

The Urgency of Green Tourism Policies in Tourism Area Development

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ABSTRACT

Green tourism policies are essential for controlling the intensity of development in tourism areas. This study examines the objectives of tourism development control, which must be directed toward preserving ecological conditions that are currently deteriorating due to development that prioritizes only economic and social aspects. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing interviews and field studies as data collection methods. The research subject is the City Government of Batu, East Java, a city that brands itself as the “City of Tourism,” as its development policies in every period consistently focus on tourism-oriented urban development. The research findings indicate that implementing green tourism policies is crucial for tourism development, as ecological sectors must remain protected amidst rapid development. Batu City’s commitment to realizing the motto “City with a Rural Ambiance” motivates the government, private sector, and community to recognize the importance of steering tourism development policies toward the “Green Tourism” concept. Conceptually, the Batu City government has already directed tourism development toward a green tourism concept, evidenced by its commitment to incorporating development control programs into environmentally friendly frameworks within the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) and the local government’s vision and mission. This is further reinforced by the Draft Regional Regulation on “Investment Incentives and Facilitation.” However, this commitment requires support from the private sector as investors, the community, and various other stakeholders to work together to ensure Batu City remains “green.” This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to those in need of guidance on tourism policy direction.

Keywords: *Investment, Tourism Policy, Batu City, Green Tourism, Regional Development*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the tourism sector has become one of the main pillars in accelerating regional economic growth in Indonesia. This sector not only contributes to an increase in Local Revenue (PAD), but also creates job opportunities for local communities, which in turn supports broader socioeconomic development. Over the past five years, the tourism sector in Indonesia has shown a positive trend in its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The data presented in Figure 1 indicates that the tourism sector’s contribution peaked in 2022, with continued growth in subsequent years, reflecting the sector’s positive and sustainable impact on the Indonesian economy.

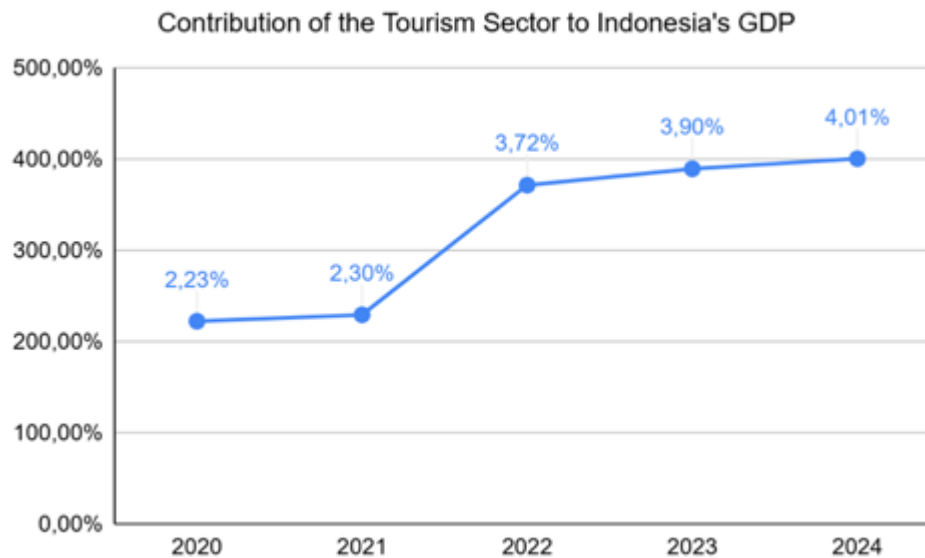


Figure 1: Contribution of the Tourism Sector to Indonesia's GDP
Source: Indonesian Ministry of Tourism (2025)

Although the tourism sector makes a significant contribution to the economy, its sustainability is often threatened by development practices that fail to take environmental factors into account. As it grows, tourism risks causing negative impacts on ecosystems and natural sustainability. For example, in many cases, tourism development focused on physical expansion and increased investment often ignores environmental carrying capacities, ultimately leading to serious environmental damage (UNEP & UNWTO, 2012). This indicates that to maintain the long-term economic benefits of the tourism sector, a more holistic approach is needed that integrates environmental sustainability with economic objectives, as highlighted by Hall (2019), who emphasizes the importance of a sustainable tourism approach to prevent long-term damage. The imbalance between economic interests and environmental protection often leads to ecosystem degradation, land-use conversion, and a decline in the quality of natural resources, which ultimately threatens the sustainability of the tourism sector itself.

