

Symbolic Convergence and Fantasy Themes in Community-Based Ecotourism Communication: A Case Study of Pokdarwis Situ Gede

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Abstract

Situ Gede is an ecotourism destination in Bogor City that combines the attractions of a lake ecosystem and a forest. Situ Gede ecotourism is a community-based ecotourism site managed by the Local Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis) Situ Gede. Communication interactions within Pokdarwis generate various fantasy themes, which then form symbolic convergence (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). These fantasy themes flow through both offline and online communication via WhatsApp group. This research aims to understand how the fantasy themes formed within Pokdarwis Situ Gede relate to the principles of ecotourism development. This study is qualitative, employing several methods, including

virtual ethnography, observation, and interviews. The findings reveal that the rhetorical vision of Pokdarwis Situ Gede can be divided into four pillars: environmental education, conservation, community empowerment, and livelihood enhancement.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, Fantasy themes, Pokdarwis, Situ Gede.*

1. Introduction

Tourism development based on the uniqueness and conditions of a region can be advanced by implementing sustainable tourism development in the form of ecotourism. Ecotourism, in essence, is a nature-based form of tourism that emphasizes learning, sustainability/conservation, and participation/benefits for local communities, while considering responsible aspects of planning, development, and management (Fennell, 2015). Meanwhile, community-based ecotourism is an approach to tourism development that emphasizes the active participation of local communities in managing and developing their natural and cultural resources. Community-based ecotourism recognizes the rights of local communities to manage tourism activities in areas they own customarily or as stewards.

However, this approach does not mean that communities will independently operate ecotourism ventures (Emma Hijriati & Rina Mardiana, 2014). A study by Tanati et al. (2020) on ecotourism in Kampung Saporkren, Raja Ampat, highlights the roles of various community groups, such as heads of households, interest groups, and youth, in managing ecotourism, contributing to its success and sustainability (Tanati et al., 2020). This underscores the importance of involving all community elements in the planning and implementation of ecotourism, enabling them to directly benefit from these activities. Furthermore, research by Mondejar et al. (2021) on ecotourism at Gunung Tunak Nature Park in Lombok demonstrates that ecotourism development focused on biodiversity can provide economic benefits while preserving the environment.

The effectiveness and quality of community-based ecotourism management can be assessed by examining how local groups understand and articulate their vision of core ecotourism principles. Such an examination also provides insight into the capacity of the group's human resources. Successful ecotourism planning and development depend heavily on the quality of those who manage it (Ramírez & Santana, 2018). Communication is central to community-based ecotourism: it supports

capacity building among ecotourism practitioners and enables coordination of action. Interpersonal communication, in particular, helps forge relational bonds among group members (Yasir, 2021) and contributes to the strengthening of the group's social capital.

The performance quality of Pokdarwis in ecotourism management is deeply tied to the communicative actions that occur within the group. Communication enables members to coordinate effectively in managing ecotourism initiatives. Through interaction and dialogue, members construct shared narratives that shape their collective vision.

Yasir (2021) explained that both group and interpersonal communication played a pivotal role in advancing the local tourism village in Pulau Belimbang, Riau. Furthermore, he stated that sustainable tourism development could be achieved by fostering community awareness and skills to establish businesses that produce goods representing regional identities, such as local specialties or souvenirs. This process of awareness-building inherently involves the creation of fantasies within the community about the benefits they expect from tourism development in their region. This notion resonates with Bormann, Cragan, and Shields (2001), who argue that human beings are, by nature, creators of fantasies and dramatizations.

Stone (2015) explains that collaboration is key to developing community-based ecotourism. Therefore, communication is critical in fostering collaboration among community members involved. The use of WhatsApp as a communication tool for groups has garnered significant attention in various studies. WhatsApp supports communication in diverse contexts, including education, communities, and workgroups (Asti & Sumarsid, 2023). In the context of group communication, the application offers advantages such as ease of access, speed in exchanging information, and the ability to build closer interactions among group members (Isnaini et al., 2023; Rezeki & Hadiyanto, 2022).

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), developed by Ernest Bormann, is a communication theory that posits that within a group or community, individuals can develop shared interpretations of an event or situation through stories, symbols, and metaphors they share. SCT uses the term "symbolic" because it relates to language, fantasy, and various symbolic facts. Meanwhile, "convergence" indicates that shared fantasies within a group create symbolic unity among participants (Bormann et al., 2001). Indriani and Seti Indriani & Ditha (2020) applied SCT to analyze the discussion themes of a youth group in a WhatsApp group called Monster Rabbits. The study examined the thematic chains formed within

the group related to COVID-19 and identified the conversational culture within the group.

