



Exploring the Paradox of Natural Beauty and Management Neglect of Fodo Beach

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ABSTRACT

Coastal tourism remains a primary driver of regional development, yet its sustainability is frequently compromised by the quality of local governance. Fodo Beach in Gunungsitoli presents a unique paradox where significant natural aesthetic capital is currently overshadowed by operational decline and infrastructure decay. This study aims to explore the disconnect between the destination's natural potential and its management reality while identifying the specific factors contributing to its stagnation. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with family owners, visitors, and tourism officials, supplemented by field observations and thematic analysis. The findings reveal a "Strategic Gap" where high-value natural assets are neutralized by a lack of professional hospitality standards and deteriorating facilities. The informal, family-based management structure serves as the primary barrier to professionalization, characterized by a lack of standard operating procedures and "resource poverty" in human capital. Consequently, Fodo Beach has transitioned into a decline stage within its lifecycle, where enduring natural beauty can no longer compensate for systemic management neglect. This study implies that reversing the decline requires a fundamental shift from informal family-centric ownership toward professionalized governance or public-private partnerships to restore the destination's competitiveness.

Keywords: Coastal Tourism, Management Neglect, Destination Decline, Family-Managed Tourism, Fodo Beach.

ABSTRAK

Pariwisata pesisir tetap menjadi penggerak utama pembangunan daerah, namun keberlanjutannya sering kali terancam oleh kualitas tata kelola lokal. Pantai Fodo di Gunungsitoli menyajikan paradoks unik di mana modal estetika alam yang signifikan saat ini dibayangi oleh penurunan operasional dan kerusakan infrastruktur. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi keterputusan antara potensi alami destinasi dan realitas manajemennya sekaligus mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor spesifik yang berkontribusi pada stagnasi tersebut. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pemilik lahan (keluarga), pengunjung, dan pejabat pariwisata, yang dilengkapi dengan observasi lapangan serta analisis tematik. Temuan mengungkapkan adanya "Kesenjangan Strategis" di mana aset alam bernilai tinggi menjadi tidak efektif akibat kurangnya standar hospitalitas profesional dan fasilitas yang memburuk. Struktur manajemen berbasis keluarga yang informal menjadi penghambat utama profesionalisasi, ditandai dengan ketiadaan prosedur operasional standar dan "kemiskinan

sumber daya" pada modal manusia. Akibatnya, Pantai Fodo telah bertransisi ke tahap penurunan (decline stage) dalam siklus hidupnya, di mana keindahan alam yang abadi tidak lagi mampu mengompensasi pengabaian manajemen yang sistemik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa membalikkan penurunan tersebut memerlukan pergeseran mendasar dari kepemilikan informal yang berpusat pada keluarga menuju tata kelola profesional atau kemitraan publik-swasta demi memulihkan daya saing destinasi.

Kata Kunci: *Pariwisata Pesisir, Pengabaian Manajemen, Penurunan Destinasi, Pariwisata Berbasis Keluarga, Pantai Fodo.*

INTRODUCTION

Coastal tourism is a cornerstone of the global travel industry, fundamentally driven by the "pull factors" of marine environments and aesthetic landscapes (Hall & Page, 2020). However, the long-term competitiveness of a destination is not guaranteed solely by its natural capital; it is increasingly dependent on the quality of management and the professionalization of service delivery. Modern tourists have transitioned from being mere spectators of nature to demanding high-quality experiences, where hospitality standards and infrastructure maintenance play a decisive role in satisfaction (Raza et al., 2021). When a destination fails to align its operational quality with its natural potential, it enters a state of stagnation, leading to a phenomenon academically described as the "paradox of neglect."

The current state of Fodo Beach in Gunungsitoli serves as a critical example of this paradox. Historically recognized as a premier local destination with high aesthetic value, Fodo Beach is now experiencing a visible decline. Preliminary observations indicate a significant disconnect between the site's enduring natural beauty and its deteriorating facilities. The management, restricted to an informal family-owned structure, lacks the professional hospitality literacy required to sustain visitor interest. This condition is reflective of the "Stagnation" phase in the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), where a lack of innovation and maintenance leads to a loss of market share (Butler, 2021).

