

**WHEN POLITICAL WILL FADES: POLICY DISCONTINUITY AND TOURISM  
STAGNATION ON RUPAT 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 Leadership Transition, Institutionalization Failure.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The burgeoning landscape of post-reformasi Indonesia, a period marked by decentralization and a push for regional economic development, the search for untapped tourism assets became a national priority. Within this context, the northern coastal region of Rupat Island in Riau Province emerged as a site of immense promise. The discourse surrounding its development gained significant momentum in the early 2000s, centered on its enchanting 11-kilometer stretch of white sandy beach that directly faces the strategic Malacca Strait. Positioned as a potential flagship destination, Rupat was seen as Riau's answer to the highly successful coastal tourism models of Bali, Lombok, and neighboring West Sumatra. Its strategic location, a mere 48 kilometers from Port Dickson, Malaysia, further amplified its potential, offering a compelling new alternative for the established cross-strait tourism market.

This awareness was soon formalized into policy. The first concrete step was taken when the Riau Provincial Government, in collaboration with its regional legislature, issued Provincial Regulation No. 4 of 2004 concerning the Riau Tourism Development Master Plan. This regulation explicitly designated North Rupat as a key marine tourism area, providing the initial legal foundation for its development. Following this, the Bengkalis Regency government, under the leadership of Regent Syamsurizal (2001-2010), began to articulate a grand vision. This phase was characterized by high-level planning, with the Regent announcing that a comprehensive master plan had been developed by the Regional Development Planning Agency (BAPPEDA). To ensure international standards, the administration commissioned renowned Singapore-based firms, ACP Partnership Pte Ltd and SAA Architects Pte Ltd, who designed a sophisticated blueprint for North Rupat as a modern hub for ecological resorts, organic agriculture, and marine tourism. Regent Syamsurizal declared the project a top priority, but also prudently noted the

immense financial challenge, stressing the need for third-party investment beyond the capacity of regional budgets<sup>1</sup>.

A critical turning point occurred with the inauguration of Regent Herliyan Saleh in 2010, when the project transitioned from ambitious discourse to tangible action. The 2010-2015 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) of Bengkalis Regency formally and powerfully designated Rupert Island as a primary center for tourism development. This local commitment was almost immediately reinforced by the highest level of national government. In a move of immense significance, the Indonesian central government, through Government Regulation No. 50 of 2011 on the National Tourism Development Master Plan, officially listed "Rupert the Longest White Sandy Beach Island" as one of the nation's 50 elite National Tourism Destinations (DPN). At this moment, local political will and national strategic vision were perfectly aligned; setting the stage for what should have been an unequivocal success story.

However, a profound chasm exists between this high-level policy ambition and the lived reality on the island. On-the-ground observation reveals a destination grappling with severe foundational deficits. Overland access remains a formidable obstacle; a journey from the provincial capital requires a lengthy drive, a ferry crossing from Dumai fraught with extensive queues that can last anywhere from three to ten hours during peak seasons, followed by a grueling 2.5-hour drive over poorly maintained roads<sup>2</sup>. The alternative, sea travel, is prohibitively expensive for most domestic tourists<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, North Rupert suffers from a critical lack of public infrastructure (prasarana umum), including a reliable electricity grid, clean water networks, stable telecommunication services, and systematic waste management. Basic tourism facilities (fasilitas pariwisata)—ranging from ATMs and 24-hour clinics to proper sanitation, a variety of accommodation, and visitor information centers—are conspicuously

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<sup>1</sup> "This can be traced to the report in **GATRA Magazine**, dated **April 22, 2005**, which published the article *'Bengkalis Regency, the Bahamas of the Junjungan Land: This island on the edge of the Malacca Strait has already been designed as a world-class modern tourism area. Highly strategic, with beautiful and promising natural potential. Awaiting investors.'*"

<sup>2</sup> Interview with the Head of Teluk Rhu Village, Mr. Mansyur, on September 4, 2017, and confirmed through the researcher's personal experience in 2018 by traveling overland to North Rupert.

