Architecture
Image Studies

Sustainable Tourism Competitiveness Enhancement Model in North Buton Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to formulate a model for developing sustainable tourism competitiveness in North Buton Regency, which has a wealth of natural and cultural tourism resources but has not been optimally managed. The study used a qualitative approach with an exploratory design, making North Buton Regency tourism the unit of analysis. Data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews, and expert judgment with 20 experts from local government elements, tourism actors, academics, community leaders, and tourists, and supported by analysis of regional planning and policy documents. Data were analyzed using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method to determine the priority scale of variables and indicators for developing sustainable tourism competitiveness. The results showed that the model for developing sustainable tourism competitiveness in North Buton Regency was influenced by six main variables, namely tourism planning and development policies, core resources and tourist attractions, tourism management, supporting factors of resources, tourism services, and evaluation of destination resilience. In terms of priority, tourism planning and development policies ranked highest, followed by core resources and tourist attractions and tourism management, while supporting factors of resources, tourism services, and evaluation of destination resilience played a role as strengthening factors for sustainability. These findings confirm that developing competitive and sustainable tourism in North Buton Regency must begin with strong political and policy commitment, accompanied by the preservation of natural and cultural resources, effective destination governance, and ongoing evaluation of social, economic, and environmental impacts.

Keywords: *Tourism Competitiveness, Sustainable Tourism, Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), Development Model, North Buton Regency.*

Introduction

Tourism is a strategic sector in the global economy, contributing significantly to economic growth, job creation, and improving public welfare. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the travel and tourism sector contributed approximately USD 9.2 trillion to the global economy, supporting 334 million jobs, and contributing 10.4 percent to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 (Jus and Misrahi, 2021). This substantial contribution demonstrates that tourism functions not only as an economic driver but also as a social development instrument capable of improving the welfare of local communities when managed optimally and sustainably. In the context of global competition, the competitiveness of tourism destinations is a crucial issue that must be addressed by governments and industry players. Tourism competitiveness refers to a destination's ability to attract tourists, provide enjoyable and memorable experiences, and generate long-term economic benefits for local communities without compromising the sustainability of natural and cultural resources (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999; Ritchie and Crouch, 2005). To achieve competitive advantage, tourism destinations rely not only on the strengths of their natural and cultural resources but also require the support of infrastructure, human resources, accessibility, amenities, promotion, and effective destination governance (Arabov et al., 2024).

North Buton Regency, as an autonomous region in Southeast Sulawesi Province, possesses diverse tourism potential, encompassing natural tourism, marine tourism, man-made tourism, and

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cultural tourism, all of which remain relatively pristine and authentic. The availability of unique natural resources and cultural heritage is a core strength in building a destination's competitive advantage (Thong et al., 2020). North Buton's geographical location, close to leading national destinations such as Wakatobi and Baubau City, also provides strategic opportunities as a supporting area through the spillover effects of tourism development (Zhang, 2023). Its unsaturated marine tourism potential, tropical rainforest areas, and the presence of endemic flora and fauna are key attractions for tourists, including international tourists arriving through the Operation Wallacea program (Horak et al., 2023). In addition to natural resources, North Buton also boasts a rich and well-preserved cultural heritage, such as the Poriwangaa tradition, Haroano Tau, harvest festivals, and various historical relics such as historic forts. Cultural heritage has been proven to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations and is a key motivator in tourists' decisions to choose a destination (Akhmedenov and Sdykov, 2021; Kutlu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). However, the presence of abundant tourism resources is not sufficient to guarantee a destination's competitiveness without effective management, local community participation, and government policies that support sustainable tourism development (Gonzales et al., 2023).

Various studies have developed models of tourism destination competitiveness, including those by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), Dwyer and Kim (2010), and Goffi (2013), which emphasize the importance of integrating comparative and competitive advantages, the role of destination management, and supporting factors and situational conditions. Gonzalez-Rodríguez et al. (2023) later expanded this approach by integrating the managerial efficiency dimension and the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), while Posch et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of destination resilience in the face of dynamic environmental risks. However, to date, there is no universal model or indicator that can be used to comprehensively measure tourism destination competitiveness, given the complexity and unique characteristics of each destination (Shariffuddin et al., 2021). Given this complexity, tourism competitiveness is understood as a contextual and dynamic concept, necessitating the development of a model tailored to the local characteristics of the destination (Dwyer and Kim, 2003; Goffi, 2013). Therefore, this study aims to develop a sustainable tourism competitiveness model in North Buton Regency by integrating key variables and indicators from the models of Ritchie and Crouch (2003), Dwyer and Kim (2010), Goffi (2013), and Gonzalez-Rodríguez et al. (2023), and enriches the perspective of destination resilience as proposed by Posch et al. (2024). The development of this model is expected to serve as a conceptual and practical basis for formulating competitive and sustainable tourism management policies in North Buton Regency.

