



Realizing World-Class Tourism Through the Development of Leading Tourism Areas: An Analysis of Policy Implementation in Kuningan Regency

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Abstract

This study analyzes the implementation of the World Class Tourism Leading Tourism Area (KWU) Development Policy in West Java, with a case study focus on Kuningan Regency. The background of the study is based on the suboptimal implementation of the KWU policy as indicated by infrastructure constraints, limited human resources (HR), weak promotion, cross-stakeholder synergy, and environmental sustainability challenges. This study aims to (1) analyze the implementation of the KWU development policy; (2) identify the forms of innovation implemented; and (3) measure the contribution of KWU to Regional Original Income (also known as PAD in Indonesian) and economic growth in Kuningan Regency. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method, referring to the Van Meter and Van Horn Policy Implementation Model which includes six variables. The results show that the implementation of the KWU policy in Kuningan Regency is not fully optimal. The main obstacles include the uneven distribution of policy standards, limited resources (budget, infrastructure, and HR competencies), and unsynchronized communication and coordination between implementing organizations. Nevertheless, community-based innovation and the integration of cultural/natural/historical attractions, as well as the development of KWU, have been shown to positively contribute to increasing the tourism sector's regional revenue (PAD) and local economic growth. Although this contribution is still dependent on fluctuations in tourist visits and is not yet supported by sustainable tourism product diversification. Overall, it is concluded that strengthening coordination, increasing institutional capacity, and digital innovation are necessary to achieve world-class tourism.

Keywords: Policy implementation, leading tourism areas, world-class tourism, tourism innovation, local original income

1. Introduction

Tourism has been recognized globally and nationally as a strategic sector that plays a vital role in driving economic development and promoting a nation's cultural identity. In Indonesia, Law Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism serves as the primary legal framework, underscoring the sector's importance in increasing regional income, creating jobs, and promoting natural and cultural assets (Saputro et al., 2025; Jaelani et al., 2025). At the macro level, the tourism sector's contribution to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) continues to grow, reflecting its position as one of Indonesia's core economic sectors (Aida et al., 2024).

West Java Province, endowed with strategic geographic advantages, abundant natural resources, and a rich cultural heritage, is one of Indonesia's prime destinations with significant potential to be developed into a world-class tourism region (Collins & Jones, 2023). To realize this vision, the West Java Provincial Government has implemented a strategic policy through the Superior Tourism Area Development Program (also known as KWU in Indonesian), as stipulated in West Java Provincial Regulation Number 15 of 2015 concerning the West Java Provincial Tourism Development Master Plan 2015–2025 (Wijaya, 2022). A KWU is defined as a tourism area comprising integrated tourism components with distinctive products and development themes based on natural, cultural, and man-made attractions, aiming to create a highly competitive and sustainable destination (Azmi et al., 2023).

Kuningan Regency, as part of the Greater Cirebon Province Tourism Destination (DPP), has significant tourism potential, including ecotourism, natural landscapes, and cultural heritage sites such as the Cibuntu Tourism Village, Mount Ciremai, and the Linggarjati Negotiation Historic Building. This potential has been formally regulated through the Kuningan Regency Tourism Development Master Plan (also known as RIPPARKAB in Indonesian) Number 90 of

2020–2028, which aims to position Kuningan Regency as a competitive and sustainable nature- and culture-based tourism destination (Fajarudin et al., 2024).

Despite a strong policy framework, the implementation of the KWU in Kuningan Regency shows signs of suboptimal performance. Several key challenges hinder the realization of world-class tourism. First, inadequate supporting infrastructure, including limited accessibility, inadequate accommodation facilities, and service quality that does not meet international standards. Second, weak promotion and branding, particularly the lack of an effective marketing strategy and limited use of digital technology, hinder the development of Kuningan's image as a world-class destination. Third, the availability of competent human resources is limited, as local tourism stakeholders still need to improve their skills and knowledge to meet international service standards. Fourth, inadequate synergy among stakeholders, where coordination and collaboration between the local government, the private sector, state-owned enterprises, and the local community remains fragmented and unsynchronized.

These conditions highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the Superior Tourism Area (KWU) policy in Kuningan Regency, not only at the policy formulation level but also related to implementation factors on the ground. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the KWU policy implementation in Kuningan Regency, identify key inhibiting and supporting factors, and formulate strategic recommendations to strengthen governance, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable development towards achieving a competitive world-class tourism destination.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Public Policy Implementation Concept

Public policy implementation refers to the process by which formally adopted policy decisions are translated into concrete actions and operational activities to achieve predetermined objectives (Banha et al., 2022). It encompasses a series of administrative, managerial, and technical efforts undertaken by public institutions and other relevant actors over a specific period of time. Implementation serves as a crucial bridge between policy formulation and policy outcomes, determining whether policy objectives can be effectively realized in practice.