To establish the state of the art for this inquiry, several recent studies must be considered. Situmorang et al. (2022) identified that the primary barrier to sustainable coastal tourism in Indonesia is the lack of institutional coordination and unprofessional human resource management. Furthermore, research by Duarte Alonso et al. (2022) emphasizes that small-scale family tourism enterprises often suffer from "resource poverty," where emotional attachment to land ownership precludes the adoption of professional management standards. Additionally, Aramide et al. (2022) demonstrated that natural beauty cannot compensate for "operational decay," as broken infrastructure creates high levels of cognitive dissonance in visitors, leading to permanent destination decline. Finally, Pike (2021) argues that once a destination's image is tarnished by neglect, the path to rejuvenation becomes exponentially more difficult and costly.

Despite these findings, a significant knowledge gap exists. Most existing literature focuses on either large-scale destination management or the success factors of thriving sites. There is a scarcity of qualitative research that explores the internal "paradox" of why family-managed sites in developing regions allow high-potential

natural assets to fall into neglect. This research fills that gap by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of Fodo Beach. Therefore, the objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to explore stakeholder perceptions of the paradox between Fodo Beach's natural beauty and its management neglect; (2) to analyze the internal factors contributing to the destination's decline; and (3) to identify specific service and management deficiencies that hinder the site's recovery. This study offers originality by documenting the "Decline" phase from the perspective of informal ownership dynamics, providing a blueprint for potential revitalization.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative inquiry with a case study approach. A case study is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of a complex issue within its real-life context—specifically the "bounded system" of Fodo Beach (Yin, 2018). The researcher acted as the primary instrument (human instrument) throughout the study, facilitating direct interaction with the environment and informants to capture the nuances of the management paradox (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The research was conducted at Fodo Beach, located in Gunungsitoli, North Sumatra. Research subjects and informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the individuals chosen were "information-rich" regarding the site's history and current operational status (Patton, 2015). The informants consisted of three distinct groups: (1) the primary landowners and family managers of Fodo Beach (2 persons); (2) domestic visitors consisting of both frequent and first-time guests (5 persons); and (3) a representative from the Gunungsitoli Tourism Office (1 person). Data collection was carried out through the triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings (Denzin, 2017). The primary techniques included: (a) In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the underlying reasons for management neglect and visitor perceptions of the service-quality gap. (b) Field Observation: Non-participant observations were performed to document the physical condition of the infrastructure, waste management, and the nature of host-guest interactions. (c) Documentation: Visual evidence (photographs) and digital footprints, such as visitor reviews on social media platforms, were analyzed to supplement the narrative data.

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which involves three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, raw interview transcripts were coded and categorized into themes such as "Aesthetic Capital," "Professionalization Gap," and "Informal Governance." Data display was then utilized to organize these themes into a logical matrix that highlights the paradox of the destination. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through continuous reflection and cross-referencing between the observed physical decay and the reported management philosophies of the owners. To ensure data trustworthiness, the researcher applied the criteria of credibility and confirmability through prolonged engagement and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The investigation uncovered three primary dimensions of the paradox at Fodo Beach: the enduring pull of its natural landscape, the visible decay of infrastructure, and the structural barriers inherent in its informal family management.

1. The Aesthetic Appeal: Natural Capital as the Sole Survivor

Field observations confirm that Fodo Beach possesses a unique geographic advantage. Its coastline offers expansive sunset views and a serene atmosphere that remains its primary competitive asset. Interview data from local visitors (LV) consistently highlighted that the "natural view" is the only factor preventing the site from total abandonment. Informant LV-1 noted, "We come here for the horizon and the peace that the ocean provides, but we try to ignore everything behind us." This sentiment was echoed by LV-4, who stated, "The beach itself is a gift, but the way it is treated feels like a waste of potential."

2. The Reality of Neglect: Infrastructure and Service Decay

In stark contrast to the natural beauty, the physical state of the destination reflects chronic neglect. During field visits, the researcher documented several "critical failure points":

- a. Infrastructure: 60% of the gazebos (pondok) were found to be structurally unsound, with rotting wood and missing roof tiles.
- b. Sanitation: Toilets were largely non-functional, and there was no systematic waste collection, leading to visible plastic accumulation in the vegetation line.
- c. Service: There were no designated reception areas or standardized service interactions.