In response to these impacts, the concept of green tourism has emerged as an approach that combines economic objectives, environmental sustainability, and social well-being. This concept not only emphasizes environmentally friendly practices at the operational level but also positions public policy as the primary instrument in regulating tourism sector development in harmony with environmental capacity. Bramwell and Lane (2011) explain that green tourism focuses on controlling the intensity of development by considering natural carrying capacity and ensuring that tourism activities do not threaten ecosystem conservation. Green tourism policies function as a more comprehensive control mechanism, not merely as a symbol of commitment to sustainability (Andari & Setiyorini, 2016; Lagodiienko et al., 2022). Therefore, this approach plays a crucial role in ensuring a balance between economic development and environmental protection within the tourism sector.

Nevertheless, there is a significant research gap in studies on green tourism policies at the local level. Most previous research has focused more on the conceptual aspects of sustainable tourism, sustainability indicators, or the economic and environmental impacts of tourism (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2019). These studies have not yet delved deeply into how green tourism policies function as instruments of development control, particularly in the context of the relationship between local government policies, investor interests, and local community participation. Furthermore, research

specifically examining the gap between policy intent and policy practice in regional tourism development remains limited.

Batu City, East Java, serves as a relevant empirical context for examining the implementation of green tourism policies. As a region that brands itself as the “City of Tourism,” Batu City’s development direction in each regional development planning period tends to be oriented toward strengthening the tourism sector. This situation has significantly driven local economic growth, yet simultaneously increased pressure on mountain ecosystems, water catchment areas, and green open spaces due to the rapid development of tourism facilities. The Batu City Government has demonstrated a conceptual commitment to environmentally friendly development, including through the overarching vision established at the city’s inception—“A City with a Rural Ambiance” (“Kota Bernuansa Desa”)—the prioritization of development control in the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), and the drafting of a Draft Regional Regulation on Investment Incentives and Facilitation that accommodates sustainability principles.

Public policy literature emphasizes that the success of sustainable policies is highly dependent on the involvement of non-governmental actors, including the private sector and the community, in the policy implementation process (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Setianingsih (2025) adds that community actor involvement also contributes to tourism development. However, in the context of green tourism, there remains a scarcity of empirical studies examining how such synergies among these actors are formed and to what extent investor and community support can strengthen or, conversely, weaken the control of tourism development policies. This research gap constitutes an academic void that needs to be addressed through context-based local research.

Based on this background and research gap, this study aims to examine the role of green tourism policies as an instrument for controlling tourism development in Batu City. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and field studies to understand policy dynamics, local government commitment, and the roles of private actors and the community in maintaining environmental sustainability amidst rapid tourism development. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to enrich the study of sustainable tourism policies, as well as practical contributions to local governments in formulating and implementing more effective and contextually appropriate green tourism policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Development Theory

Development theory refers to the concepts and approaches used to explain the process of social and economic change in a country or region. This theory encompasses aspects such as economic growth, wealth distribution, community empowerment, and environmental sustainability. According to Todaro and Smith (2011), development theory involves understanding how developing countries can improve the quality of life for their citizens through effective planning and policies that support the economic, educational, and social sectors. Development approaches must prioritize basic human needs, not just economic growth to achieve inclusive and sustainable well-being.

Development theory can be applied in the context of tourism as a key element for driving regional economic growth. In many developing countries, tourism is viewed as a sector capable of accelerating economic development through job creation, increased local revenue, and stimulation of related sectors such as transportation, hospitality, and trade (Todaro & Smith, 2011). Therefore, tourism development often becomes an integral part of regional development strategies. However, the application of development theory in tourism does not focus solely on increasing economic revenue but also on social and environmental sustainability. For example, sustainable tourism development can improve the quality of life for local communities while preserving and conserving natural resources that serve as tourist attractions. According to Hall (2008), sustainable tourism integrates economic

growth with social and environmental responsibility, ensuring that tourism not only provides short-term economic benefits but also preserves nature and culture for future generations.

b. Green Tourism

Green tourism is a concept that prioritizes the principle of sustainability in the management of tourist destinations. This concept emphasizes a balance between the growth of the tourism sector and environmental conservation and involves local communities in the management of natural resources (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Green tourism focuses on reducing the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, such as waste management, energy conservation, and the protection of biodiversity. Additionally, green tourism emphasizes the importance of using natural resources wisely and educating tourists and the public about the importance of environmental conservation.