The effectiveness of public policy implementation is influenced not only by the clarity of policy objectives but also by institutional capacity, resource availability, inter-organizational coordination, and the socio-political environment in which the policy operates (Zamroni et al., 2025). Even well-designed policies may fail to deliver desired results if they are not supported by adequate resources, effective communication mechanisms, and committed implementers. Conversely, robust implementation can offset certain design limitations by ensuring adaptive and responsive implementation.

In the context of governance and development, public policy implementation is increasingly viewed as a dynamic and interactive process involving multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, the private sector, and local communities. This perspective emphasizes that implementation is not merely a technical activity, but also a political and social process shaped by interests, values, and power relations. Therefore, understanding the concept of public policy implementation is crucial for analyzing policy performance and identifying factors contributing to policy success or failure (Temitope, 2023).

2.2. The Van Meter and Van Horn Policy Implementation Model

The van meter and van horn policy implementation model conceptualizes policy implementation as a process influenced by the interaction of several interrelated variables that determine the extent to which policy objectives are achieved. This model emphasizes that successful implementation depends not only on the content of the policy itself but also on the conditions under which it is implemented. Central to this model are clearly defined policy standards and objectives, which provide direction and benchmarks for implementers. These standards must be consistent and measurable to ensure that implementing actors understand what is expected and how success will be evaluated. Equally important is the availability of resources, including financial capacity, human resources, infrastructure, and formal authority, which collectively shape the organization's ability to effectively implement policy directives (Muksin et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this model highlights the importance of the characteristics of implementing organizations, such as organizational structure, leadership, and internal coordination mechanisms, which influence how policies are translated into action. Effective interorganizational communication is also crucial, as policy implementation often involves multiple institutions that must coordinate activities, share information, and maintain consistent interpretations of policy objectives. Furthermore, Van Meter and Van Horn emphasize the role of external socioeconomic and political conditions, recognizing that public support, economic stability, and political dynamics can facilitate or hinder implementation efforts. Finally, the dispositions of policy implementers, including their attitudes, commitment, and level of understanding of the policy, play a crucial role in shaping implementation outcomes. Collectively, these variables form a comprehensive analytical framework for examining why policies succeed or fail in practice (Ye & Gou, 2025).

2.3. Contribution of KWU to Regional Original Revenue (PAD) and Economic Growth

The development of Leading Tourism Areas (*Kawasan Wisata Unggulan/KWU*) plays a strategic role in strengthening Regional Original Revenue (*Pendapatan Asli Daerah/PAD*) and stimulating regional economic growth. The tourism sector has a direct fiscal impact on PAD through various sources, including tourism-related taxes, entrance fees, retribution charges, accommodation taxes, restaurant taxes, and other service-based levies. As KWU development enhances destination quality, accessibility, and service standards, it tends to increase tourist arrivals, length of stay, and visitor spending, which collectively expand the local tax base and contribute to higher PAD (Baydur, 2024).

Beyond its direct contribution to public revenue, KWU development also functions as a catalyst for broader economic growth. Increased tourism activity generates multiplier effects across related sectors such as transportation, hospitality, creative industries, agriculture, and local services. This economic circulation creates employment opportunities, encourages the growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and strengthens local supply chains. Over time, these dynamics improve household incomes and regional economic resilience. Consequently, the contribution of KWU extends beyond fiscal gains, positioning tourism as a sustainable driver of inclusive regional development and long-term economic growth (Hurdawaty & Tukiran, 2024).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Type and Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The qualitative method is selected to achieve an in-depth and holistic understanding of the policy implementation process, innovation dynamics, and the impacts of the Leading Tourism Area (KWU) program, as well as to construct the social realities experienced by the informants. The descriptive approach aims to systematically and accurately describe empirical facts and the relationships among the variables observed in the field, thereby providing a comprehensive depiction of policy implementation as it occurs in practice.

3.2. Research Location and Object

The research was conducted in Kuningan Regency, West Java. The object of the study focuses on the implementation of the Leading Tourism Area (KWU) policy, involving three key locations that function as strategic nodes of policy execution:

1. The Youth, Sports, and Tourism Office (DISPORAPAR) of Kuningan Regency: Serving as the primary governmental organization responsible for implementing regional tourism policies.
2. Cibuntu Tourism Village: Representing a community-based tourism development model that emphasizes local participation and empowerment.
3. Linggarjati Negotiation Manuscript Building: Representing the development of historical and cultural tourism.