Literature Review

Definition of Tourism

Etymologically, tourism comes from Sanskrit which consists of the word pari which means many, repeated, or going around and wisata which means journey or traveling, which is synonymous with the word travel in English (Yoeti, 2018); legally, Law Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism defines tourism as various tourism activities supported by facilities and services provided by the community, entrepreneurs, government, and regional governments, while Majid et al (2009) views tourism as a temporary journey undertaken by individuals or groups from one area to another not to earn a living, but for recreation and to fulfill various non-economic needs, and in a broader sense, tourism is understood as the overall integrated effort undertaken by the government, entrepreneurs, and the community in developing tourism based on religious values, preservation of natural and cultural resources, and by considering political, economic, social, cultural, and defense and security interests, thus confirming that the government, business actors, and the community are key actors who interact with each other in building the tourism industry (Zaenuri, 2012).

Destination attractions in the form of nature, culture, and cultural heritage are the main components that tourists pay close attention to when choosing a travel destination (Chin et al., 2020), including nature-based tourism that aligns with conservation values such as ecotourism, scientific research, bird watching, and nature photography (Trisic et al., 2024), as well as the motivation to enjoy the sun, sea, comfortable climate, and new experiences (Heriqbaldi et al., 2023); From the perspective of tourists, natural resources, cultural heritage, and special events have a significant impact on the competitiveness of a destination (Lo et al., 2017), as history and culture are strong motivations for visiting, thus the preservation and proper utilization of cultural heritage are key to the sustainability and popularity of a destination (Akhmedenov & Sdykov, 2021), where the authenticity and aesthetics of traditional architecture, the richness of local culture, and the uniqueness of products such as crafts, customs, and historical sites shape the perception and satisfaction of tourists (Zhang et al., 2024; Trisic et al., 2023),

while sustainable tourism development is rooted in the concept of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations (WECD, 1987 in Goffi, 2013), emphasizing that competitiveness without sustainability is an illusion because destinations must be managed efficiently with sustainability as a key pillar through comprehensive planning, impact management, local community involvement, and the provision of unique and comprehensive tourism experiences for tourists, including international tourists (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Lu & Nepal, 2009; Goffi, 2013; Ngondo et al., 2024; Parrilla-Gonzalez et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2024).

Tourism Competitiveness

Tourism competitiveness is influenced by various factors such as the level of regional economic development, the quality of the tourism environment, and overall tourism performance (Zhang et al., 2023), which Crouch and Ritchie (1999) define as the ability of a destination to attract tourists, increase visitor flow, provide pleasant and unforgettable experiences, and generate economic benefits for local communities, so that its development requires determining indicators as factors attracting tourists, including cultural resources, variety of activities, service quality, hospitality, entertainment, marketing management, price, destination environment, and security (Rebelo & Patuleia, 2022); Various models have identified key factors of competitiveness, such as ten determinants according to Rheeders (2022) which include natural resources and strategic location, safety and security, accommodation, historical and cultural heritage, transportation, bureaucracy, leadership and political stability, technology, innovation, communication, and essential services, as well as seven indicators according to Goffi (2013) which refers to Muller (1994), while Gonzalez (2023) emphasizes that a large comparative advantage does not necessarily lead to a competitive advantage without effective managerial capabilities, and Dwyer and Kim (2010) emphasize the importance of developing competitiveness indicators as a tool to identify the determinants of tourist decisions and the relative strengths and weaknesses of destinations, although until now there has been no universal agreement on the definition or measurement standards for the competitiveness of tourism destinations, so this concept remains multidimensional and contextual (Sharifuddin et al., 2021).