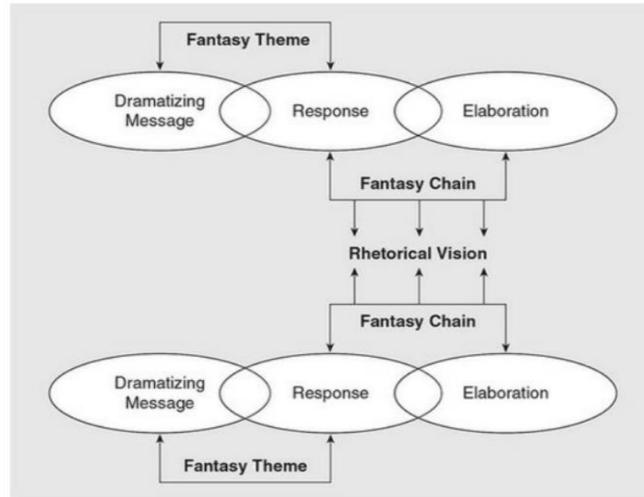


Figure.1 The process of symbolic convergence
Source: Dainton & Zelley (2023)

Based on the figure above, it can be observed that the process in Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) occurs when fantasy themes circulate (chaining) and receive responses and elaboration among group members. Fantasy themes consist of dramatized messages, and these circulating fantasies then form a rhetorical vision (Dainton & Zelley, 2022). Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) can help uncover the fantasies formed within a group (Arianto, n.d.). Bormann et al. (2001), as cited in Gyimóthy (2013), explain that sharing collective fantasies can transform a group of individuals into a more cohesive unit. The expressed fantasies serve as a tool for sharing experiences, meanings, and emotions. By storytelling and sharing fantasies, individuals can share the same symbolic reality, thereby helping to build group consciousness.

A rhetorical vision is a collective narrative or drama that captures the imagination of a group, creating shared understanding and a symbolic reality among its members. This vision is formed by integrating fantasy themes into a coherent structure that resonates with the audience. Through this rhetorical vision, the study of symbolic convergence can be used to evaluate the shared group consciousness in creating a sense of identity and collective purpose among members (Bormann et al., 2001).

Although prior ecotourism scholarship has addressed sustainability principles and community-based management, there remains a clear gap regarding how *symbolic convergence*, the emergence and circulation of shared

“fantasy themes,” and advocacy identities shape stakeholder alignment in ecotourism settings. This study addresses that gap by examining how recurring communicative scripts at Situ Gede help forge a collective consciousness among Pokdarwis members, residents, civil society groups, and academic partners. Demonstrating how these shared symbolic frames highlight the importance of communication processes in addressing the practical management and coordination challenges at the site.

The ecotourism site in this study is Situ Gede Ecotourism, located in the West Bogor District, Bogor City, West Java. The area features a lake ecosystem surrounded by lush green trees and fertile vegetation. It is one of the leading tourism destinations in West Java and has been revitalized to enhance recreational facilities, such as water attractions, a jogging track, and culinary stalls. As a priority tourism area, Situ Gede not only offers natural beauty but also serves as a water catchment area for raw water reserves. Its location adjacent to the Dramaga Forest, a research forest owned by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) Indonesia, adds to its ecological value.

1.1 Research Questions

Based on previous discussions, this study is designed to answer two research questions:

RQ1: What kind of fantasy themes emerge within the Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis) Situ Gede related to ecotourism management?

RQ2: How does the collective consciousness within the Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis) Situ Gede align with the principles of sustainable ecotourism management in managing Situ Gede?

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine group communication within Situ Gede’s Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis). Qualitative research focuses on the research problem, the participants to be observed, the data collected, and how the data will be managed and analyzed (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

This study employs several methods to explore the fantasies and collective consciousness of the Situ Gede Ecotourism Pokdarwis (Kelompok Sadar Wisata), including virtual ethnography and in-depth interviews to identify fantasy themes formed in the conversations within the Situ Gede Ecotourism Pokdarwis WhatsApp group. Hadiyat (2017) explains that virtual ethnography refers to the practice of observing and/or

participating in specific online groups or communities over a certain period. Meanwhile, Kozinets (2015) outlines several stages in online ethnographic research, including: 1) defining the research question or topic, 2) identifying the community, 3) participating in and observing the community, 4) collecting data, 5) analyzing and interpreting data, and 6) presenting findings and research reports.

In this study, the researcher joined the Pokdarwis Situ Gede WhatsApp group, interacted, and observed the conversations taking place within the group from November 2023 to December 2024. Over approximately 14 months, the researcher observed the interactions and discussions occurring in the group. The conversation data from the WhatsApp group was then extracted, with a total of 5,678 words successfully extracted by the researcher from the group's conversations during the study period. To gain deeper insights, the researcher also conducted interviews with several Pokdarwis Situ Gede members, including the Pokdarwis leader, group members, and visitors to the Situ Gede Ecotourism site.