<sup>3</sup> Petak Panjang (Pangkalan Nyirih) serves as a small dock for fishing boats and inter-village vessels located in the western region of Dumai City. This travel route was identified through the researcher's personal experience, with additional information obtained via a conversation with the boat captain (Acong). The speedboat fare was recorded at Rp 110,000 during the period of December 2, 2017.

absent<sup>4</sup>. This is exacerbated by a severe and ongoing problem of coastal abrasion, which actively erodes the shoreline and threatens the limited infrastructure that does exist<sup>5</sup>.

And yet, for a brief and promising period between 2010 and 2015, this challenging reality began to transform. Driven by the forceful commitment of the Regent's office, the government's seriousness became visible to the local population. The Department of Culture, Tourism, Youth, and Sports initiated tangible projects, including the construction of small resorts and the establishment of an annual cultural festival, "mandi safar," which successfully attracted visitors. Most critically, the public works agency (Bina Marga) commenced construction on a vital arterial road intended to connect the island's port to the northern tourism zones<sup>6</sup>. This tangible progress ignited a wave of organic, community-led investment. Local residents began renovating their homes to serve as home stays, a retired civil servant invested his pension in building a 20-room hotel that became a local favorite, and small cafes and shops emerged, some even offering free Wi-Fi to attract patrons.

This period of vibrant optimism and synergistic development came to an abrupt and jarring halt in early 2016. The catalyst was the cessation of the main road construction, leaving a critical 20-kilometer stretch unfinished, unpaved, and nearly impassable, especially during the rainy season. This single failure effectively severed North Rupert's primary lifeline to overland tourists. The economic consequences were immediate and devastating: tourists cancelled hotel bookings en masse, and the nascent local businesses that had sprung up in anticipation of their arrival—the home stays, the cafes, the souvenir stalls—withered and closed. The community's budding trust in the government's commitment was shattered, replaced by a pervasive sense of abandonment. By 2018, the situation had not improved; overland tourism had all but disappeared, and the island's development had entered a deep and prolonged stagnation.

This raises a crucial research question. Why did a tourism development project, backed by both national and local policy, funded by the state, and demonstrating clear positive impacts, suddenly collapse? To attribute this failure merely to a damaged road is to fundamentally misunderstand the problem. The real issue is far deeper, rooted in the dynamics of governance and power. The

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<sup>4</sup> *Such conditional idealism is indeed a demand within tourism studies texts. See further: I Gde Pitana and I Ketut Diarta, Introduction to Tourism Studies, Andi, Yogyakarta, 2009, pp. 128–129; see also: A.J. Muljadi and Andri Warman, Tourism and Travel, Rajawali, Jakarta, pp. 73–75.*

<sup>5</sup> Theo Rizky wrote a news article titled "Sand dredging vessels threaten the exoticism of North Rupert" on the online news platform *Tribun Pekanbaru.com / Local Breaking News*, published on Sunday, May 1, 2016, under the Riau Region section. The article was accessed on Wednesday, December 20, 2017, at 00:04 WIB via the website: <http://pekanbaru.tribunnews.com>.

<sup>6</sup> Tanjung Medang is the capital village of North Rupert subdistrict, located near the dock where boats anchor and serving as a primary destination.

state was initially present and highly active, only to become conspicuously absent, leaving a vacuum of leadership and a legacy of unfulfilled promises.

This article argues that the stagnation of tourism in North Rupat is a classic example of policy discontinuity triggered by a shift in local political leadership. We contend that the rapid progress between 2010 and 2015 was driven by the actions of a 'policy entrepreneur'—the incumbent regent—who leveraged his authority to champion the project. However, because this development agenda failed to be institutionalized into a permanent bureaucratic or legal framework, its survival became inextricably tied to the political fortunes of its champion. Consequently, the regent's electoral defeat effectively extinguished the political will necessary to sustain the project, leading to an immediate halt in funding and a reordering of priorities by the new administration. This case study, therefore, uses rich, primary field data to dissect this process, offering critical insights into how personalistic politics and the failure of policy institutionalization can derail a national strategic agenda at the local level.

