for a more systematic community empowerment program to support sustainable tourism development.

This program also offers a distinctive contribution compared with previous community service initiatives, as it integrates local cultural elements of Candi Belahan

with a participatory mentoring model that prioritizes behavioral transformation. Rather than focusing solely on knowledge transfer, the program emphasizes hands-on practice and community-driven decision-making, enabling tourism actors to internalize *Sapta Pesona* principles and apply them consistently in their daily interactions with visitors.

In response to these challenges, this community service initiative was developed to enhance the capacity of local tourism actors through a structured training program and participatory mentoring focused on applying the *Sapta Pesona* principles. The program aims to empower the community by strengthening their competency in applying the *Sapta Pesona* principles in daily tourism practices. This goal aims to enhance the functional and aesthetic appeal of tourism facilities, improve service quality, and contribute to the development of a cleaner, more orderly, and more memorable tourism environment in Candi Belahan Village.

2. METHODS

This program employed a participatory community development approach that integrated participatory training and mentoring to strengthen the capacity of local tourism actors. The approach emphasized active engagement, collaborative learning, and the practical application of *Sapta Pesona* principles within the community. The program was implemented in Candi Belahan Village, Gempol District, Pasuruan Regency, East Java, from July to August 2025. The village was selected because of its distinctive historical and cultural tourism assets, particularly the 11th-century Candi Belahan heritage site, which holds significant archaeological and cultural value. The implementation involved lecturers and students from Universitas Yudharta Pasuruan as facilitators within the university's community engagement initiative.

The program targeted local tourism actors who directly influence visitor experiences, including members of the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*), vendors, local guides, and parking attendants. Their roles positioned them as essential participants for strengthening service quality and environmental stewardship. The focus of this group was intended to build foundational competencies necessary for applying *Sapta Pesona* in daily tourism practices.

The method applied in this program combined the Training and Mentoring approaches, emphasizing community participation and local asset utilization. This approach aimed to empower tourism actors by enhancing their understanding and practice of the *Sapta Pesona* principles, which encompass safety, orderliness, cleanliness, coolness, beauty, friendliness, and memorable experiences, to improve tourism service quality and environmental management.

The implementation process consists of four main stages, as shown in Figure 1, which are carried out sequentially as follows:

1. Preliminary Assessment

The initial stage involved observation and informal interviews to identify existing problems related to tourism service quality and community awareness. The assessment focused on determining the current application level of the *Sapta Pesona* principles and mapping local resources and stakeholders.

2. Training and Awareness Development

The second stage focused on knowledge enhancement through workshops, presentations, and discussions. Thirty participants, including members of the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*), traders, guides, and parking attendants, were involved in the study. The training material introduced the meaning and application of *Sapta Pesona* in daily tourism practices, emphasizing service ethics and environmental cleanliness.

3. Field Mentoring and Practical Application

The third stage aimed to transform the training knowledge into real actions. Participants received direct mentoring in implementing *Sapta Pesona* at key tourism locations, including entrances, pedestrian paths, parking areas, and public facilities. Activities included cleaning and organizing the tourism area, installing informative signs, improving safety routes, and creating thematic photo spots that reflect local identity.

4. Evaluation and Reflection

The final stage consisted of monitoring, evaluation, and reflection activities conducted through structured observations and participant feedback sessions. The evaluation employed a combination of pre- and post-training questionnaires, behavioral observation checklists, and brief semi-structured interviews to assess changes in participants' understanding, service behavior, and environmental management practices. The pre- and post-questionnaires assessed the improvement in conceptual knowledge of the *Sapta Pesona* principles. At the same time, the observation checklist captured behavioral changes during tourism activities, including cleanliness practices, visitor interaction, and adherence to safety and orderliness standards. Participant interviews provided qualitative insights into challenges, perceived benefits, and commitments to future implementation. Findings from these evaluation instruments were used to refine the *Sapta Pesona* training module, ensuring its

relevance, clarity, and applicability as a sustainable reference for continued community use.

Through this structured and participatory framework, the program substantially strengthened local stakeholders' conceptual understanding, practical skills, and service-oriented behavior while simultaneously cultivating a collective commitment to maintaining a clean, orderly, and hospitable tourism environment. The outcomes of the intervention were systematically documented and synthesized into a comprehensive *Sapta Pesona Implementation and Training Module*, designed to facilitate the sustained application and scalability of the program across comparable tourism villages. The definitive outputs of this activity include the development of a standardized *Sapta Pesona* training module, a complete repository of program documentation, and empirically measurable enhancements in community capacity, thereby providing a replicable model for community-based tourism development.