In this study, informants were selected using purposive sampling, allowing the researcher to intentionally choose participants with specific knowledge and experience relevant to Situ Gede Ecotourism. For Pokdarwis Situ Gede members, the criteria were: (1) being an active member of Pokdarwis Situ Gede, ensuring direct involvement in organizational operations and decision-making; (2) having participated in Pokdarwis activities, such as environmental clean-ups, educational programs, or collaborative events; and (3) being part of the official Pokdarwis Situ Gede WhatsApp group, which serves as the primary communication platform where fantasy themes and collective narratives are circulated. For Situ Gede visitors, the criteria included: (1) having visited Situ Gede more than once, ensuring familiarity with the ecotourism environment and its programs; and (2) having participated in environmental education activities at the site, such as school programs, clean-up initiatives, or interpretive learning sessions. These combined criteria ensured that the selected informants could provide rich, credible insights into both the internal communication dynamics of Pokdarwis and the external experiences of visitors, aligning with the study's focus on symbolic convergence in community-based ecotourism.

Table 1. Research informants

| No | Role of the Informant | Initials |
|----|-------------------------------|----------|
| 1. | Head of Situ Gede Pokdarwis | HD |
| 2 | Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis | NHY |

| No | Role of the Informant | Initials |
|----|---------------------------------|----------|
| 3 | Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis | MH |
| 4 | Visitor to Situ Gede Ecotourism | HK |

There are several stages for data processing in this research. The stages of qualitative data coding are a systematic process for organizing and interpreting data to enable in-depth analysis. This process typically begins with open coding, which involves breaking down raw data such as interview transcripts and WhatsApp group messages into small units of meaning and assigning labels to emerging themes or concepts. Next is axial coding, where the initial codes are grouped into broader categories by identifying relationships, patterns, or dimensions among them.

The final stage is selective coding, in which the researcher selects a core category and integrates all related categories to construct a narrative or conceptual model that addresses the research questions. Based on the selective code phase, the researcher found out that there are three main categories on this theme, which are environmental education, conservation, community participation, and environment. This process is iterative, requiring repeated readings of the data and reflection to ensure that interpretations remain aligned with the research context. Finally, the researcher then draws conclusions that are continuously verified throughout the research process (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

Ethical consideration was of paramount importance in this regard of research, so that the rights and welfare of all concerned parties were safeguarded. In advance of the research, I had gotten consent from all the informants for data collection and interviews. I elaborate on the research concern, the research objectives, and the methods to acquire data for all the informants so as to be granted permission to conduct the study.

3. Results and Discussion

The collective consciousness of the Situ Gede Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis) in understanding ecotourism principles can be analyzed through three main components: fantasy themes that are chained within the group's interactions and communications, leading to the group's rhetorical vision. This section elaborates on several fantasies circulating within the Situ Gede Pokdarwis related to the development of Situ Gede ecotourism, grounded in the principles of education, conservation, and community empowerment.

3.1 Fantasy Related to the Role of Situ Gede Ecotourism and Environmental Education

Situ Gede ecotourism features a lake ecosystem and a research forest. The research forest ecosystem at Situ Gede ecotourism is managed under the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK). The vegetation in this research forest is equipped with barcodes that, when scanned, provide detailed explanations about specific trees or vegetation. These explanations include the scientific name of the tree, its habitat, and the uses of its wood. This serves as a form of environmental education present at Situ Gede ecotourism.

With digital technology, visitors to the research forest at the Situ Gede ecotourism site not only come for recreation but can also learn about the forest's diverse vegetation. This blend of leisure and learning dramatizes Situ Gede not as "just a park," but as a living outdoor classroom, an interpretive frame repeatedly invoked by Pokdarwis actors when guiding groups, thus extending (chaining) the educational fantasy theme to new participants.

Environmental education on waste management is a key fantasy theme within the Situ Gede Pokdarwis. This theme translates into actions and efforts to educate visitors against littering in the Situ Gede ecotourism environment, particularly in the lake. However, many visitors still perceive Situ Gede ecotourism as merely a park or a common public space, whereas it is an ecotourism site encompassing a lake and forest ecosystem. This is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

"The main thing is we keep communicating about waste. We always educate visitors; sometimes we meet visitors who think this is just a public place, but we still remind them to take their waste with them. Sometimes they're not aware that entry here is free." (HD, Head of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

Here, HD's statement dramatizes a recurring scene, Pokdarwis volunteers to confront misperceptions ("just a public place") and to reframe the site as an ecotourism environment that must be cared for. Repetition of this dramatized interaction across encounters constitutes a **fantasy theme** ("We remind, they learn, we protect the lake") that circulates interpersonally and in signage, contributing to symbolic convergence around responsible visitation.

This fantasy is also realized through tourism interpretation boards. In Figure 2 below, there is a tourism interpretation board aimed at educating visitors on how to dispose of waste properly. The board contains several messages, including "The Lake is Not a Place for Dumping

Waste," "Let's Dispose of Waste in Its Place," and "Let's Keep the Environment Clean." The use of interpretation boards is one way to build visitors' awareness of the importance of maintaining environmental cleanliness. Because these messages echo what Pokdarwis members say in person, the symbolic cues are reinforced across channels (face-to-face + text + imagery), strengthening fantasy chaining beyond immediate conversations.