These locations were selected to capture diverse dimensions of KWU implementation, including governance, community involvement, and heritage-based tourism development.

3.3. Informants and Data Collection Techniques

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals and stakeholders directly involved in the formulation and implementation of the Leading Tourism Area policy. This sampling technique ensures that the data collected are rich, relevant, and aligned with the research objectives.

1. Data were collected through three primary techniques:
2. In-depth Interviews: Conducted with officials from DISPORAPAR, managers of village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), and tourism destination managers to obtain detailed insights into policy implementation practices and challenges.
3. Observation: Direct observation of infrastructure conditions, facilities, service quality, and management activities at the research sites.
4. Document Analysis: Collection and review of secondary data, including the Kuningan Regency Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARKAB), Regional Original Revenue (PAD) realization reports, tourist visitation statistics, and other relevant KWU-related policy documents.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis technique follows a qualitative analysis model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. This iterative process enables the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships relevant to the research focus. Data validity and reliability are ensured through triangulation, which

involves cross-checking data from multiple sources and methods to enhance the consistency and credibility of the research findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Result

4.1.1. Implementation of the leading tourism area (KWU) policy

The implementation of the Leading Tourism Area (KWU) policy in Kuningan Regency was analyzed using the six dimensions of the Van Meter and Van Horn Policy Implementation Model. Overall, the findings indicate that policy implementation has not yet been fully optimal.

1. Policy Standards and Objectives are formally articulated in the Kuningan Regency Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARKAB) 2020–2028, which explicitly targets the achievement of world-class tourism and sustainable KWU development. However, field findings reveal a substantive discrepancy between the ideal standards outlined in policy documents and the operational benchmarks applied in practice. The notion of "world-class tourism" is often interpreted by technical-level implementers primarily as an increase in tourist visit volumes rather than as an improvement in service quality and digital competitiveness (smart tourism). As a result, policy standards have not been uniformly internalized, causing derivative programs such as sanitation facility upgrades or destination beautification to be implemented without reference to measurable international service standards. This condition constrains the potential for destination certification or accreditation at the global level.
2. Resource limitations constitute a major inhibiting factor in KWU implementation.
 - a. Human Resources (HR): There is a shortage of personnel with globally recognized competency certifications, such as certified tour guides or internationally standardized destination managers. Most local tourism workers lack sufficient awareness and skills related to hospitality excellence and service quality standards. Training programs organized by DISPORAPAR tend to be sporadic and insufficiently focused on specialization and long-term capacity building.
 - b. Budget: Tourism budget allocations within the Kuningan Regency Regional Budget (APBD) are largely maintenance-oriented and inadequate to support large-scale investments required for world-class infrastructure development. Per capita tourism budget allocations remain significantly below the national average for major tourism destinations, resulting in slow modernization of facilities and infrastructure.
 - c. Infrastructure: Despite Kuningan's outstanding natural potential, infrastructure accessibility particularly roads leading to flagship destinations such as Mount Ciremai and several geopark sites remains substandard and frequently damaged. These limitations directly restrict access for both domestic and international tourists who demand safety, comfort, and reliability.
3. Characteristics of Implementing Organizations: The Youth, Sports, and Tourism Office (DISPORAPAR) of Kuningan Regency serves as the primary implementing agency. Institutionally, the organization is structurally established; however, significant challenges persist, particularly regarding cross-sectoral coordination and the absence of a strong Destination Management Organization (DMO). Kuningan Regency does not yet possess an independent and authoritative DMO that can function as a program integrator, destination brand builder, and holistic tourism project manager. As a result, strategic DMO functions are partially assumed by DISPORAPAR, which has limited executive authority beyond its sectoral mandate. Additionally, internal work systems are not fully integrated with information technology, constraining data-driven decision-making and rapid responsiveness to market dynamics.
4. Inter-organizational Communication: Inter-organizational communication and coordination both vertical (regency–province–central government) and horizontal (inter-agency) remain unresolved critical issues. Horizontally, program synergy between DISPORAPAR and agencies such as the Public Works Office (responsible for road infrastructure) and the Environmental Agency (responsible for conservation) is often weak. For example, road improvement planning toward tourism destinations is frequently misaligned with tourism promotion priorities. Vertically, communication barriers arise from differing interpretations of policy timelines and delays in provincial-level KWU assistance programs, resulting in postponed or mismatched implementation at the regency level. These communication gaps foster silo mentality and hinder holistic program integration.
5. Social, Economic, and Political Environment: The social, economic, and political environment in Kuningan Regency generally supports tourism development.
 - a. Social: Local communities demonstrate openness and strong participation, particularly in Cibuntu Tourism Village, which exemplifies community-based tourism practices.
 - b. Economic: Tourism has positively impacted household incomes and stimulated MSME growth. Nevertheless, regional economic disparities and limited access to investment remain persistent challenges.
 - c. Political: Local government support is relatively strong, with KWU positioned as a priority in the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD). However, leadership changes and local political dynamics may affect policy consistency.

