

Developing Tomb-Based Religious Tourism: Creating Inter-Cultural Communication Competence in Central Tapanuli Regency

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ABSTRACT

The development of tomb-based religious tourism has not been maximally implemented by the regional government of Central Tapanuli Regency (CTR) although there are the diverse culture of visitors who travel to Mahligai and Papan Tinggi tombs and their visits have implications for them to be able to communicate with tourism conscious groups, with management, and with tomb guards. This paper is aimed at describing the development of tomb-based religious tourism, and at creating competency and model for inter-cultural communication in CTR. This paper is qualitative and descriptive, involving the 28 research subjects, such as individual visitor, tourism conscious groups, coastal culture observers, tomb management and guards. The research objects were focused on the verbal and non verbal symbols which were collected by interviews, observation, and document searches; moreover, the data analysis technique involved inductive approach with the data validity used triangulation. It is concluded that the two tombs received little attention from local governments and the management was less professional but the interaction among visitors, tourism conscious groups, management, and guards, who have different cultural identities, results in relational identity with similar meaning, and forms dynamic social relations; they also have adequate experience, knowledge, positive motivation, attitudes, values, abilities, and skills in communication. The visitors' inter-cultural communication competency with tourism conscious groups, management, and tomb guards about the verbal and non verbal messages have been in accordance with the principles of communication intelligence in Islamic perspectives; so, the model for the inter-cultural communication competency is based on Islam.

Keywords: development, tomb, religious tourism, competency, inter-cultural communication

INTRODUCTION

The CTR has decent tourism potentials, such as marine, underwater nature, mountaineous, historical, religious, and cultural heritage tourisms. Two of the religious tourisms are the Mahligai and Papan Tinggi (MPT) tombs located in the city of Barus and in the Northern Baru (Barus Utara). The two tombs are actually potential for religious tourism if they are

managed optimally so that tourists can gain experience about the old tombs that are rich of religious and cultural values and historical events to be explored and developed in order to increase the insight knowledge and religious experience and to deepen spiritual feelings.

In one hand, the high interests of local and international visitors coming to the MPT can be seen from the number of

tourists from various ages, like children, adolescents, adults and the elderly. The Mahligai grave site becomes the main attraction for tourists to visit to directly see the cultural heritage and the historical development of Islam in this area. The development of tomb for tourist attraction by the regional government is still lacking, as seen from the lack of tourism facilities and infrastructure such as accommodation, general accessibility to reach the destinations, and promotion. There are also low public awareness towards the importance of grave as religious tourism and lack of professionalism from the tomb guards. Observations show there are five problems in managing the two tombs, namely preservation of cultural assets, human resources, tourism supporting facilities, information, and promotion media.

On the other hand, communication carried out by visitors with all parties in relation to the tombs tends to be culturally bound, so that those who communicate in inter-cultural contexts, in this case members of tourism conscious groups, management, and tomb guards, should at least be open to visitors' differences in values, beliefs and attitudes, and cultures. The parties should also reflect the smart communication when they describe the tombs. Communicative competence is used as the parameter to measure the quality of visitors' intercultural communication with the tourism conscious groups, management, and tomb guards. Inter-cultural communication competency might see the capabilities, communication skills, and interactions among people from different cultures in which the presence of visitors force them to adapt to the parties although it must be that the parties should make themselves adaptative and intelligent to the visitors who should be brought into secure atmosphere from the tomb locations.

Appropriate behavior in communication is observed in the inter-cultural communication competency as an important factor for tomb visitors who enter new environments that are different in

cultures. Tomb visitors need to prepare themselves in the face of the challenges in language differences, habits, unusual behavior, and cultural diversity, both the style of verbal and nonverbal communication which aim to achieve successful adaptation to members of tourism conscious groups, management, and tomb guards.

The differences in cultural backgrounds between multi-ethnic visitors and members of tourist conscious groups, managers, and tomb guardians who have coastal characteristics are important to understand the principles of communicative intelligence, especially verbal communication such as the principles of *Qaulan Sadidan* (to speak correctly), of *Qaulan Balighan* (to speak effectively), of *Qaulan Maysuran* (to speak appropriately), of *Qaulan Layinan* (to speak in gentle), of *Qaulan Kariman* (to speak in noble) and of *Qaulan Ma'rufan* (to speak well). All the principles should be supported by openness, positive and supportive attitude, equality, and empathy in the frame of Islam because, generally, the majority of visitors who come to the tombs are Muslims, but only a small proportion of visitors are others (non-Muslims); the tourism conscious groups, management, and tomb guards are all Muslims.

The questions are then: how is the current development of tomb-based religious tourism and what model is suitable for inter-cultural communication competencies?

Theoretical frameworks

Developing tomb-based religious tourism

The development of tomb-based religious tourism is very necessary in an effort to improve or advance tourism objects by the development of facilities and infrastructure, promotion and marketing, and human resources (Munanef, 1996: 8), especially for the Mahligai and Papan Tinggi tombs which have been included as the religion-nuanced cultural heritage and which prove to be first entry of Islam in Indonesia via Barus. Given the 2011-2016

of CTR's Vision and Mission, the tourism becomes one of the leading sectors in order to improve public welfare and the CTR's Tourism Office in 2018 has made efforts in developing the two tombs as the historical, religious, and cultural heritage tourism (Dinas Pariwisata, 2017).

Inter-cultural communication competence

Inter-cultural communication refers to interpersonal communication carried out by those with different cultural backgrounds, to exchanging messages conveyed verbally even imaginatively between two people of different cultural backgrounds, and to exchanging symbolic meanings by two people of different cultural backgrounds (Liliweri, 2011: 13). The term *communicative competency* was first introduced by David Hymes in the 1960s to emphasize that knowledge of grammar rules was insufficient to speak and communicate (Priandono, 2016: 219).