In addition to educating visitors, instilling cleanliness values among the local community residing in the Situ Gede ecotourism area is also a fantasy of the Situ Gede Ecotourism Pokdarwis. One Pokdarwis member expressed that building a "clean-up culture" is necessary to reduce the bad habit of littering among the local community living in the ecotourism area. This was conveyed by a Pokdarwis Situ Gede member as follows:

"My dream has been growing, you know, I want to create a clean-up culture to counter the habit of littering carelessly, so it's countered with a habit of cleaning up." (MH, Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

MH's "dream" language signals an aspirational fantasy script: a before/after drama in which careless littering is overcome by a community habit of collective clean-ups. Framed as a shared aspiration, this fantasy invites identification ("we") and motivates coordinated action, a critical step in symbolic convergence.

One of the educational activities aimed at building this "Clean Up Culture" targets children to instill a culture of cleanliness from an early age. These activities are packaged as playful experiences, making children feel that the activities are enjoyable.

"So initially, it's disguised as just playing, not about doing community service or anything like that, just playful playing. Then they want to try it again, and eventually they go around doing it. It becomes a habit." (MH, Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

By dramatizing clean-up as "play," Pokdarwis members transform routine maintenance into a positive, repeatable group story ("we played cleaning the lake and wanted to do it again"), which helps the theme chain from children to parents and to visiting schools.

As a manifestation of the fantasy related to environmental education, the Situ Gede Ecotourism Pokdarwis actively serves as a facilitator for environmental education for students at both school and university levels. One school that frequently uses this location as a learning site for environmental education is Nizamia Andalusia School. In recent years, Situ Gede Ecotourism has become a platform for students to learn

about sustainability values. This was expressed by one of the teachers from Nizamia Andalusia School as follows.

"This is part of our team's learning program. This time, we brought the team with the main theme of earth and sustainability, with a focus on waste." (HK, Visitor to Situ Gede Ecotourism)

HK's comment shows the visitor side of the fantasy chain: external groups adopt the waste-education frame already promoted by Pokdarwis, confirming that the theme has traveled beyond insiders to partner institutions.

Through the clean-up activity, students not only learn to sort organic and non-organic waste but also gain an understanding of different types of waste, enabling them to identify which waste can be recycled and which cannot. Hands-on enactments like these concretize the fantasy ("we learn by doing, and the lake gets cleaner") and provide memorable scenes that participants retell, fuel for further chaining.

Efforts to create a cleaner and more sustainable environment cannot be achieved alone; they require collaboration among various parties. Therefore, other activities conducted by students at Situ Gede ecotourism include team-based learning to enhance students' abilities to work collaboratively in groups. Students are divided into groups and explore the lake using rubber boats. This activity fosters teamwork and strengthens students' collaboration skills. Collaborative lake exploration extends the environmental education fantasy into a social action script ("we protect what we explore together"), linking ecological learning with group cohesion, an SCT-relevant bridge between symbolic meaning and social bonding.

Another effort that the Situ Gede Ecotourism Pokdarwis aims to promote is environmental education for the local community, particularly residents living nearby and local vendors operating within the Situ Gede ecotourism area. One Pokdarwis member emphasized the importance of this education by stating.

"Vendors around the area must be educated not to litter carelessly." (MH, Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

Extending the theme to vendors is important for fantasy chaining across stakeholder roles; when residents, vendors, visitors, and schools all repeat the same cleanliness script, symbolic convergence widens, and the emergent rhetorical vision, "Situ Gede as a shared learning space we keep clean together," gains persuasive force for policy, signage, and ongoing programming.

Taken together, the educational signage, visitor reminders, playful children's clean-ups, school programs, and vendor outreach illustrate how multiple related fantasy themes (Learning Through the Forest; Clean-Up Culture; Waste Awareness) are chaining across groups and converging into a broader rhetorical vision that frames Situ Gede as a community-owned ecotourism classroom where caring for the environment is a shared responsibility.

3.2 Fantasy of Situ Gede Ecotourism Pokdarwis Related to Environmental Conservation

The management of waste by local residents through burning has become a concern for the Situ Gede Ecotourism Pokdarwis. Burning waste is an inappropriate approach. In SCT terms, this recurring concern functions as a dramatized script of "what must not happen", a negative fantasy that reinforces group norms for proper conservation behavior. Burning waste, especially without adequate technology, can produce harmful gases such as carbon monoxide (CO), contribute to air pollution, and exacerbate global warming. One informant emphasized the need to manage waste without burning, stating:

"I suggest that the waste issue be addressed immediately to avoid creating a negative cycle of waste burning." (MH, Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

Here, MH articulates a fantasy theme portraying an undesirable cycle ("negative cycle of waste burning") that the group seeks to prevent. By naming the risk dramatically, the statement sets the stage for shared urgency and moral alignment, a key step toward symbolic convergence on eco-friendly practices.