6. **Implementer Disposition:** The disposition of policy implementers reflects strong affective commitment and willingness to advance KWU and the vision of world-class tourism. Stakeholders across managerial and operational levels demonstrate high motivation. However, this commitment is often not matched by sufficient cognitive and technical competence. A clear gap exists between enthusiasm and structured capacity building, particularly in implementing global service SOPs and leveraging digital tools for marketing and operational management.

4.1.2. Forms of innovation in KWU development

Innovation in tourism is no longer optional but a fundamental prerequisite for achieving global competitiveness and sustainability. This study finds that innovation in Kuningan Regency follows a bifurcated pattern: strong bottom-up innovation coexists with a significant gap in top-down innovation.

4.1.3. Bottom-up innovation: Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

The most prominent innovation emerges through the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model, with Cibuntu Tourism Village serving as a successful prototype. This innovation emphasizes strengthening local institutions through Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), which function as local destination managers and economic incubators. This represents a critical institutional innovation, transforming communities from passive objects into active subjects of tourism development.

Bottom-up innovation successfully integrates three core value pillars nature, culture, and history. Local wisdom, such as the Sedekah Bumi tradition, is packaged as seasonal cultural attractions, while homestay-based tourism offers authentic visitor experiences. Success is measured not only by increased visitation but also by heightened community ownership and participation, which correlates directly with improved service quality and environmental conservation. Nevertheless, this model remains limited in scale and has yet to be fully integrated into a broader, digitally connected KWU system.

4.1.4. Gaps in top-down innovation: smart tourism challenges

Despite strong community-based innovation, substantial gaps persist in top-down innovation, particularly in smart tourism adoption and destination management digitalization. Smart tourism is a core component of world-class tourism, emphasizing operational efficiency and data-driven decision-making.

Kuningan Regency faces several constraints:

1. **Digitalization of Retribution and Ticketing:** Entrance fees are predominantly managed manually and in a fragmented, cash-based manner. The absence of a centralized e-ticketing system undermines efficiency, fiscal accountability (PAD), and real-time tourist profiling.
2. **Integrated Digital Marketing:** Branding and digital promotion strategies remain fragmented and ad hoc, with limited use of big data analytics for targeted marketing based on tourist demographics and preferences. Consequently, Kuningan's KWU brand has not yet gained strong international recognition.
3. **Tourist Data Management:** The lack of an integrated tourist database restricts analytical capacity related to spending per arrival and length of stay, which are essential indicators for developing high-value tourism products.

This top-down innovation gap constitutes a major structural barrier distinguishing Kuningan Regency from established world-class destinations that position technology as the core of operational management and marketing strategy.

4.1.5. Contribution of leading tourism areas (KWU) to regional original revenue (PAD) and economic growth

The development of KWU in Kuningan Regency has generated tangible and positive contributions to regional fiscal performance and the local economy. These contributions reflect the economic multiplier effects created by tourist mobility and spending. Increased tourist arrivals stimulate demand across accommodation, transportation, food services, creative industries, and local trade, thereby expanding the local tax base and tourism-related retribution revenues. As a result, KWU contributes directly to PAD growth while simultaneously strengthening MSMEs, generating employment opportunities, and enhancing household incomes. In the long term, this dynamic positions KWU as a strategic instrument for sustainable regional economic growth and fiscal resilience.

4.1.6. Contribution to regional original revenue (PAD)

Empirically, the tourism sector through the Leading Tourism Area (KWU) program has demonstrated its role as a vital non-oil and gas revenue driver for Kuningan Regency. This contribution primarily originates from Regional Taxes on Certain Goods and Services (PBJT), particularly hotel services, restaurants and food outlets, as well as arts and entertainment services. Realization data indicates a consistent upward trend in tourism-related PAD during the 2022–2024 period excluding extraordinary anomalies such as economic crises or pandemics confirming that the KWU policy has successfully opened new and sustainable revenue channels for the region.