With regard to competency, a lot of evidence shows that communication plays an important role in human life, whether or not someone builds a life, career, does business, and even politics can not be separated from the ability of a person to communicate. Competence is an ability to carry out or do a job or task based on skills, knowledge, and supported by the work attitude demanded by the job (Kompri, 2017: 1). Communication competence is a person's ability to act communication effectively and successfully (Purwasito, 2015: 284). Furthermore, in case of the model of inter-cultural communication competency, Brian Spitzberg and Bill Cupach argued there are three important components that are inter-related and needed, namely knowledge, motivation, and behavior (James, 2006: 444).

The formation of theories in inter-cultural communication has certainly the power to discuss inter-cultural humanitarian issues; in short, the theories of intercultural communication refer to theories that specifically generalize the concept of communication between communicators and communicants of different cultures and

discuss the influence of culture on communication activities (Liliweri, 2011: 29). The theories used in this paper are related to "conversation and relationship" which is specifically addressed to symbolic interaction, identity management, self presentation, and advance negotiation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method is a descriptive qualitative which focuses more on the aspects of processes rather than results; this is due to the relationship of the parts being studied is much clearer if observed in the process (Creswell, 2002: 9-12). There were 28 research subjects (or informants) including the individuals from the visitors coming to the MPT, from members of the tourism conscious groups, management, and tomb guards, from Barus coast culture observers or prominent figures and CTR's tourism agency. The research objects were all verbal and nonverbal symbols taken from every visitor, from members of the tourism conscious group, of the management, and of tomb guards. Data collection techniques were taken from interviews, observation, and documents. In qualitative research, the instruments used are words and actions; the rests are additional data such as documents and others (Moleong, 2010: 157). The data analysis technique was descriptive with an inductive approach which starts from fields (Moleong, 2010: 10). For data validity, the triangulation through other sources was applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of the old MPT tombs in Barus has become one of the regional government programs which was handled by local tourism and cultural agency. Each year the number of visitors or tourists have increased significantly. The agency has also created the tourism development master plan (RIPP), the long term development plan (RPJP) in 2006-2020, the medium term development plan (RPJM) in 2012-2016 which can be used as the reference for tourism development in

general and for religious tourism in Barus's MPT in specific. The current problems are that creativity, human resources, and innovation from local governments are still lacking; groups of tourism actors in the community are also still limited, and Barus community participation itself is still low. In short, the integration of government and communities in practice for the development of religious tourism remains poor.

In the context of developing religious tombs and other tourism destinations, the local government has begun to seriously organize and develop such destinations in CTR even though the MPT's development seen from the aspect of access to the tombs need serious attention. The damaged road conditions and the availability of facilities such as affordable grave houses, praying facilities, toilets, health among others are less optimal; however, planning, organization, moving (or implementation), and supervision which have been arranged become powerful strategy in the development of old religious tourism destinations in Barus.

The importance of developing tourism and specifically grave religious tourism creates a multiplayer effect on the improvement of the economy, welfare and of other fields, the CTR's government is committed in which one of its development directions is focused on tourism development which is hoped to improve the local people's welfare. All this is supported by the condition that the CTR is very strategically located in the West Coast region of North Sumatra, has a coastline of ± 200 km, and has the extraordinary potential either natural or cultural tourisms; therefore, this regency is very feasible to be developed as one of the National Tourism destinations.

The social interactions between visitors with members of tourist conscious groups, management, and tomb guards has created an intimate relationship that is indicated by the words "similar" or the "same meaning"; such words are often

outspoken by visitors when they make perceptions on their experiences during their interaction with the members. The multi-ethnic visitors come from Toba Batak, Mandailing, Minangkabau, Java, coastal regions, Aceh Singkil, and Malay whose characteristics are open, adaptable, and Islamic. The members of tourism conscious groups, management, and tomb guards are also multi-ethnic whose characteristics are almost the same. Their characters may influence the situation that supports visitors to maintain their self-image when they make conversations with those members.

The visitors as well as the members of the tourism conscious groups, management, and tomb guards have adequate experience and knowledge of human beings like the basic knowledge of who they are communicating to, for example, what their ethnicity is, what their profession is, where they reside among others. In addition, the members should also think positive to visitors, give interesting motivation, and show nice attitudes, values, and skills when communicating.

Thus, the communicative competence between visitors and the members can enrich the inter-cultural communication that explores the inter-personal communication producing models for inter-cultural communication competency, and explaining a communicative phenomenon. Thereby, the models for the inter-cultural communication by visitors with the members help explain the parts that the researcher considers important from the inter-cultural communication competencies by visitors and the members.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of the Mahligai and Papan Tinggi tombs received little attention from the regional government, which can be seen from the lacks of accessible facilities and infrastructure, of low quality of human resources, of less professional management perceived by visitors and by coastal culture observers

and/or figures. But, the interaction between the visitors and the members have created relational identities which are perceived from the perspective of “similar in meaning” which has proved to form dynamic social relationships. Such relationships are marked by experience, adequate knowledge, positive motivation, attitude, values, and communication skills. The model for the inter-cultural communication carried out by the visitors and the members, in case of verbal messages in communication, are in accordance with the Islamic principles of communication intelligence, namely *qaulan sadidan*, *qaulan balighan*, *qaulan maysuran*, *qaulan layinan*, *qaulan kariman*, and *qaulan ma’rufan*. In short, the model for the communicative competency between visitors and the members is Islam-based.

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