The following table summarizes the thematic findings derived from the interview transcripts:

Table: Thematic Analysis of Informant Perspectives on Fodo Beach

Theme	Key Indicators	Frequency of Mention
Natural Potential	Sunset views, coastal serenity, unique landscape	High
Physical Neglect	Broken gazebos, waste accumulation, unmanaged toilets	Very high
Service Deficiencies	Lack of staff training, informal greeting, slow response	High
Management Barrier	Family ownership, lack of capital, resistance to change	Medium

3. The Management Structure: The Family Ownership Barrier

The interview with the primary family owner (FO-1) revealed a deeply rooted "informalism." The management style is defensive rather than entrepreneurial. FO-1 explained, "This land has been ours for generations. We manage it our own way because we do not have the budget for big renovations or professional staff. It is just us family members helping out."* This confirms that the lack of professionalization

is not merely a financial issue but a structural one. The Gunungsitoli Tourism Office (GTO) representative confirmed that while Fodo Beach was once a priority destination, its private status makes government intervention difficult when the owners are hesitant to adopt modern hospitality standards.

The findings at Fodo Beach present a classic case of destination decline triggered by a failure in management governance. The discussion below interprets these results through the lenses of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) and Destination Competitiveness Theory.

1. The Stagnation-Decline Trajectory

The data suggests that Fodo Beach has moved past the "Development" phase and is currently descending into the Decline stage of Butler's (2021) lifecycle model. Historically, the beach thrived on its "Exploration" value, where its beauty was enough to attract visitors. However, as the market matured, the lack of reinvestment led to stagnation. Unlike professionally managed sites that use the stagnation phase to innovate (rejuvenation), Fodo Beach has remained static. According to Pike and Page (2023), a destination enters decline when its "Created Resources" (facilities) can no longer support the expectations set by its "Endowed Resources" (nature). At Fodo, the natural beauty sets a high expectation that the management consistently fails to meet, creating a permanent negative perception among visitors.

2. The Service-Quality Paradox

The neglect documented in this study is a manifestation of a massive Service Gap. Applying the logic of Grönroos (2020), service is a process of value co-creation. At Fodo Beach, value is "destroyed" rather than "created" during the host-guest interaction. The informality of the family management leads to what Raza et al. (2021) describe as "Service Failure," where the lack of reliability and responsiveness alienates the modern traveler. The "Paradox" is that the owners are sitting on a high-value asset but are utilizing a low-value management model.

3. The Resource Curse of Small-Scale Informalism

The study finds that the family-ownership model at Fodo Beach suffers from "Resource Poverty," as defined by Duarte Alonso et al. (2022). This poverty is not only financial but also conceptual. The owners view the beach as private property to be "guarded" rather than a tourism product to be "developed." This creates a barrier to professionalization.

4. Synthesis of the Paradox

The core of the paradox lies in the fact that the very beauty of the beach has likely contributed to the management's complacency. Historically, the "view" was enough to guarantee income. However, in the era of social media and global tourism standards, "nature" is now merely a baseline. The failure to professionalize indicates a disconnect from the "State of the Art" in coastal tourism, where sustainability and service quality are now the primary drivers of competitiveness (Vengesai et al., 2021). Fodo Beach is a poignant reminder that in tourism, a beautiful view cannot survive a broken system.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Fodo Beach represents a profound management paradox where its immense natural capital is systematically undermined by chronic operational neglect. This disconnect is primarily driven by an informal, family-based management structure that prioritizes localized ownership control over professional hospitality standards, effectively placing the destination in the decline stage of the tourism area life cycle. The research highlights that natural beauty alone cannot sustain a destination's competitiveness when faced with physical infrastructure decay and a total absence of standardized customer service. Consequently, the transition of Fodo Beach from a once-prosperous local attraction to its current stagnant state is not merely a result of financial constraints but reflects a significant gap in management literacy, where the owners have failed to convert endowed resources into a professional and sustainable visitor experience.

To reverse this trajectory, a fundamental shift from informal family-centric ownership toward professionalized governance or public-private partnerships is required to bridge the existing service-quality gap. It is recommended that the local government provides technical guidance and establishes minimum quality standards for privately-owned coastal sites to incentivize rejuvenation. Future research should consider a quantitative assessment of the economic loss resulting from management neglect or a comparative analysis of successful revitalization models in similar small-scale coastal destinations across the region. Such inquiries would provide a more robust framework for transforming high-potential but neglected natural assets back into competitive tourism products.

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