Table 1: Realization of tourism sector PAD in Kuningan regency (2022–2024)

No.	Type of Revenue	2022 (IDR)	2023 (IDR)	2024 (IDR)
1	PBJT – Hotel Services	4,243,000,000	4,742,000,000	7,349,000,000
2	PBJT – Restaurants & Food Outlets	11,397,000,000	14,514,000,000	19,367,000,000
3	PBJT – Arts and Entertainment Services	1,480,000,000	1,898,000,000	2,319,000,000
	Total	17,120,000,000	21,154,000,000	29,035,000,000

Source: Youth, Sports, and Tourism Office of Kuningan Regency

The data illustrate a significant increase in total tourism PAD, rising from IDR 17.12 billion in 2022 to IDR 29.04 billion in 2024. This growth reflects the expanding scale of tourism activities and the strengthening fiscal contribution of KWU-supported destinations. Nevertheless, qualitative analysis reveals that the current revenue structure remains relatively volatile and vulnerable. Heavy reliance on visitor-based revenues, such as entrance fees and consumption-driven taxes, makes PAD highly sensitive to external shocks, including extreme weather conditions, fluctuations in visitor flows, and mobility restriction policies. To enhance fiscal sustainability and resilience, diversification of tourism PAD sources is essential. This can be achieved through the expansion of entertainment taxes, event-based tourism, and the development of premium tourism products capable of substantially increasing spending per arrival, rather than merely increasing visitor volume.

4.1.7. Impact on Local Economic Growth (Multiplier Effect)

The development of KWU has generated a substantial multiplier effect on the grassroots economy of Kuningan Regency. Tourism activities act as an economic stimulus that extends beyond the destination itself and permeates various local economic sectors.

1. **MSME Development:** KWU destinations function as catalysts for the growth of local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Increased tourist arrivals directly stimulate demand for accommodation services particularly homestays local culinary products, handicrafts, and souvenirs. This demand expansion strengthens local value chains and enhances community-based entrepreneurship.
2. **Local Employment Absorption:** KWU development has had a pronounced impact on job creation, particularly in non-agricultural sectors. Local residents, especially youth, are absorbed as destination managers, tour guides, hospitality workers, and creative industry actors. This dynamic contributes indirectly to reducing open unemployment rates in tourism areas.
3. **Enhancement of Village Economic Resilience:** In tourism villages, KWU has significantly improved economic resilience by reducing dependence on traditional agriculture and fostering faster circulation of money at the local level. Tourism revenues support village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) and enable reinvestment in social and economic infrastructure.

Despite these positive impacts, the study concludes that the maximum economic potential of KWU has not yet been fully realized. Tourist spending per arrival remains relatively low, and the average length of stay in Kuningan is short, dominated by day-trippers. To achieve more robust and accelerated economic growth, KWU implementation must prioritize upgrading the tourism value chain through the development of higher-standard accommodations, experiential tourism products, and integrated tour packages that encourage longer stays and higher tourist expenditure.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion grounded in the Van Meter and Van Horn Policy Implementation Model, several key conclusions can be drawn. First, the implementation of the Leading Tourism Area (KWU) policy in Kuningan Regency has not yet been fully optimal in realizing the vision of world-class tourism. The primary constraints are found in the resource dimension particularly limited budget allocations, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient human resource competencies as well as in inter-organizational communication, which remains unsynchronized among local government agencies. Nevertheless, the disposition of policy implementers demonstrates a high level of commitment and willingness, representing an important form of social capital that can support future policy improvement. Second, the forms of innovation observed in KWU development are predominantly characterized by the strengthening of community-based tourism institutions and the integration of local attractions. While these bottom-up innovations have generated positive impacts at the local level, digital-based tourism innovation, particularly in the form of smart tourism systems, remains highly limited. This shortcoming constrains the achievement of competitive world-class tourism standards that increasingly rely on digitalization, data-driven management, and integrated marketing strategies. Third, KWU development has contributed positively to increasing Regional Original Revenue (PAD) and stimulating local economic growth, especially through the expansion of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). However, this contribution has not yet reached a sustainable level, as it remains heavily dependent on visitor volume rather than on higher tourist spending and value-added tourism products. The absence of innovative product diversification and digitalized retribution systems further weakens fiscal resilience.

Therefore, to realize a competitive and sustainable Leading Tourism Area, it is imperative to strengthen cross-sectoral coordination, enhance institutional and human resource capacity, and accelerate the adoption of digital innovation as a core component of tourism governance and destination management.

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