Another fantasy that concerns the Situ Gede Pokdarwis is the waste transportation system at Situ Gede Ecotourism. Waste collected by residents and Pokdarwis is subsequently transported by cleaning officers from the Bogor City Environmental Agency. However, in practice, this process sometimes faces delays, leading to waste accumulation. One Pokdarwis member highlighted the need to ensure the waste transportation system functions effectively.

"We need to ensure the waste transportation system doesn't get stalled, especially since the Taman Firdaus/Genus TPS has been closed." (MH, Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis)

By dramatizing "the system getting stalled," MH creates a scenario of vulnerability where environmental efforts could collapse without timely support. This dramatization operates as a fantasy cue, triggering shared

concerns and motivating coordinated advocacy toward government agencies.

Waste bins at Situ Gede Ecotourism are divided into three types: organic waste bins (green), non-organic waste bins (yellow), and hazardous inorganic waste (B3) bins (red). With this categorization of waste bins, the hope is that waste can be collected based on its type: organic waste can be used as fertilizer, non-organic waste can be recycled, and B3 hazardous waste can be properly disposed of. This arrangement materializes the fantasy theme of “responsible sorting,” offering visual cues that visitors and locals can enact together. These material symbols (colored bins) reinforce the storyline of collective responsibility, a key SCT mechanism for sustaining group identity.

However, in practice, waste is still found to be disposed of in the wrong bins, which complicates the efforts of the Situ Gede Pokdarwis in sorting or separating the waste. This gap between ideal and actual behavior often sparks new dramatizations in Pokdarwis meetings (“we set up the system, but people mix it up”), which circulate as fantasy themes underscoring the need for ongoing education and monitoring.

In addition to waste management, attention is also given to managing household wastewater, which can pollute the lake. Household wastewater from residences around the Situ Gede ecotourism area can contribute to pollution of the lake ecosystem. One Pokdarwis member emphasized.

“The disposal of household wastewater must be managed properly to avoid polluting the lake.” (MH, Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

This statement dramatizes the lake as a vulnerable shared asset, requiring collective vigilance. Such dramatizations, where harm to the lake is portrayed as imminent unless proper action is taken, serve as motivational cues that sustain the rhetorical vision of Situ Gede as a protected ecotourism environment.

This reflects the awareness of the Situ Gede Pokdarwis regarding the negative impacts of human activities on the lake ecosystem and their efforts to preserve it. Based on the above description, the fantasies of the Situ Gede Pokdarwis related to conservation are predominantly focused on waste management and the disposal of household wastewater. When connected, these fantasy themes (e.g., “stopping the burning cycle,” “keeping the system moving,” “protecting the lake from pollution”) chain together into a larger rhetorical vision: Situ Gede as a clean and resilient ecosystem, safeguarded through shared responsibility among Pokdarwis, residents, and external partners. This convergence of dramatized messages

strengthens group solidarity and provides a unifying frame for advocacy and action.

3.3 Fantasy of Situ Gede Ecotourism Related to Community Participation and Empowerment

The Situ Gede Ecotourism Pokdarwis (Kelompok Sadar Wisata) is a community-based group consisting of local residents and stakeholders in the Situ Gede ecotourism area. As a Kelompok Sadar Wisata, Pokdarwis Situ Gede is responsible for managing the ecotourism activities in the Situ Gede ecotourism environment. However, in its implementation, Pokdarwis Situ Gede faces several challenges. First, the assets and natural resources in Situ Gede Ecotourism are not directly owned by the community. The lake asset in Situ Gede is indirectly owned and managed by the West Java Provincial Water Agency, while the forest asset is owned and managed by the Ministry of Forestry.

This overlapping ownership and management structure makes it difficult for Pokdarwis Situ Gede to innovate and implement initiatives for the development of Situ Gede ecotourism. This tension generates a recurrent fantasy theme of “stewarding land we do not own,” a dramatized situation in which local caretakers must negotiate with distant bureaucracies. Repeated telling of this obstacle in meetings and messages helps unite members around a shared struggle for legitimacy, an important driver of symbolic convergence.

“So, Situ Gede ecotourism falls under two authorities. The first is under the West Java BKSDA (Natural Resources Conservation Agency), and the second is the conservation forest, which is under the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. Neither of these parties has provided us with written authorization to 'go ahead and manage it.' That's why we are currently working with the tourism agency to fight for the legality of transferring the management of these assets from both parties.” (HD, Head of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

HD's account dramatizes conflicting jurisdictions (scene), powerless but persistent locals (actors), and a quest for formal recognition (plot), providing rich fantasy content that members can retell when mobilizing support from government or civil society partners. As these stories circulate, they help align community identity around advocacy and empowerment.

