



When Political Will Fades: Policy Discontinuity and Tourism Stagnation on Rupert Island, Indonesia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the causes behind the abrupt stagnation of a once-promising tourism development project on Rupert Island, Indonesia. It investigates how a shift in local political leadership triggered a significant policy discontinuity, halting progress despite the island's status as a national strategic tourism area. The study employs a qualitative, single-case study design. It draws on rich empirical evidence from multiple sources, including official government planning and budgetary documents (The Regional Medium-Term Development Plan/RPJMD and Government Agency Performance Reports/LAKIP), in-depth interviews with key local stakeholders (government officials and business owners), and direct field observations conducted over several years. The findings reveal a two-act drama. First, a period of rapid development (2010-2015) was driven by a powerful 'policy entrepreneur'—the incumbent regent—who championed the project and allocated significant resources. Second, an abrupt stagnation occurred post-2015, triggered by a change in leadership. The new administration abandoned the project, demonstrating a classic case of policy discontinuity. The root cause was the failure to institutionalize the development policy, leaving it entirely dependent on the political fortunes of its initial champion. For policymakers and destination planners, this study highlights the profound risks of development models that are overly dependent on the political will of a single leader. It underscores the critical need to embed long-term tourism development projects within robust institutional frameworks—such as binding multi-year regulations or cross-partisan agreements—to ensure their continuity and insulate them from the volatility of electoral cycles. This study provides a rare and empirically granular account of the mechanisms of policy failure at the sub-national level. By tracing budgetary allocations and project timelines against a political transition, it offers a vivid contribution to the literature on policy implementation, demonstrating precisely how local electoral politics can derail national strategic objectives in decentralized developing countries.

Keywords: policy discontinuity, tourism development, political will, destination governance, indonesia