## **2.0 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

The relationship between politics and tourism development has long been recognized as fundamentally intertwined, yet the mechanisms through which political dynamics shape destination outcomes remain underexplored in the developing world context. Classical political thought, dating back to ancient Greece, conceptualized politics as the pursuit of collective good—an effort to establish regulations acceptable to the majority in order to guide society toward harmonious coexistence<sup>7</sup>. This pursuit of "the good life" involves complex processes of goal-setting within political systems, requiring choices among alternatives and the prioritization of objectives. However, these activities often generate conflict due to the inherently scarce nature of both material and intangible values being pursued. Paradoxically, in democratic societies, these same activities require cooperation due to the collective nature of human existence, making politics fundamentally about conflict resolution and consensus-building<sup>8</sup>.

Contemporary political science offers multiple lenses through which to understand political processes. Surbakti identifies five distinct approaches: the classical view (politics as collective welfare), the institutional perspective (politics as state governance), the power-centered approach (politics as the pursuit and maintenance of power), functionalism (politics as policy formulation and implementation), and the conflict perspective (politics as the struggle to obtain and maintain values)<sup>9</sup>. For this study, we adopt a definition that synthesizes these approaches: politics as the

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<sup>7</sup> Miriam Budiardjo, *Fundamentals of Political Science*, Gramedia, Jakarta, 2018 (15th edition), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>9</sup> Ramlan Surbakti, *Understanding Political Science*, Grasindo, Jakarta, 1992, pp. 1–2.

efforts of stakeholders—particularly dominant actors—to influence the making and implementation of state decisions or policies.

### **2.1 Tourism Policy as Political Process**

In the tourism context, policy represents a critical intersection of political will and developmental aspirations. Tourism policy encompasses "a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, and development/promotion objectives and strategies that provide a framework within which the collective and individual decisions directly affecting long-term tourism development and the daily activities within a destination are taken" (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006)<sup>10</sup>. More specifically, Biederman in (Edgell and Swanson, 2018) defines tourism policy as "the direction or course of action that a particular country, region, locality or an individual destination plans to take when developing or promoting tourism," emphasizing that effective tourism policy should maximize economic and social benefits while improving citizens' lives.

The capacity of stakeholders to influence tourism policy decisions depends critically on their position within decision-making structures—whether they occupy core positions or serve merely as complementary elements. This creates a hierarchy of political actors, from those wielding substantial or even dominant power to those with limited or negligible influence. Crucially, those with significant power can compel the cancellation, postponement, or modification of policies already formulated or under implementation. In policy theory, the policy environment—particularly powerful actors or higher authorities—can derail policies during implementation<sup>11</sup>. Government commitment plays a pivotal role in tourism development policy success, with the strength of governmental commitment directly correlating with developmental outcomes.

### **2.2 Policy Entrepreneurs and Institutional Continuity**

While existing Indonesian tourism research has predominantly focused on SWOT-based strategic planning approaches—as seen in studies by Timang Setyorini on Semarang Regency's tourism economics and Kartini La Ode Unga on Bansa Island development strategies—this study adopts a fundamentally different theoretical framework. We draw upon Kingdon's (1984) concept of "policy entrepreneurs": individuals who leverage their authority, resources, and political capital to champion specific policy agendas. Policy entrepreneurs are crucial in opening policy windows—moments when political will, problem recognition, and available solutions converge to enable significant policy change.

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<sup>10</sup> David L. Edgell, Sr et al., *Tourism Policy and Planning: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, 30 Corporate Drive, Suite 400, Burlington, MA 01803, USA.

<sup>11</sup> See the Top-Down Theory by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) as discussed in Helga Pulzl and Oliver Treib, "Public Policy Implementation" in Frank Fischer et al., *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics, and Methods*, (translated), Nusamedia, Bandung, 2015, p. 129. See also: Riant Nugroho, *Public Policy*, Gramedia, Jakarta, 2009, p. 629.



However, the literature also highlights a critical vulnerability in entrepreneur-driven policies: their susceptibility to policy discontinuity. Hall (2008) argues that tourism policies heavily dependent on individual champions face inherent risks when those champions lose power or influence. This connects to broader theories of policy institutionalization, where policies achieve sustainability only when they become embedded in permanent bureaucratic structures, legal frameworks, or cross-partisan consensus (Peters, 2019).