In terms of management, another challenge faced by Pokdarwis Situ Gede is financial. Situ Gede Ecotourism is a public open space, so no

entry fees can be charged. This poses a challenge for Pokdarwis Situ Gede in securing funds to support daily operations. Financial constraint becomes part of the same narrative arc: “We care for a public place without revenue,” reinforcing the moral frame that community labor sustains a commons used by many.

Community participation is one of the main pillars in the development of Situ Gede ecotourism. One of the routine activities typically carried out by Pokdarwis Situ Gede is the “Jumat Bersih” community service. This activity includes waste collection, weeding, and planting trees or plants. “Jumat Bersih” functions as a recurring performative scene that members reference when describing who “we” are: a community that shows up, cleans together, and restores the landscape. In SCT, this recurring, action-oriented scene can evolve into a fantasy theme of **collective care**, which chains across households as more residents join.

In addition, Hamdani also informed about area patrols involving various community groups:

“It is announced that starting tonight, we will conduct patrol activities... Those who have time, please join us along with the LPM, and perhaps the RT and RW.” (HD, Head of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

Patrol calls dramatize guardianship, and residents, neighborhood leaders (RT/RW), and local councils (LPM) are joining forces to watch over the ecotourism space. This “community guardians” fantasy theme extends participation beyond clean-ups to protection, broadening the symbolic identity of Pokdarwis from cleaners to defenders of the site.

Pokdarwis Situ Gede Ecotourism also frequently receives support from higher education institutions and students. Collaboration between the Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis) and academics is a strategic step in building the capacity of Pokdarwis, particularly in managing ecotourism. As HD shared:

“It is important to inform all members that today at 1:00 PM, we have a scheduled mentoring session with vocational students from IPB [Bogor Agricultural University]. Your presence is expected at the Situ Gede village office.” (HD, Head of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

Mentoring announcements like this introduce new actors (students, universities) into the storyline, helping the fantasy chain outward: local stewardship is recognized and reinforced by formal knowledge institutions. The community’s aspirational identity shifts toward “learning partners in sustainable tourism.”

This information reflects Pokdarwis's commitment to actively participating in mentoring programs to enhance the potential of local tourism. Students and academics, as agents of change with strong academic knowledge, can help identify opportunities and provide new perspectives for sustainable ecotourism management. One form of mentoring focuses on strengthening digital promotion and tourism product packaging. As stated by the following informant:

"They will assist us in creating tourism packages and digital promotional media." (HD, Head of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

Here, the fantasy shifts from maintenance to empowerment: with outside expertise, the community imagines itself capable of designing marketable, environmentally responsible tourism products. These empowerment fantasies, circulated in WhatsApp groups, meetings, and training sessions, reinforce collective efficacy and sustain engagement despite resource constraints.

These efforts reflect an inclusive approach in community-based ecotourism, where all community groups are involved in environmental management. Notably, participation scripts are directed not only at visitors but also at local actors (vendors, householders, neighborhood leaders), widening the circle of identification and enabling broader symbolic convergence. By changing the behavior of vendors, ecotourism not only focuses on tourists but also on local actors who have the potential to impact environmental sustainability. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including the community, government, and external parties, is key to the success of this program. Taken together, the fantasy themes of shared stewardship under contested authority, collective care through Jumat Bersih, community guardianship patrols, and capacity-building with universities are chaining into a broader rhetorical vision: Situ Gede as a community-empowered ecotourism commons sustained through multi-stakeholder collaboration despite limited formal control.

3.4 Pokdarwis Fantasy Regarding Economic Benefits for the Local Community

The existence of Situ Gede Ecotourism also provides economic benefits for the local community, particularly following the revitalization of the area. These economic benefits include opportunities for local residents to open stalls and engage in trade around the ecotourism site. Hamdani stated:

"Alhamdulillah, after the revitalization, about 30% of our community's economy has improved. We recorded around 80 traders, with 70% being

local residents and 30% from outside the area." (HD, Head of Situ Gede Pokdarwis)

HD's statement dramatizes a post-revitalization "before/after" storyline in which community livelihoods improve as tourism grows. In SCT terms, this constitutes an **economic uplift fantasy theme** that members can retell to validate continued participation in ecotourism activities and negotiations with government agencies.

Economic benefits are also felt by the group of women who are part of the SituGede Pokdarwis. These women have formed a culinary group named "Tania." The culinary team often receives requests for boxed lunches or nasi liwet (traditional rice dish) from groups of tourists visiting the Situ Gede ecotourism site. For example, when there are visits from government officials, field trips organized by government agencies, or private institutions. In one month, the culinary group "Tania" can receive orders 1 to 3 times, and in each order, the number of servings can vary between 20 and 25 people.

