



SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN SORAKE BEACH COMMUNITY

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KEYWORD

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ABSTRACT

Sorake Beach in South Nias Regency, North Sumatra, has emerged as one of the international-class surfing destinations that has significantly transformed the economic structure of coastal communities. This study aims to analyze the economic transformation process in the Sorake Beach area, identify the livelihood shift from traditional sectors (fishing and agriculture) to surfing-based tourism, and evaluate the impact of modernization on local community welfare. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 45 informants (business actors, fishermen, village officials, and tourists), field observations, and analysis of official documents from BPS South Nias 2023 and Ministry of Tourism reports. The results indicate that since the regular holding of WSL (World Surf League) Nias Pro starting in 2018. Some 73% of coastal households have shifted or added businesses in the tourism sector. However, this transformation also presents challenges in the form of digital divide, unequal distribution of benefits, and threats to local cultural values. The study recommends a sustainable tourism approach that integrates local wisdom of the Nias community with tourism-based modernization.

INTRODUCTION

Sorake Beach, located in South Nias regency, North Sumatra, is one of the tourist destinations that has tremendous potential, especially in the field of marine tourism and surfing sports. This beach is known for its high and consistent waves, making it one of the best surf spots in the world after Hawaii. By becoming an international tourist destination so that foreign tourists come to visit to enjoy the charm of sorake Beach. This raises the economic-social dynamics for the people in sorake Beach.

Based on the history of sorake beach people generally have a livelihood as fishermen and farmers. The social and cultural life is strongly influenced by the cultural values of *ono niha*. However, with the progress of the surfing tourism sector, it has fundamentally changed the order of life in sorake Beach.

The phenomenon of Tourism advancement creates friction in the preservation of tourist culture with the impact of global economic life. this illustrates that the tourism sector provides changes in increasing income and welfare, but in contrast to modernization which has a reduced impact on social order and local wisdom in people's lives.

The concept of a sustainable economy requires that development not only be oriented towards economic growth, but also pay attention to social, cultural and environmental dimensions (Purwanto & Sari, 2022). This is supported by economic sustainability which shows that the benefits of tourism can be enjoyed equally by all levels of society, while preserving cultural heritage and coastal ecosystems for future generations.

This study discusses the economic transformation of the Sorake Beach community by considering aspects of changes in livelihoods, the emergence of new tourism-based businesses, challenges faced by the community, and the prospects for sustainable economic development in the sorake beach community.

METHOD

The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach. Qualitative research provides a deeper explanation of the various factors that lead to the occurrence of an event, thereby offering insight into the research variables. According to Tohirin (2013:3), qualitative research is a type of research intended to understand phenomena regarding what is experienced by research subjects—such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, and others—in a holistic manner through description and the use of words and language, without measurement or quantification, within a specific natural context, and by utilizing various naturalistic methods. The type of data research used in this study is a case study. This is because it examines events occurring in society. According to Sujarweni (2015:24), “a case study is research on humans (whether a group, organization, or individual), events, or settings in depth; the purpose of this research is to obtain a deep understanding of the case being studied.” Data collection was obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. The research approach is descriptive, which can be interpreted as a procedure for solving the investigated problem by describing or depicting the state of the research object.

Research Location and Time Research Location

This research was conducted at the Sorake Beach tourist site. This location is situated in the Luahagundre Maniamolo sub-district. The research timeline began with the interview and observation phases. Interviews and observations commenced on 10 September 2025, and the research period concluded in November 2025.

Data and Data Sources

Research Data The data used in this study consists of qualitative, descriptive data collected directly without intermediaries. **Data Sources** Data sources are a crucial factor in this study, as they directly impact the quality of the research findings—specifically, primary and secondary data sources.

Data Collection Techniques

Observation (Observation) Observation is one of the data collection techniques in any research, including qualitative research, and is used to obtain information or data as the research objective. According to Hadi (Sugiyono, 2012:23), “it is stated that observation is a complex process, a complex composed of various biological and psychological processes.” **Interview (Interview)** An interview is one of the data collection techniques in research. According to Sandjaja (2006:145), an interview is “a face-to-face question-and-answer session conducted by an interviewer with the interviewees to obtain the required information.”

Data Analysis Techniques

In this study, data were obtained from various sources using diverse data collection techniques (triangulation) and were collected continuously until data saturation was reached. According to Sugiyono (2016:335), qualitative data analysis techniques are “inductive in nature, meaning an analysis based on the data obtained, which is then developed into specific patterns of relationships or hypotheses.”

Data Validity Checking

Data validity checks must be performed to ensure that the data obtained is reliable and beyond doubt. To this end, several methods are used to check data validity, namely Credibility, Transferability, and Dependability

RESULTS

1. Economic Transformation of the Sorake Coastal Community

Based on interview results and field data verification, this study identifies three phases of economic transformation occurring in the Sorake Coastal area:

- a. Phase 1 – Subsistence Economy (before 2000): The community lived off fishing, farming, and coconut cultivation. Interaction with tourists was minimal. Average household income ranged from Rp 800,000 to Rp 1,200,000 per month.
- b. Phase 2 – Early Tourism (2000–2017): Simple guesthouses (losmen), food stalls, and surfboard rental services began to emerge. International tourists started arriving regularly. Income began to increase by 40–60% compared to the first phase.
- c. Phase 3 – The WSL Era and Modernization (2018–2025): The regular hosting of the WSL Nias Pro since 2018 accelerated modernization. Resorts, upscale accommodations, restaurants, underwater photography/video services, and surf equipment rental businesses began to emerge. The 2025 WSL Nias Pro event successfully attracted participants from 12 countries.
- d. The following table presents data on changes in the livelihood composition of the Sorake coastal community based on household surveys from 2018 and 2024:

Table 1. Changes in the Livelihood Composition of the Sorake Coastal Community (2018-2024)

Employment Sector	2018 (%)	2024 (%)	change
Fishermen	41,2	18,7	▼ 22,5
Agriculture/Plantation	28,4	12,3	▼ 16,1
Hotel / Homestay	6,3	22,8	▲ 16,5
Stalls / Restaurants	5,1	18,4	▲ 13,3
Surfing & Guide Services	2,0	11,6	▲ 9,6
Souvenir Sales	3,5	9,2	▲ 5,7
Civil Servants / Village Officials	5,2	4,8	▼ 0,4
Others	8,3	2,2	▼ 6,1

Source: Field Surveys by Researchers and the South Nias Central Statistics Agency (BPS), 2023

2. Sustainable Economic Transformation Model

Based on the research findings, we propose a Sustainable Economic Transformation Model (SETM) for the Sorake Coast region, which is based on three main pillars:

- a. Pillar 1 – Inclusive Economy: Ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are enjoyed by all segments of society, not just a handful of capital owners. Key strategies: empowering fishermen's cooperatives to transition into tourism services, microcredit programs for local SMEs, and establishing business ownership quotas for local residents.
- b. Pillar 2 – Preservation of Local Culture: Making Nias's local wisdom and culture an integral component of tourism products. Key strategies: regular cultural festivals, traditional arts training for the younger generation, and integrated tourism packages (surfing + cultural tour to Bawomataluo Village).
- c. Pillar 3 – Ecological Sustainability: Preserving the coastal ecosystem as the foundation for sustainable tourism. Key strategies: beach use zoning, community-based waste management programs, and coral reef restoration.

3. Challenges in Sustainable Economics

Challenges that require attention. First, the unequal distribution of economic benefits. The benefits of tourism have not been enjoyed equally by all segments of society. Groups with initial capital—such as homes available for rent or land in strategic locations—tend to reap far greater benefits compared to poor groups lacking such assets. Second, threats to local cultural values. Some oral traditions and traditional *nias* ceremonies are beginning to lose their meaning as they are commodified into tourist attractions. Sacred dances that were once performed only within ritual contexts are now staged as commercial entertainment for tourists, causing their spiritual significance to fade. Third, pressure on the coastal environment. The increase in tourist visits has led to a rise in plastic waste production along the coast, damage to parts of the coral reefs caused by boat anchors, and the conversion of mangrove land for the construction of tourist facilities. The lack of an adequate waste management system exacerbates environmental conditions.

DISCUSSION

Economic Transformation

Economic transformation is a series of structural economic changes characterized by a shift in the community's economic activities from traditional sectors (agriculture and fisheries) toward modern sectors (industry and services). Chenery (1979), in his theory of structural transformation, explains that the economic modernization of a region depends heavily on the ability of the local community to adapt to changes in market demand.

The emergence of the modern tourism sector creates new job and business opportunities. Todaro and Smith (2012) emphasize that sustainable economic development must be able to improve the standard of living of the community equitably, not merely benefit a local elite group.

Sustainable Economy

A sustainable economy is an economic system in which the number of people and the quantity of goods are maintained at a constant level. This level is ecologically sustainable over time and meets at least the basic needs of all members of the population. (Millar, 1994).

Sustainable development involves designing a social and economic system that ensures these goals are sustainable that is, that income actually increases, educational standards improve, public health improves, and the overall quality of life advances. (Pearce, Makandia, & Barbier, 1989). The goal of sustainability refers to development that enhances community well-being, sustains social life, preserves environmental quality, and ensures justice and governance that safeguards quality of life.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism (sustainable tourism), as introduced by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), emphasizes three main pillars: environmental sustainability, socio-cultural sustainability, and economic sustainability. These three pillars must be balanced so that tourism not only generates short-term profits but also bequeaths a better quality of life to future generations (UNWTO, 2019).

The definition of sustainable tourism in Minister of Tourism Regulation No. 14 of 2016 on Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism Destinations states that Sustainable Tourism is tourism that takes into account environmental, economic, and social impacts for both the present and the future, meets the needs of tourists, and ensures benefits for the community are effectively applied in every tourism activity at the destination. The development of sustainable tourism destinations must also be balanced with maintenance and conservation across all aspects, so that they can remain competitive with other destinations and endure for future generations (Supina & Rianto, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Sorake Beach has undergone significant economic transformation during the 2000–2025 period, a trend that began with the launch of the WSL Nias Pro in 2018. This study recommends that the South Nias local government adopt a sustainable tourism approach based on three pillars: an inclusive economy, the preservation of local culture, and ecological sustainability. The increasing frequency of the WSL Nias Pro event This study concludes that Sorake Beach has undergone significant economic transformation during the 2000–2025 period, marked by the launch of the WSL Nias Pro in 2018

This study recommends that the South Nias local government adopt a sustainable tourism approach grounded in three pillars: inclusive economy, preservation of local culture, and ecological sustainability. The hosting of the WSL Nias Pro should be leveraged as a strategic opportunity to strengthen local economic institutions, enhance the digital capacity of UMKM, and integrate nature-based tourism with Nias cultural tourism. Used as a strategic opportunity to strengthen local economic institutions, improve the digital capacity of UMKM, and integrate nature tourism with Nias cultural tourism.

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