Insights into the Sustainable Competitiveness Model Variables

Core resources and tourist attractions are the most central elements in shaping the competitiveness of a destination because tourists pay close attention to components such as nature, culture, and cultural heritage when choosing a travel destination (Chin, 2020; Lu et al., 2023), so their development needs to emphasize preserving the authenticity of the landscape while simultaneously adapting harmoniously to the environment without causing excessive damage (Wei & Zhang, 2024); Nature-based attractions such as marine tourism, ecotourism, and agrotourism remain high because they are supported by clean seas, beautiful views, a sustainable environment, the availability of basic coastal facilities, and opportunities for education and community empowerment that simultaneously increase the marketing and visibility of the area (Horak et al., 2023; Magas et al., 2023; Abdullah et al., 2022; Zakaria et al., 2024), while in cultural tourism, cultural heritage functions as a valuable asset that encourages visiting motivation, satisfaction, and perceptions of competitiveness through uniqueness, authenticity of traditional architecture, museums and cultural attractions, integration of visitor technology, and careful management to avoid the threat of damage due to tourism intensity (Wardana et al., 2019; Kutlu et al., 2024; Kontogeorgis & Varotsis, 2022; Thong et al., 2020; Herman et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024); This attraction is strengthened when the destination provides a comprehensive experience through diversified activities, cultural events, nightlife, festivals (including culinary festivals), and local products such as crafts, customs, and historical sites, as this strategy encourages tourists' length of stay and spending while strengthening the destination's image and brand, including for international tourists who demand a complete range of complementary experiences (Faerber et al., 2020; Zarotis, 2021; Wang & Krakover, 2017; Wei & Zhang, 2023; Ngondo et al., 2024; Parrilla-González et al., 2024).

Several models for increasing sustainable tourism competitiveness have been developed by previous researchers, such as Gonzalez-Rodríguez et al. (2023), Goffi (2013), and Dwyer and Kim (2010). These three models use variables and indicators that are almost all the same as the variables and indicators of the model developed by Rich & Crouch (2003). Then, the researcher tried to develop a new model by including one of the determining factors of sustainable tourism competitiveness discovered by Posh et al. (2024), namely the destination resilience factor. Based on these findings, the researcher created a new model using the variables and indicators that have been used by four previous researchers and added a new variable, namely "Destination Resilience Evaluation" adopted from the

theory of Posch et al. (2024) with the following indicators: "Destination Sustainability," "Socioeconomic Impact on the Community," "Demand Mitigation," and "Investment Openness."

Figure 3.1. Research Conceptual Framework
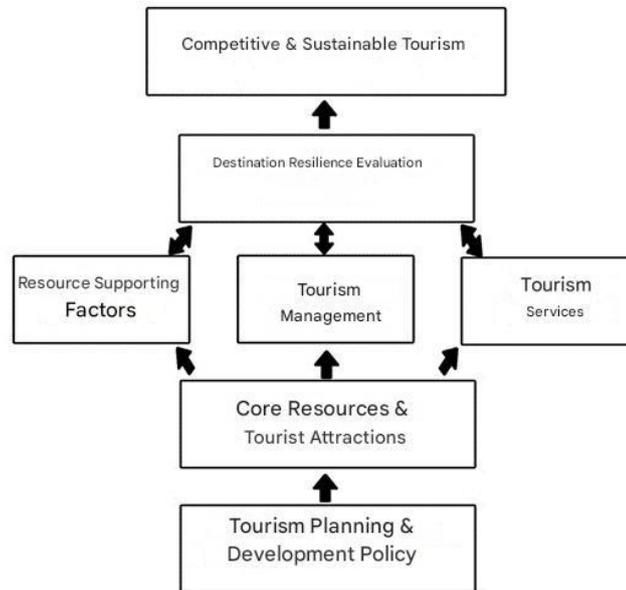
Research Methods