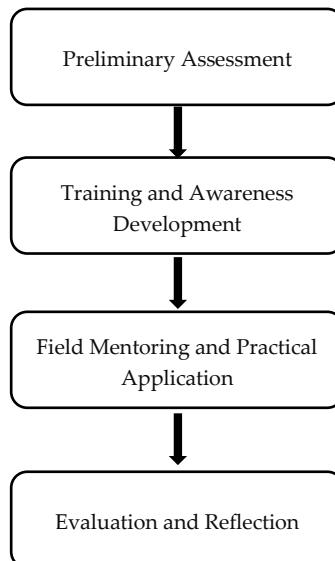


Figure 1. Program implementation stages *Sapta Pesona*.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

3.1.1. Improvement of Knowledge and Awareness

Before implementing the *Sapta Pesona* concept, a discussion session was held with community leaders to explore the potential of the village's tourism destinations (fig. 2). This was followed by a training session that significantly improved participants' understanding of the *Sapta Pesona* concept and its seven core principles: safety, orderliness, cleanliness, coolness, beauty, friendliness, and memorable experiences. Before the program, most participants, particularly vendors and parking attendants, had a limited understanding of the practical application of these values.

After attending the workshop, participants demonstrated significant improvements in conceptual understanding, as evidenced by an increase in their average knowledge score from 42% in the pre-training assessment to 81% in the post-training evaluation. Observable behavioral changes in the field accompanied this cognitive improvement. Quantitative monitoring results showed that 87% of participants consistently applied hospitality principles by greeting visitors appropriately, 76% demonstrated increased compliance with order in managing parking areas, and 82% implemented better hygiene practices at their respective work points, including food stalls and public spaces. Collectively, these data demonstrate a substantive shift toward more professional and service-oriented behaviors aligned with the *Sapta Pesona* framework.



Figure 2. Discussion on preparations for the implementation of *Sapta Pesona*.

This result is consistent with the findings of Handayani et al. (2025), who emphasize that participatory training facilitates meaningful knowledge transformation and enhances community competence in service-based sectors (Handayani et al., 2025). The observed shift in participants' mindset toward more professional tourism service practices further demonstrates progress toward the program's primary objectives, namely, improving service quality and strengthening community empowerment in managing the tourism environment.

3.1.2. Enhancement of Tourism Environment and Facilities

Field mentoring led to noticeable improvements in the village's physical environment (Fig. 3). Participants reorganized parking spaces, installed directional signage, cleaned access routes, and placed categorized waste bins at strategic locations.

Additionally, thematic photo spots were developed in key areas such as the Ken Dedes Spring Area and the Belahan Temple Courtyard (fig. 4), which enhanced the site's visual appeal and introduced new points of interest for visitors.



Figure 3. Field mentoring improved the cleanliness, organization, and aesthetics of the tourism area.



Figure 4. Thematic photo spots are in the Ken Dedes Spring Area and the Belahan Temple Courtyard.

In addition, new thematic photo spots were developed to highlight local cultural heritage, such as the Ken Dedes Spring Area and the Belahan Temple Courtyard. These enhancements not only improved the visual appeal of the tourism area but also increased visitor engagement and satisfaction. Similar initiatives have been noted by Nofiyanti et al. (2021), who found that strengthened visual identity and aesthetic improvements significantly enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of tourism villages (Nofiyanti et al., 2021). These outcomes directly support the program's core objectives by enhancing the overall quality of tourism services and empowering the community to contribute to the development of the destination actively.

3.1.3. Strengthening Community Participation and Collaboration

The participatory approach applied during the mentoring stage encouraged collaboration among local stakeholders, including *Pokdarwis* members, village officials, traders, and youth communities. Through collective activities such as joint

clean-ups and safety inspections, the sense of ownership toward the tourism site increased substantially (fig. 5).

The empowerment process fostered stronger communication between the village government and local tourism actors, resulting in more coordinated efforts to promote the destination through social media and community networks. This finding aligns with the principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) described by Alamri et al. (2025), which emphasize that community-driven initiatives are more sustainable when grounded in existing local capacities and assets (Alamri et al., 2025). These strengthened collaborative practices directly reinforce the program's primary objectives by enhancing the quality of tourism services and empowering the community to take an active, collective role in managing the destination.



Figure 5. Joint Activities and Safety Inspections of Tourist Attractions

3.1.4. Sustainable Impacts and Knowledge Dissemination

The final output of the program was the development of a *Sapta Pesona Implementation and Training Module* designed specifically for Candi Belahan Village (fig. 6). The module includes step-by-step guidelines for maintaining service quality, environmental cleanliness, and visitor hospitality. It also serves as a reference document for replication in other tourism villages within Pasuruan Regency.