### **2.3 The Indonesian Decentralization Context**

The post-Reformasi Indonesian context adds another layer of complexity. Decentralization reforms since 1998 have empowered regional governments with unprecedented autonomy in tourism development, creating opportunities for local innovation but also risks of policy fragmentation (Aspinall and Fealy, 2003). In this environment, the role of individual regional leaders (bupati/walikota) has become particularly pronounced, as they possess both the formal authority and political incentives to champion signature development projects.

Yet this same decentralized structure creates what we term "institutional vulnerability"—where national strategic priorities can be derailed by local political transitions. This phenomenon remains understudied in the tourism literature, despite its apparent prevalence in developing democracies.

### **3.0 METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology to examine the political dynamics underlying tourism development in North Rupat Island. The selection of North Rupat as the research site was strategically motivated by its unique position as a microcosm of Indonesia's broader post-decentralization development challenges—a location that experienced rapid policy-driven tourism development followed by equally dramatic stagnation, making it an ideal case for understanding the interplay between political entrepreneurship, institutional vulnerability, and policy discontinuity. The research adopts an interpretive framework that combines empirical observation with analytical interpretation, allowing for deep understanding of the complex political processes that shaped Rupat's tourism trajectory. This approach is particularly suited to uncovering the nuanced relationships between individual political actors, institutional frameworks, and policy outcomes that quantitative methods might overlook.

The study's data collection strategy encompassed both primary and secondary sources to ensure comprehensive coverage of the political dynamics at play. Primary data was obtained through extensive in-depth semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across multiple levels of governance and civil society. These included former and current officials from Bengkalis Regency government, particularly from the Department of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports

(Dinas Kebudayaan, Pariwisata, Pemuda dan Olahraga), as well as local political leaders such as village heads and community leaders in North Rupat communities. Additionally, interviews were conducted with private sector actors including hotel owners, home stay operators, and local entrepreneurs who invested during the development period, alongside community members who witnessed and participated in the tourism development process.

Direct field observation constituted another crucial component of primary data collection, with multiple field visits conducted between 2017-2018. These visits involved participant observation of community activities and tourism infrastructure, systematic documentation of physical infrastructure conditions including road quality, tourism facilities, and coastal erosion impacts, as well as photographic and descriptive records of development progress and subsequent deterioration. Secondary data was obtained through official government documents such as Regional Medium-Term Development Plans (RPJMD) 2010-2015, Government Accountability Performance Reports (LAKIP) from relevant agencies, budget allocation documents and expenditure records, and provincial and national tourism development regulations. Media and archival sources provided additional context through contemporary news reports documenting the development process, historical accounts of policy decisions and public announcements, and academic and policy research on Indonesian tourism development.

The analytical approach follows a comprehensive three-stage process designed to trace the political dynamics of policy entrepreneurship and institutional change. The first stage involves chronological reconstruction through systematic timeline development of key policy decisions, infrastructure investments, and political transitions, identification of critical junctures where policy direction changed significantly, and mapping of actor networks and their evolving influence over time. The second stage focuses on thematic coding and pattern recognition, involving coding of interview transcripts and documentary evidence using the theoretical framework of policy entrepreneurship, institutional embedding, and political continuity, cross-validation of findings across multiple data sources to ensure reliability, and pattern identification linking specific political behaviors to development outcomes. The third stage encompasses interpretive analysis through theoretical interpretation of empirical patterns using the policy entrepreneur framework, comparative analysis with broader patterns of development politics in decentralized Indonesia, and assessment of generalizability and implications for similar contexts.

To ensure analytical rigor, this study employs multiple validation strategies including triangulation through cross-referencing interview data with official documents and direct observations, member checking via verification of key findings with informed local stakeholders, and temporal consistency through analysis of how accounts and evidence align across different time periods. The study acknowledges several methodological limitations, recognizing that the



research focuses on a single case, limiting statistical generalizability, though it offers rich insights into causal mechanisms. Additionally, some key informants, particularly former Regent Herliyan Saleh, were not directly accessible, requiring reliance on secondary accounts and documentary evidence for certain aspects of the analysis.

All interviews were conducted with informed consent, and informants were assured of confidentiality where requested. Given the sensitive nature of political analysis, particular care was taken to protect the identity of informants who expressed concerns about potential repercussions from their participation. This methodological approach enables a comprehensive examination of how political dynamics shaped Rupert's tourism development trajectory, providing both empirical documentation of events and theoretical insights into the mechanisms of policy entrepreneurship and institutional vulnerability in the Indonesian context.

