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Empowering Local Tourism through Competitive Swimming Events for Sustainable Development at Swembath Natural Springs

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a community empowerment project aimed at revitalizing local tourism at Swembath Natural Springs in Naga Soppa, Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra. Faced with declining visitor numbers and the need to boost local economic activity, this project integrated competitive swimming events as a new attraction while fostering sustainable development. The construction of an international-standard swimming pool served as the foundation for this initiative, offering a venue for sports tourism that attracts both athletes and recreational visitors. The project also included comprehensive training for local businesses, focusing on tourism management, digital marketing, and service improvement, thereby empowering the community to capitalize on the influx of tourists. The results show a significant increase in visitor numbers during swimming competitions, positively impacting local businesses such as food vendors, craft sellers, and accommodation providers. Moreover, the project fostered environmental conservation efforts, ensuring that the natural beauty of Swembath is preserved for future generations. This initiative aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in terms of economic empowerment and environmental sustainability. The community now possesses the tools and infrastructure needed to maintain Swembath as a competitive tourist destination, with a sustainable model that benefits both the environment and the local economy. The project's success highlights the potential of integrating sports tourism and community-based empowerment to foster long-term economic growth and environmental stewardship.

Keyword: Local Tourism, Competitive Swimming, Community Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Swembath Natural Springs

1. Introduction

Tourism has always been a significant driver of economic growth, particularly in regions blessed with natural attractions. Swembath Natural Springs, located in Naga Soppa, Bandar Hulan, Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra, is one such destination that has historically drawn visitors due to its pristine natural beauty and clear water.



Figure 1. Sweembath Natural Baths

However, in recent years, a sharp decline in visitor numbers has negatively impacted both the local economy and the viability of tourism in the area. The challenges faced by Swembath Natural Springs are not unique, but they are urgent [1,2]. The decrease in visitors can be attributed to several factors, including inadequate marketing, lack of appealing activities, and limited infrastructure. The community around Swembath relies heavily on tourism for their livelihoods, engaging in activities such as providing local crafts, food, and cultural experiences. However, without an effective strategy to rejuvenate the tourism appeal of the region, the future of Swembath as a tourist destination seemed uncertain [3].

This community service project was developed to address these challenges by integrating competitive swimming events as a new attraction, leveraging the natural water resources while fostering sustainable development [4,5]. The project also focused on empowering local businesses through training and infrastructure support, aiming to boost the local economy and position Swembath as an internationally recognized tourism destination.



Figure 2. Community Service Team Discussion with Partners and Community

This initiative is aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 15: Life on Land. By prioritizing both economic development and environmental conservation, this project aims to create long-term

sustainability for the local community. Moreover, it reflects the commitment to community-based tourism, where local people take an active role in the development and promotion of their natural resources.

2. Method

The community service project was carried out in two major phases from April to December 2024:

1. Construction of Competitive Swimming Facilities:

The focal point of this phase was the construction of a 50-meter swimming pool with dimensions and facilities adhering to international competition standards. This included:

- Length: 50 meters
- Width: 25 meters
- Depth: Minimum of 1.35 meters at the starting blocks
- Temperature control: Between 25°C and 28°C, suitable for competitive swimming
- Lane ropes: Eight lanes, each separated by a 50 cm gap to ensure competition-grade conditions
- Starting blocks and timing systems: Equipped for official competitions.

The design of the pool was discussed thoroughly with local stakeholders to ensure that it met both the technical requirements for competition and the community's expectations for functionality [6]. The construction was carried out with materials that ensure durability, environmental compatibility, and long-term usage.

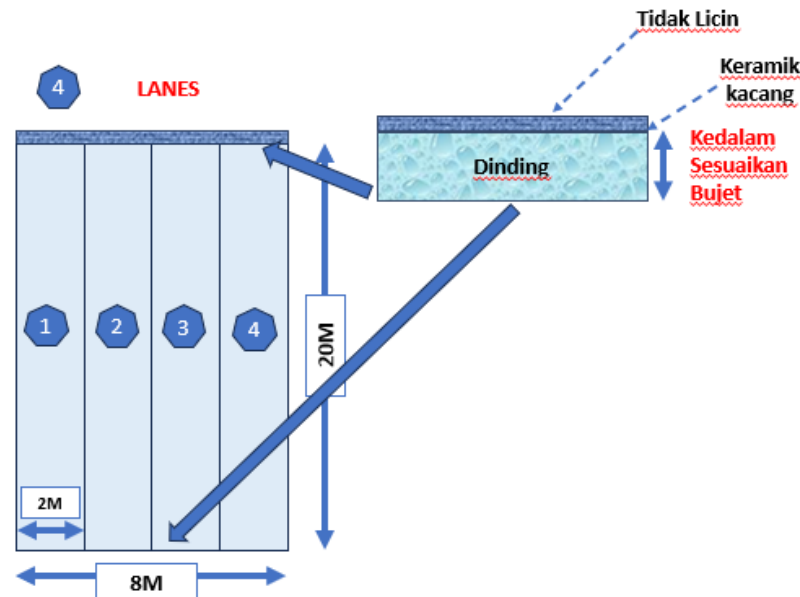


Figure 3. Swimming Pool Design to be Made

2. Community Training and Local Business Empowerment

Training programs were implemented to improve local knowledge and skills in tourism management and digital marketing. The workshops were designed to enable local businesses to better market their services to a wider audience, including through online platforms [7,8]. Community members, including those involved in local crafts, food services, and accommodation, were trained to enhance their business offerings. This involved skills such as improving product quality, customer service, and adopting e-commerce strategies to sell local products online. The competitive swimming events were promoted through multiple platforms, including social media and tourism websites. The events were designed not only to draw athletes but also to create an engaging experience for visitors, offering a mix of sport and cultural tourism [9,10].