This research was conducted in North Buton Regency in six sub-districts (Kulisusu, North Kulisusu, West Kulisusu, Bonegunu, Kambowa, and North Wakorumba) for four months, namely August–November 2025, with two months of data collection and two months of data processing as well as dissertation preparation and guidance. The research design was directed to answer the question "How is the Sustainable Tourism Competitiveness Development Model in North Buton Regency" with the tourism analysis unit of North Buton Regency. Data sources come from field observations, interviews using Expert Choice and in-depth interviews, and document studies, with 20 experts selected for their capacity to understand North Buton tourism (elements of the tourism office, Bappeda, DPRD, sub-district heads, HPI, ASITA, Pokdarwis, academics, Wallacea tourists and guides, cultural observers, and the Secretary of the Public Works Office), plus supporting documents such as the 2025–2030 RPJMD, RIPPARKAB 2022, Regent's Decree Number 382/2018 and 48/2019 concerning tourist villages, Regional Regulation Number 18 of 2022 concerning cultural heritage management, PPKD 2018, and other relevant documents. Data collection was carried out through observation (focusing on infrastructure, visitors, and governance), interviews (expert assessment and in-depth interviews), and documentation, with instruments in the form of Expert Choice, stationery, calculators, cameras, computers, printers, and supporting equipment. Data analysis used the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method (Saaty, 1988) through the formation of hierarchies, the preparation of pairwise comparison matrices on a scale of 1–9, the calculation of weights using eigenvector/maximum eigenvalue, consistency checking, and evaluation of alternative priorities, with weighting processing carried out using Microsoft Excel.

Operational Definition of Variables

The Core Resources and Tourist Attractions variable refers to the level of conditions, characteristics, and positive attributes of the natural, heritage, and cultural elements of a destination, making it attractive, valuable, and capable of supporting a satisfying tourist experience.

The Resource Supporting Factors variable refers to all basic facilities provided by the government or other public bodies for the benefit of tourism and the wider community.

The Tourism Planning and Development Policy variable refers to a series of regulations, strategies, and actions designed to develop and manage tourism activities in a responsible and sustainable manner.

The Tourism Management variable refers to the tourism development process that emphasizes increasing destination competitiveness and minimizing negative impacts on natural, heritage, and cultural resources.

The Tourism Services variable refers to the processes implemented by tourism destinations, attractions, service providers, and other stakeholders to understand and meet tourist expectations.

The Destination Resilience Evaluation variable refers to the processes implemented to control the development, management, and service processes of tourism to ensure a destination's competitiveness and sustainability.

Research Result

North Buton Regency is a new autonomous region resulting from the division of Muna Regency based on Law Number 14 of 2007 dated January 2, 2007 concerning the formation of North Buton Regency in Southeast Sulawesi Province, with an administrative area consisting of 6 sub-districts, namely Bonegunu, Kambowa, North Wakorumba, Kulisusu, West Kulisusu, and North Kulisusu, which includes 78 villages and 12 sub-districts, has a land area of 1,923.03 km² (BPN) and a population of 73,766 people in 2024 (Disdukcapil), and is geographically located south of the equator at 4°06'–5°15' South Latitude and 122°59'–123°15' East Longitude with a tropical climate with an average temperature of 26–28°C, the rainy season in October–July and the dry season in August–September (BPS, 2025), borders the Wawonii Strait to the north, the Banda Sea and Wakatobi Regency to the east, Buton Regency to the south, and the Buton Strait and Muna Regency to the west, thus placing North Buton in a strategic position in tourism development because it is on the shipping route from Kendari City to Wakatobi and has land and sea connections with Baubau City, Buton Regency, and Muna Regency, which are developing their tourism sectors.

To develop a model for developing sustainable tourism competitiveness in North Buton, this study adopted variables and indicators that have been proven relevant in various previous studies, namely the models of Rich & Crouch (2003), Dwyer and Kim (2010), Goffi (2013), and Gonzalez-Rodríguez et al. (2023), which include: (1) core resources and tourist attractions (natural resources, heritage and culture, combination of activities, special events, and entertainment), (2) supporting resource factors (accessibility, amenities, ancillaries, and market relations), (3) tourism planning and development policies (government political commitment, institutional formation and human resource development, identification and mapping of potential, planning and development, and vision), (4) tourism management (preservation of tourist attractions, pentahelix collaboration, promotion and branding, financing, and information and research), and (5) tourism services (price competitiveness, security and safety, international openness, environmental sustainability, and cleanliness and health), then enriched with the addition of new variables from Posch et al. (2024), namely the evaluation of destination resilience (destination sustainability, socio-economic impacts on the community, demand mitigation, and investment openness), which was then analyzed through expert judgment and in-depth interviews using Expert Choice and processed using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method to produce a hierarchical structure, a pairwise comparison matrix between indicators and between variables, and determining the priority order of indicators and variables in developing sustainable tourism competitiveness in North Buton Regency.