## **4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 The Genesis of Policy Entrepreneurship: Constructing Rupert Utara's Tourism Vision (2010-2025)**

The transformation of North Rupert Island from a neglected coastal periphery into a flagship tourism destination represents one of the most dramatic examples of policy entrepreneurship in post-decentralization Indonesia. When Herliyan Saleh assumed the regency of Bengkalis in 2010, he inherited a jurisdiction characterized by vast territorial expanse and diverse developmental challenges that demanded strategic prioritization. His decision to designate North Rupert as one of four regional development centers—specifically as the focal point for tourism and agribusiness—marked the beginning of an ambitious experiment in local developmental leadership.

Herliyan's approach embodied classic policy entrepreneurship characteristics, combining visionary planning with substantial resource mobilization and personal political commitment. The establishment of Regional Regulation No. 19 of 2011 concerning the Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJM) 2010-2015 provided the formal institutional foundation for this transformation, explicitly positioning Rupert District and North Rupert District as integrated tourism and agribusiness zones. This regulatory framework represented more than mere bureaucratic planning; it constituted what Kingdon would recognize as successful policy window exploitation, where political will, problem recognition, and available solutions converged to enable transformative change.

The comprehensiveness of Herliyan's developmental vision becomes evident through examination of the ten supporting programs embedded within the RPJM framework. These ranged from infrastructure planning for regional facilities and natural resources, tourism

destination development, and environmental quality improvement, to research and development initiatives, electricity sector development, road and bridge construction, transportation infrastructure, natural resource rehabilitation, and water management systems. The scope of this programming suggests not merely opportunistic project selection, but rather systematic institutional embedding designed to create sustainable developmental momentum beyond individual leadership tenure.

Particularly significant was the substantial financial commitment underlying this vision. Over the five-year implementation period, approximately 500 billion rupiah was allocated to support these programs, with an estimated 345 billion rupiah dedicated specifically to the crucial arterial road connecting Batu Panjang to Tanjung Medang. This level of resource commitment demonstrates what distinguishes genuine policy entrepreneurship from mere political rhetoric—the willingness to stake significant political and financial capital on transformative initiatives.

#### **4.2 Institutional Mobilization and Community Response**

The Department of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports (Dinas Kebudayaan, Pariwisata, Pemuda dan Olahraga) emerged as the primary implementing agency for Herliyan's tourism vision, developing a comprehensive 26-point program for maritime tourism development in North Rupat District spanning 2010-2015. This program encompassed infrastructure development including master plan creation, ecotourism detailed engineering design, resort planning, bird watching tower construction, beach lighting installation, and gazebo construction, alongside facility provision such as home stay development, house renovation, and traditional house construction. Human resource development components included youth tourism training, vocational school establishment, tourism awareness programs, and community guidance initiatives.

The tangible results of this programming became visible through substantial budget realizations. In 2010 alone, superior tourism object development received over 1.3 billion rupiah, while beach festival organization absorbed nearly 200 million rupiah. Although funding fluctuated in subsequent years—dropping significantly in 2011-2012 before resurging dramatically in 2013 to over 3.1 billion rupiah across multiple program components—the consistency of governmental attention maintained developmental momentum.

These governmental investments catalyzed remarkable community response, demonstrating the multiplier effects of effective policy entrepreneurship. The emergence of two representative hotels, one under construction, fifteen guesthouses, and approximately twenty home stays reflected growing private sector confidence in the developmental trajectory. Local entrepreneurs invested personal resources, including pension funds, in tourism-related businesses, while food vendors and souvenir producers proliferated to serve increasing visitor numbers. The installation

of free Wi-Fi services by local warung operators exemplifies the community's adaptive response to tourism market demands.

The infrastructure improvements achieved during this period were substantial and visible. The completion of ten rest gazebos, three kilometers of jogging track, twenty solar-powered lamps, three public toilet facilities, and ten home stay units created the basic framework for tourism reception. More significantly, the commencement of arterial road construction promised to resolve the fundamental accessibility challenge that had historically constrained developmental potential.