"It's not fixed, at most 25, the minimum is around 20. But if it's 20, that's calculated based on nasi liwet, which isn't served in boxes. We calculate this amount of rice for 20 people, and it's served buffet-style. Yeah, nasi liwet is rare unless specifically requested as a regular boxed lunch. When we serve nasi liwet, we use traditional plates, old-fashioned plates from the past. So, it's become a village specialty." (NHY, Member of Situ Gede Pokdarwis).

NHY's account layers economic gain with cultural performance: food orders become occasions to stage heritage identity ("traditional plates," "village specialty"). This blends livelihood and cultural pride in a **culinary heritage fantasy theme**, expanding symbolic convergence by linking income to the preservation of local tradition, an alignment that strengthens ecotourism legitimacy among residents who value cultural continuity.

This shows that the community not only gains economic benefits but also preserves local culture, as emphasized in Hadi et al.'s (2024) research, which states that the development of ecotourism can provide economic benefits while maintaining environmental and cultural preservation.

Discussion

Based on the description in the results section, several fantasies can be observed circulating within the Situ Gede Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis). Bormann et al. (2001) explain that various fantasies that

converge and form symbolic convergence can be used to evaluate the shared group consciousness of a community in fostering a sense of identity and common purpose among members. Therefore, this discussion will evaluate how the collective awareness of Pokdarwis aligns with the principles of ecotourism in managing the Situ Gede ecotourism destination. According to Fennell (2015), the pillars that represent the principles of ecotourism development can be assessed based on whether nature-based tourism emphasizes learning, sustainability/conservation, and benefits/participation for local communities, as well as the participation of local communities in the planning, development, and responsible management of the tourism activities (Fennell, 2015).

From the perspective of environmental education, some key fantasies include environmental education for visitors and the local community. This theme encompasses the efforts of Pokdarwis Situ Gede to educate visitors and the local community about the importance of maintaining environmental cleanliness. Pokdarwis is striving to build a "Clean-Up Culture" or a culture of cleanliness in the community. Additionally, Pokdarwis aims to transform Situ Gede Ecotourism into an Environmental Education Hub. This fantasy envisions transforming Situ Gede Ecotourism into a learning center about the environment for school students, university students, and the general public. These linked themes (Clean-Up Culture + Environmental Education Hub) have been repeatedly dramatized through signage, playful child clean-ups, school visits, and guided interpretation. Their repetition across audiences indicates fantasy chaining, producing symbolic convergence around Situ Gede as "a place where we learn by caring for nature."

From the conservation perspective, the circulating fantasy themes include waste management and household wastewater management. Waste management is one of the major challenges at Situ Gede Ecotourism. Although separate trash bins have been provided (organic, non-organic, and hazardous waste), many people still dispose of waste incorrectly, complicating the sorting process. Additionally, the waste collection system, managed by cleaning personnel, often experiences delays, leading to waste accumulation. The burning of waste by local residents also poses a problem, as it can create air pollution and contribute to global warming. Household wastewater from nearby settlements also threatens the lake's ecosystem. These "threat" dramatizations (burning, delays, pollution to the lake) function as negatively valenced fantasy themes that rally members to intervention; shared concern for the lake's health fosters convergence on conservation norms even in the absence of formal control.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of community empowerment and participation, financial challenges arise due to the lack of authority to collect entrance fees. Another circulating fantasy involves boosting the local economy through business opportunities in the Situ Gede area. This aligns with Hadi et al.'s (2024) findings that tourism development can help improve the local economy. Economic uplift stories (more traders, women's culinary group, special menus for visitors) circulate as success scripts that justify ongoing volunteer labor and attract broader neighborhood participation, critical symbolic fuel when formal revenue streams are weak.

Situ Gede Ecotourism is essentially community-based ecotourism because its tourism development emphasizes the active participation of local communities in managing and developing their natural resources and cultural heritage (Emma Hijriati & Rina Mardiana, 2014). However, the challenge lies in limited access to asset management. A related circulating fantasy involves overlapping ownership in the Situ Gede ecotourism environment, where the lake is owned by the West Java Provincial Water Agency, while the forest is owned by the Ministry of Forestry. This makes it difficult for Pokdarwis Situ Gede to independently manage and develop tourism initiatives, as any initiative related to ecotourism development will always conflict with government agency permits.

Retelling this multi-jurisdiction barrier helps consolidate an "advocacy identity" among Pokdarwis members: we are rightful stewards seeking recognition. When this identity chains across residents, civil society, and academic partners, it amplifies the collective voice. Analytically, these governance constraints hinder sustainability by delaying infrastructural upkeep (e.g., timely repair of trails and bins), fragmenting monitoring responsibilities (leading to episodic enforcement of anti-littering norms), and constraining investment in low-impact improvements; thus, governance is not a background condition but an active variable mediating whether symbolic convergence around stewardship can materialize into stable ecological outcomes. Addressing this fragmentation (through formalized co-management agreements or memoranda of understanding) emerges as a practical implication, converting advocacy identity from a defensive posture into a platform for coordinated planning consistent with responsible management principles (Fennell, 2015).