Figure 4. Community Training and Local Business Empowerment

3. Result and Discussion

The project produced significant outcomes that addressed the critical issues of declining tourism, economic stagnation, and community engagement at Swembath Natural Springs.

1. Increased Tourism through Swimming Competitions

The construction of the swimming pool successfully created a new attraction at Swembath, drawing a wide range of visitors. Competitive swimming events were organized with participation from schools, local sports clubs, and regional swimming teams. Due to the pool's design, which meets international standards, Swembath was able to host events that attracted both amateur and professional swimmers. These events not only increased the number of visitors during the competitions but also generated sustained interest in Swembath as a potential training and recreational venue for future sports events. Additionally, these events were heavily promoted online through platforms like Instagram and Facebook, which increased the destination's visibility and drew visitors from beyond the local area, thus expanding its reach.



Figure 5. Tourism empowerment training with residents

2. Economic Impact on Local Businesses

Local businesses experienced significant benefits from the influx of tourists. Food vendors, local craft sellers, and accommodation providers reported a sharp increase in demand during the events. By receiving training in customer service and digital marketing, local business owners were able to capitalize on the increased footfall. Furthermore, the introduction of e-commerce platforms allowed

them to reach a broader audience by selling souvenirs and food products online, even after visitors had left the region. The community's ability to host tourists also improved as businesses adapted to higher service standards, enhancing the overall visitor experience. This improvement led to increased visitor satisfaction and repeat visits, contributing to a sustainable economic cycle for the local businesses.

3. Environmental and Social Benefits

A core aspect of the project was preserving the natural beauty of Swembath. Environmental conservation efforts included regular cleaning campaigns and reforestation around the natural springs to maintain the area's ecological integrity. The involvement of the local community in these conservation efforts not only raised awareness about environmental issues but also empowered them to take responsibility for protecting their natural resources. Socially, the project strengthened community bonds as locals worked together toward shared goals. The swimming events, in particular, became community-wide celebrations, fostering a sense of pride and ownership in the tourism project.



Figure 6. Provision of Goods and Supporting Facilities

3.1. Discussion

The success of the swimming competitions at Swembath Natural Springs highlights the importance of integrating sports tourism with local economic and environmental initiatives. By positioning Swembath as a venue for competitive swimming, the project attracted a new demographic of visitors while promoting the area's natural beauty. The promotional efforts through social media proved highly effective in extending Swembath's reach beyond local tourists, bringing in athletes and visitors from a broader geographic region. This highlights the potential for further expansion of Swembath as a regional and international destination.

Economically, the project proved that empowering local businesses through training and digital tools can lead to sustainable tourism development. The capacity of local vendors and service providers to adapt to modern tourism demands—such as digital marketing and online sales—ensured that the benefits of increased visitor numbers extended beyond the events themselves. This model of community-based tourism demonstrates that long-term success in rural tourism development is closely tied to the empowerment and participation of local stakeholders. The project also underscores the need for sustainable environmental management. By incorporating environmental conservation efforts into the tourism strategy, the community not only preserved the natural ecosystem but also ensured that tourism growth did not come at the expense of the environment. This balance between tourism and conservation is critical for the long-term sustainability of Swembath as a tourist destination. Moreover, the strengthened social cohesion and local pride generated by the project suggest that future community-driven initiatives will be well-received and likely to succeed.

The outcomes of this project suggest that the integration of sports tourism with environmental stewardship and local business empowerment provides a replicable model for other regions facing similar challenges. Moving forward, continued collaboration between stakeholders, regular hosting of events, and sustained environmental efforts will be necessary to maintain Swembath's status as a vibrant, sustainable tourism destination.

4. Conclusion

The empowerment of local tourism through the integration of competitive swimming events at Swembath Natural Springs has yielded multiple benefits. By addressing the key issues of declining visitor numbers and local business stagnation, this project has successfully revitalized the tourism sector in Swembath [11]. The newly constructed swimming pool, which meets international competition standards, has provided a lasting infrastructure that will continue to draw visitors and athletes alike. Through targeted training and community engagement, the project also achieved significant economic upliftment. Local businesses are now better equipped to manage and market their products, and the overall visitor experience at Swembath has improved. The positive impacts of the project extend beyond economics; it has fostered environmental stewardship and social cohesion within the local community [12].

Moving forward, it is essential to maintain this momentum by continuously promoting Swembath through various digital platforms and organizing regular swimming events. Sustainable management of the natural springs and ongoing collaboration with local stakeholders will ensure that Swembath remains a thriving tourist destination for years to come.

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