#### **4.3 The Critical Role of Emotional Connection and Political Capital**

Field research revealed that Herliyan's effectiveness as a policy entrepreneur derived not merely from formal authority, but from deeper emotional and cultural connections to the Rupert Island community. Interview data consistently emphasized his personal commitment to the region's advancement, manifested through regular site visits, community engagement, and public advocacy for North Rupert's tourism potential. During the annual Mandi Safar cultural ritual at Tanjung Lapin Beach, attended by thousands of domestic and international tourists, Herliyan articulated a sophisticated understanding of tourism's multifaceted benefits, emphasizing cultural preservation, economic welfare improvement, creative industry stimulation, and rural small business development.

This emotional investment translated into sustained political prioritization over five years, enabling the accumulation of developmental momentum that might otherwise have dissipated under competing demands for governmental attention and resources. The regent's personal oversight of the crucial arterial road project—a multi-year initiative requiring sustained budgetary commitment and technical coordination—exemplifies how individual political capital can drive institutional persistence in complex developmental undertakings.

#### **4.4 The Collapse: Political Transition and Political Discontinuity (2015-2018)**

The dramatic reversal of North Rupert's developmental trajectory following Herliyan Saleh's electoral defeat in 2015 provides compelling evidence for the vulnerability of entrepreneur-dependent policies to political transition. The incoming regent, Amril Mukminin, represented not merely a change in leadership, but a fundamental shift in developmental priorities and regional focus that would prove devastating for North Rupert's tourism aspirations.

The most immediate and visible manifestation of this policy discontinuity was the abandonment of the arterial road project. Despite 345 billion rupiah in investment and 64 kilometers of completed construction, the crucial final 20 kilometers remained unfinished, creating a

transportation bottleneck that effectively negated years of infrastructural progress. The deteriorated condition of this incomplete section rendered overland access virtually impossible during rainy seasons, forcing the cancellation of hotel bookings, restaurant reservations, and tourism activities that had become the economic foundation for numerous local businesses.

The systematic redirection of tourism programming away from North Rupert toward alternative coastal destinations—including Pantai Indah Selat Baru, Pantai Tanjung Senekip Teluk Pambang Banten, and Pantai Sepahat in Bandar Laksamana District—demonstrated deliberate policy reorientation rather than temporary resource constraints. This geographical redistribution of developmental attention effectively signaled the end of North Rupert's status as a regional tourism priority, undermining both public sector programming and private sector confidence in the destination's viability.

#### **4.5 Community Impact and Institutional Vulnerability**

The consequences of this policy discontinuity for local communities were both immediate and severe. The abandonment of numerous homestays, closure of food establishments, and cessation of souvenir production activities represented not merely economic losses, but the collapse of community-based tourism networks that had required years to establish. Entrepreneurs who had invested significant personal resources—including life savings and pension funds—found themselves with stranded assets in an effectively inaccessible destination.

The deterioration of the sea wall infrastructure, constructed to address coastal erosion problems, provides a particularly revealing example of policy abandonment dynamics. Community members began removing sea wall stones for private construction projects, transforming protective infrastructure into a commons tragedy that accelerated coastal degradation. This pattern illustrates how policy discontinuity can create negative feedback loops that compound initial infrastructural problems.

#### **4.6 Theoretical Implications: Understanding Champion-Dependent Policy Cycles**

The Rupert Island case illuminates several critical theoretical insights regarding policy entrepreneurship and institutional vulnerability in decentralized democratic contexts. First, it demonstrates how individual political leaders can serve as catalysts for transformative developmental initiatives that transcend normal bureaucratic capacity and resource limitations. Herliyan's ability to mobilize 500 billion rupiah over five years for a previously neglected peripheral region represents exceptional governmental commitment that achieved tangible infrastructural and economic results.

However, the case simultaneously reveals the inherent fragility of entrepreneur-dependent policies in systems lacking strong institutional continuity mechanisms. The absence of cross-partisan consensus, permanent bureaucratic embedding, or legal frameworks ensuring project completion created vulnerability to political transition that ultimately negated years of developmental investment. This pattern suggests what we term "champion-dependent policy cycles"—developmental trajectories that rise and fall with individual political leadership rather than achieving institutional sustainability.