The sustainable tourism competitiveness development model in North Buton was developed by adopting variables and indicators from Rich & Crouch (2003), Dwyer and Kim (2010), Goffi (2013), and Gonzalez-Rodríguez et al. (2023), then enriched with additional variables from Posch et al. (2024). The variables used include: (1) core resources and tourist attractions (natural resources, heritage and culture, activity mix, special events, entertainment), (2) supporting resource factors (accessibility, amenities, ancillaries, market relations), (3) tourism planning and development policies (government political commitment, institutional formation and human resource development, potential identification and mapping, planning and development, vision), (4) tourism management (tourist attraction preservation, pentahelix collaboration, promotion and branding, financing, information and research), (5) tourism services (price competitiveness, security and safety, international openness, environmental sustainability, cleanliness and health), and (6) destination resilience evaluation (destination sustainability, socio-economic impacts on the community, demand mitigation, investment openness).

These six variables and their indicators were used to develop a hierarchical structure for a priority-based decision-making process through in-depth interviews and expert assessments using Expert Choice. They were then analyzed using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method. The AHP process involves developing a hierarchical structure, creating a pairwise comparison matrix between

indicators for each variable, evaluating the consistency of the assessments, and then using an intervariable comparison matrix to examine the relationships and relative importance at the variable level. This results in indicator priorities for each variable, as well as priorities between variables.

The analysis at the indicator level reveals a relatively clear priority pattern: for the core resources and tourist attractions variable, the top priority is natural resources (0.493), followed by heritage and culture (0.194), and activity combinations (0.170); for the resource supporting factors variable, accessibility is the highest priority (0.605), followed by amenities (0.153), and market relations (0.122); for the tourism planning and development policy variable, political commitment is the most dominant determinant (0.553), followed by planning and development (0.119); for the tourism management variable, preservation of tourist attractions is ranked first (0.514), followed by financing (0.183), and information and research (0.116). For the tourism services variable, safety and security were the highest priority (0.445), followed by cleanliness and health (0.184), and environmental sustainability (0.175). Meanwhile, for the destination resilience evaluation variable, the top priority was destination sustainability (0.341), followed by investment openness (0.310), and community socio-economic impact (0.226).

At the inter-variable relationship level, the comparison matrix results indicate that the most prioritized factors in developing sustainable tourism competitiveness in North Buton are tourism planning and development policies (0.463), followed by core resources and tourist attractions (0.158), and tourism management (0.156). Supporting factors include resources (0.094), tourism services (0.066), and destination resilience evaluation (0.063). These findings confirm that strengthening competitive and sustainable tourism in North Buton needs to start with strengthening government policies and commitments, followed by optimizing core attractions and destination governance, and then gradually strengthening these through improvements in accessibility and amenities, enhancing service quality, and evaluating destination resilience to ensure sustainability.

This study presents a location profile, policy documents, interview results, and data analysis that yield a model for developing sustainable tourism competitiveness in North Buton Regency. This region boasts rich natural tourism resources, including tropical rainforests with diverse flora and fauna, as well as unique cultural heritage tourism resources. This strategic geographic location is supported by its proximity to developed destinations such as Wakatobi, which is included in Indonesia's top 10 tourist destinations. These conditions give North Buton significant potential for development as a leading tourism destination in Southeast Sulawesi.

Tourism development in North Buton has the potential to be strengthened through collaboration with neighboring destinations such as Wakatobi, Buton, Baubau, Muna, and Kendari, which have already developed. This allows them to complement and support each other in building an attractive integrated tourism area. This collaborative inter-destination approach aligns with the findings of Mariani et al. (2021), Nguyen et al. (2021), Tan et al. (2022), and Zhang et al. (2023), which emphasize that geographic proximity between tourist areas can be leveraged to strengthen competitiveness through management and marketing synergies.

The success of North Buton tourism development depends heavily on the local government's political commitment to sustainable tourism planning and development. Satghare and Sawant (2018) and Birkić et al. (2018) have emphasized the government's role as the primary initiator and coordinator of development. In North Buton, this commitment is reflected in the establishment of tourism villages (Regent Decrees No. 382 of 2018 and No. 48 of 2019), the 2022 Regency Tourism Development Master Plan, and the 2025–2030 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), although implementation still faces limitations.