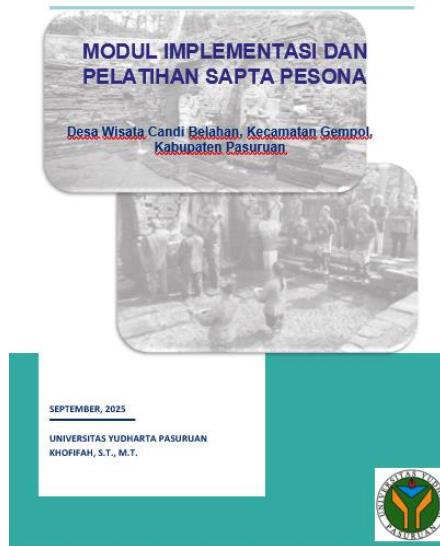


Figure 6. *Sapta Pesona* Implementation and Training Module

The existence of this module ensures the continuity of good practices after the program is completed. Continuous follow-up by *Pokdarwis* members and local leaders strengthens the sustainability of this initiative. According to Ngo & Creutz (2022), the integration of education, mentoring, and participatory monitoring forms a solid foundation for long-term community empowerment in rural tourism management (Ngo & Creutz, 2022).

Overall, the program demonstrated that structured community engagement combining training, mentoring, and participatory implementation can effectively strengthen both the human and environmental dimensions of tourism service quality. The collaboration between local stakeholders and the academic team also contributed to the development of a replicable model for sustainable community-based tourism management. These collective outcomes clearly advance the program's primary objectives by improving the quality of tourism services and empowering the community to play a more active and responsible role in developing their tourism village.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this program demonstrate that participatory training and mentoring were effective in enhancing both knowledge and service behavior, while strengthening community agency in tourism management. This aligns with community empowerment theory, which argues that participatory involvement fosters ownership, belonging, and intrinsic motivation traits reflected in the behavioral improvements observed in Candi Belahan. The increased professionalism of participants supports the claims of Handayani et al. (2025) regarding the role of

participatory learning in accelerating knowledge transformation (Handayani et al., 2025). Likewise, environmental enhancements and thematic photo spots reinforce Nofiyanti et al.'s (2021) argument that visual identity strengthens destination attractiveness (Nofiyanti et al., 2021). The improved coordination between village authorities and tourism actors is also consistent with Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), highlighting the role of existing community capacities in sustaining behavioral change.

Beyond service improvements, the program generated meaningful socio-economic benefits. Enhanced friendliness, cleanliness, and visitor experience led to increased tourist visits, which vendors reported as raising their daily income and stimulating local economic activity. These outcomes demonstrate that empowerment processes can enhance collective economic resilience, promoting both individual competencies and shared development objectives. The aesthetic improvements and coordinated promotional efforts further enhanced destination competitiveness.

Overall, the integration of participatory training, field mentoring, and collaborative implementation significantly strengthened the Candi Belahan community's capacity to manage tourism more sustainably and professionally. Increases in knowledge from 42% to 81% and the adoption of *Sapta Pesona* practices by over 80% of participants demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention. These changes reflect a deeper internalization of service values, providing a foundation for long-term tourism development and enhanced destination competitiveness.

These findings also generate important policy implications. The improvements observed suggest that participatory capacity-building should be institutionalized within village tourism governance. Local governments could integrate *Sapta Pesona*-based training into routine programs for *Pokdarwis* and other frontline actors, prioritizing community-led approaches over top-down directives. The *Sapta Pesona* Implementation Module produced in this program offers a replicable tool for other tourism villages seeking consistent service standards. Additionally, the socio-economic gains underscore the need for policies that integrate cultural heritage preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable tourism, thereby ensuring more competitive and inclusive tourism development.

4. CONCLUSION

The *Sapta Pesona* community service program in Candi Belahan Village successfully strengthened local tourism capacity through structured training, mentoring, and evaluation. Participants' understanding of *Sapta Pesona* principles increased significantly from 42% to 81% accompanied by improvements in service

behavior, environmental cleanliness, and the visual quality of the tourism site. These gains demonstrate that participatory, community-centered learning effectively enhances both individual competence and collective readiness to manage tourism services more professionally. The program also generated socio-economic benefits, as improved visitor experience and better-managed facilities contributed to increased tourist activity and higher daily income for local vendors.

To support long-term sustainability, the program produced the *Sapta Pesona* Implementation Module, which provides a practical reference that can be replicated in other tourism villages. The strengthened collaboration among *Pokdarwis*, village authorities, and local entrepreneurs further reinforces the foundation for ongoing community-based tourism management. Future initiatives are encouraged to integrate digital promotion strategies and periodic mentoring to maintain service quality improvements. Overall, the program contributes to advancing community empowerment and sustainable tourism development while offering a replicable model for strengthening rural tourism governance.

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