The North Rupert experience also highlights the particular challenges facing tourism development in Indonesia's decentralized system, where regional autonomy enables transformative local initiatives but provides limited protection against policy reversal. Unlike infrastructure projects that may achieve completion before political transition, tourism development requires sustained programming, marketing, and service quality maintenance that demands long-term institutional commitment transcending electoral cycles.

#### **4.7 Broader Implications for Indonesian Development Politics**

These findings have significant implications for understanding developmental politics in post-Reformasi Indonesia. The decentralization reforms that empowered regional leaders like Herliyan to pursue ambitious local initiatives simultaneously created systematic vulnerabilities when those leaders lose power or political support. This suggests that effective developmental policy in Indonesia's democratic context requires not merely entrepreneurial leadership, but also institutional design that protects transformative initiatives from political discontinuity.

The Rupert case demonstrates that successful policy entrepreneurship alone may be insufficient for sustainable development outcomes. Instead, it highlights the critical importance of embedding transformative initiatives within legal frameworks, bureaucratic structures, and political coalitions that can survive individual leadership transitions. This represents a crucial challenge for Indonesia's continuing democratic development, where the benefits of decentralized innovation must be balanced against the risks of political fragmentation and policy instability.

The emotional and cultural dimensions of Herliyan's connection to the Rupert community also suggest important insights about the relationship between political legitimacy and developmental effectiveness. His success derived not merely from formal authority, but from community trust and shared developmental vision that enabled sustained mobilization of both public and private resources. This points toward the importance of culturally-grounded leadership in achieving transformative developmental outcomes, while simultaneously highlighting the vulnerability created when such leadership cannot be institutionalized beyond individual tenure.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The political dynamics of tourism development on the north coast of Rupert Island demonstrate the critical role of individual political leadership in Indonesia's decentralized governance system. This study reveals that policy entrepreneurship, while capable of catalyzing dramatic developmental transformation, remains fundamentally vulnerable to political transitions in the absence of robust institutional embedding mechanisms.

The success of North Rupert's tourism development between 2010-2015 under Regent Herliyan Saleh illustrates how individual political commitment can mobilize extraordinary resources and achieve tangible infrastructural progress. Through the strategic utilization of his executive authority, Herliyan established North Rupert as a tourism development center within the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan 2010-2015, allocated approximately 500 billion rupiah for comprehensive infrastructure development, and maintained sustained governmental attention over five years. His emotional connection to the region provided the personal motivation necessary to overcome bureaucratic inertia and resource constraints that typically impede ambitious developmental initiatives.

However, the dramatic stagnation and partial reversal of these achievements following Herliyan's electoral defeat in 2015 exposes the inherent fragility of champion-dependent development policies. The subsequent administration under Amril Mukminin demonstrated no comparable commitment to North Rupert's tourism development, allowing crucial infrastructure projects to remain incomplete and redirecting tourism programming to alternative locations. This policy discontinuity effectively negated years of public investment and private sector engagement, leaving local communities with stranded tourism assets and deteriorating infrastructure.

The North Rupert case illuminates a broader challenge in Indonesian development politics: the tension between the innovation potential of decentralized leadership and the institutional continuity required for sustainable development outcomes. While decentralization reforms have empowered regional leaders to pursue transformative local initiatives, they have simultaneously created systematic vulnerabilities when political leadership changes occur without corresponding institutional protection for ongoing developmental projects.

These findings suggest that effective tourism development in Indonesia's democratic context requires not merely entrepreneurial leadership, but also institutional design that can protect transformative initiatives from political discontinuity. The emotional bonds between political leaders and their constituencies, while potentially powerful catalysts for development, cannot substitute for robust legal frameworks, bureaucratic embedding, and cross-partisan consensus that ensure policy sustainability beyond individual tenure.



The Rupat Island experience ultimately demonstrates that successful policy entrepreneurship must be complemented by institutional mechanisms that can preserve developmental momentum across electoral cycles. Without such safeguards, even the most visionary and well-funded initiatives remain vulnerable to the inevitable transitions that characterize democratic governance, potentially undermining both public investment and community development aspirations.

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