In developing destinations, the government needs to strengthen institutions and the quality of tourism human resources, as well as comprehensively identify and map potential through multi-stakeholder collaboration. Research by Chan et al. (2023) and Reddy and Sailesh (2024) emphasizes the importance of collaborative platforms involving government, business actors, local communities, academics, and conservation organizations. Luo (2024) emphasizes that mapping tourism potential must consider the tourism system, regional system, and location system in an integrated manner.

North Buton's primary tourism attractions stem from its natural wealth and cultural heritage, which are dominant factors in tourists' decision-making (Chin, 2020; Trisic, 2023; Long, 2024), as evidenced by the arrival of hundreds of international students through the Operation Wallacea program every July and August. However, this appeal needs to be strengthened with a combination of tourism activities, entertainment, and events and festivals to encourage tourists to stay longer and gain more memorable

experiences (Faerber, 2020; Zarotis, 2021; Lin et al., 2024; Ngondo et al., 2024), along with management that maintains the authenticity and quality of tourist attractions, as emphasized by Wei (2023).

To maintain competitiveness and sustainability, North Buton tourism management must consider adequate funding, pentahelix collaboration, destination marketing, and strengthening supporting factors such as accessibility, amenities, market relationships, and ancillaries (Saepudin et al., 2022; Paparic et al., 2024; Arabov et al., 2024). Furthermore, tourism service aspects such as security, safety, cleanliness, health, competitive pricing, hospitality, and international openness need to be improved (Ngondo et al., 2024; Chan et al., 2023; Sfodera et al., 2022), and balanced with an evaluation of destination resilience that includes resource conservation, community socio-economic impacts, financing adequacy, and tourist satisfaction, because tourism is only meaningful if it can improve the welfare of local communities and is maintained sustainably (Coelho et al., 2021; Posch et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024).

Conclusion and Suggestions

North Buton is a district in Southeast Sulawesi Province which was established as a new autonomous region in 2007 and has relatively unique superior tourism potential in Sulawesi, especially tropical rainforests which are the dominant habitat of Sulawesi flora and fauna (claimed to reach 90 percent) and a very large mangrove area of around 14,000 hectares, accompanied by unique cultural heritage (kompania, alionda) and historical relics such as Lipu Fort, Bangkudu Fort, and others; the political commitment of the local government has been realized through various tourism development plans since 2018 to the 2025–2030 RPJMD, but its implementation is still limited due to budget constraints and other factors, so that destination management is still minimal and the quality of tourism services is considered low even though the supporting factors are relatively adequate, while on the other hand North Buton has attracted more than one hundred foreign tourists every July–August through the Operation Wallacea (Opwal) program, so a development model is needed to address the issue of competitiveness and sustainability; this study adopts the model of Goffi (2013), Gonzalez et al. (2023), and Dwyer and Kim (2010) which is rooted in Rich & Crouch (2003), then added a new variable "Destination Resilience Evaluation" from Posch et al. (2024) which is not found in the four previous models, and uses a priority scale approach through interviews assisted by Expert Choice with 20 experts and processed with the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), resulting in a sequence of priority indicator variables: (1) Tourism Planning and Development Policy (government political commitment, development planning, institutional formation and human resource development, identification and mapping of potential, vision), (2) Core Resources and Tourist Attractions (natural resources, heritage and culture, combination of activities, entertainment, special events/events), (3) Tourism Management (preservation of tourist attractions, financing, information and research, pentahelix collaboration, promotion and branding), (4) Resource Supporting Factors (accessibility, amenities, market relations, ancillaries), (5) Tourism Services (security and safety, cleanliness and health, environmental sustainability, price competitiveness, friendliness, international openness), and (6) Destination Resilience Evaluation (destination sustainability, investment openness, social and economic impacts on the community, demand mitigation), which overall shows that even though the regional budget is limited, the development of A gradual, priority-based approach still allows North Buton tourism to become more competitive and sustainable, while also opening up opportunities for further research to map the priority scale of resource development between regions/districts so that the focus on strengthening destinations is truly more targeted.

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