Through the circulation of the above fantasy themes, Pokdarwis Situ Gede forms a rhetorical vision that serves as the foundation of their collective consciousness (Dainton & Zelley, 2023). Synthesizing these data, the emergent rhetorical vision can be expressed as: "Situ Gede is a

community-stewardship ecotourism commons where we learn from nature, keep the lake and forest clean, and improve local livelihoods while honoring local culture, even when formal control lies elsewhere."

This rhetorical vision can be divided into four pillars:

- Environmental Education: Transforming Situ Gede into a natural laboratory for students, university students, and visitors.
- Sustainable Conservation: Protecting the lake and forest ecosystems through responsible waste and wastewater management.
- Community Empowerment: active participation in tourism management, and also building Pokdarwis members' skills and capacity.
- livelihood enhancement: Improving the welfare of residents through economic opportunities (food stalls, culinary ventures) and

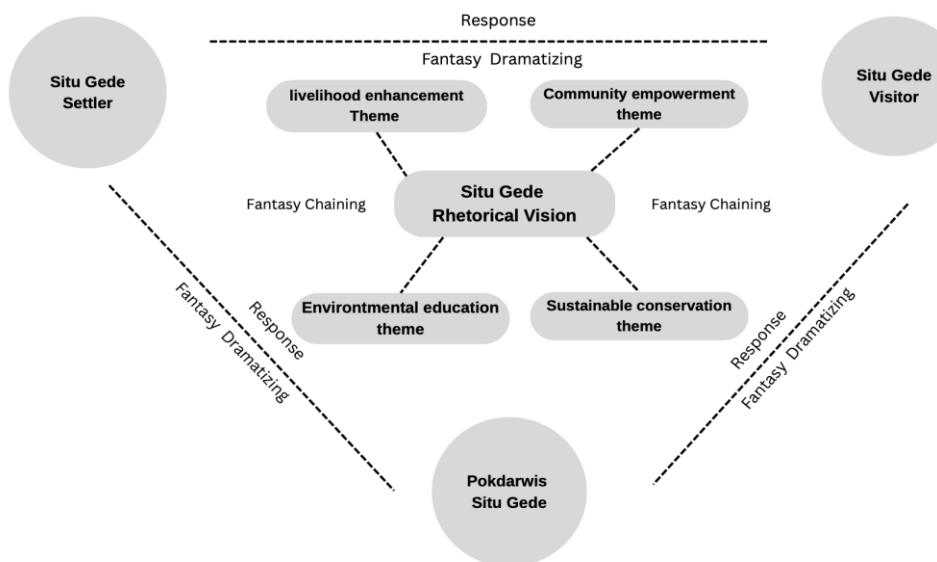


Figure 2. Symbolic Convergence Framework of Situ Gede Ecotourism

Situ Gede Ecotourism in Bogor City is an example of sustainable tourism implementation that aligns with the concepts outlined by Fennell (2015). Its development and management not only leverage the unique ecosystem of the lake and research forest as tourist attractions but also emphasize environmental education, educational programs for students, conservation efforts such as waste and wastewater management, and economic benefits for the community. This reflects the four main pillars of

sustainable tourism: learning, sustainability, community empowerment, and livelihood enhancement.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Pokdarwis Situ Gede's circulation of fantasy themes, through routine offline practices (e.g., Jumat Bersih, patrols, heritage culinary service) and WhatsApp micro-coordination, has generated a shared rhetorical vision that sustains collective action under fragmented asset governance and limited funding. The converging themes crystallize into four interrelated pillars: (1) environmental education (lake/forest interpretation, school programs, cleanliness socialization); (2) conservation (anti-burning norms, waste sorting advocacy, wastewater vigilance); (3) community empowerment (voluntary participation, capacity building, multi-stakeholder mentoring); and (4) livelihood enhancement (growth of local traders, women's culinary enterprise, culturally framed food provisioning). Articulating livelihood gains as a distinct yet ethically bounded pillar clarifies the alignment of abstract results while preserving ecotourism's sustainability focus.

Theoretically, this study advances the application of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in ecotourism by demonstrating how locally generated fantasy themes, when reinforced through digital communication, can sustain collective identity and coordinated action even amid governance and funding constraints. Practically, Pokdarwis's strategic use of WhatsApp as a narrative-sharing platform offers a replicable model for other community-based tourism groups seeking to strengthen collective action and environmental stewardship. By maintaining consistent symbolic messages, such as "Clean-Up Culture" or "Community Guardianship", Pokdarwis exemplifies how storytelling and digital connectivity can amplify community engagement and visitor education.

Future research could conduct longitudinal studies to assess how sustained symbolic convergence influences long-term sustainability outcomes or explore comparative analyses across different Pokdarwis groups to identify variations in fantasy theme development and rhetorical vision formation.

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