According to Gössling (2019), green tourism is not only related to environmentally friendly tourism activities but also encompasses policies and practices that integrate sustainability into all aspects of the tourism industry's development and operations. The implementation of green tourism also involves the active participation of the government, businesses, and local communities in creating tourist destinations that are not only economically attractive but also sustainable in the long term. The green tourism concept aims to create a responsible tourism model that preserves nature and provides socio-economic benefits to local communities without compromising environmental carrying capacity

Andari & Setiyorini (2016) state that there are three benefits that must be present in the green tourism concept. Figure 2 illustrates the components of these benefits within the green tourism concept, which consist of social benefits, economic benefits, and environmental benefits.



Figure 2: Urban Green Tourism Benefits

Source: Andari & Setiyorini (2016)

Based on Figure 2, several benefits of the urban green tourism concept are evident, including:

- 1) Social benefits, which provide local experiences through shared learning about activities, physical attributes, and concepts within the local community, thereby fostering a sense of pride and ownership among residents and creating a welcoming atmosphere for visitors. Additionally, it fosters healthier communities by promoting local culture, diverse food options, and recreational areas, while emphasizing connections among local communities as part of a vital regional mix.
- 2) Economic benefits: driving local economic development by encouraging consumption of local goods and services. Furthermore, it recirculates economic benefits through the flow of money within the local economy, thereby strengthening local resilience.
- 3) Environmental benefits: reducing energy use by utilizing active transportation (cycling, walking) to experience the city's attractions and encouraging

travel choices closer to home. Furthermore, raising environmental awareness by highlighting the connection between the urban environment and nature, along with initiatives for the preservation, revitalization, and conservation of cultural heritage.

METHOD

The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative research, employing interviews and field studies as data collection methods. Descriptive qualitative research is an approach that focuses on understanding phenomena in their natural context, to describe and explain a phenomenon in depth and detail without making comparisons or testing hypotheses. The results of descriptive qualitative research emphasize understanding the context and meaning of the research subjects' experiences rather than making generalizations or producing statistical figures (Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted on the City Government of Batu, East Java, as a city that brands itself as the "City of Tourism," since its development policies in every period have consistently been directed toward the development of a tourism city.

Data collection utilized the deep interview method with relevant informants, namely the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, the Head of the Tourism Office, as well as Village and Subdistrict Heads overseeing tourism destinations. The selection of public sector informants aimed to assess the alignment and credibility of policies formulated for Batu City in realizing Green Tourism. Additionally, data were obtained through document analysis to corroborate the informants' statements. Data analysis employed the descriptive analysis technique outlined by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014). This process is crucial for facilitating the mapping of data results obtained from transcribed interviews. After data processing, the findings were presented to derive answers relevant to the research problem.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Vision, Mission, and Development Goals of the Batu City Government

The Batu City Government has a vision: "MBATU SAE," which stands for Madani, Sustainable, Agro-creative, Integrated, Excellent, Synergistic, Accommodating, and Ecological. This vision is then translated into a mission as a strategic step toward achieving it, namely: 1) building an empowered and character-driven community rooted in local culture and identity. 2) Developing an agro-creative regional economy supported by environmentally conscious, integrated infrastructure. 3) Regulating urban spatial development and conserving water resources. And 4) Establishing governance that is integrity-driven, collaborative, and innovative, supported by the strengthening of villages and neighborhoods. As shown in Figure 3, Batu City's current vision and mission are oriented toward sustainable development and social welfare. Furthermore, while maintaining environmental conservation and maximizing local potential to improve the quality of life for residents of Batu City. Therefore, these visions and missions must be translated into strategic goals and objectives that support the achievement of Batu City's development vision and mission, as illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 3: Visi dan Misi Kepala Daerah Kota Batu
Source: Document of RPJMD Kota Batu 2024-2029 (2025)

The development direction of the Batu City Government, based on its existing vision and mission, clearly focuses on increasing investment in the green tourism sector as an effort to sustainably harness the city's natural potential. Based on interviews with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Batu, the second mission, which aims to "Develop an Agro-Creative-Based Regional Economy Supported by Environmentally Conscious Integrative Infrastructure," reflects the government's commitment to integrating the agricultural, tourism, and creative economy sectors into a single integrated system. Investment in green tourism is a vital component of the local economy, with a focus on developing nature-based tourist destinations and environmentally friendly local products. The development of agrotourism, as part of this mission, is expected to optimize the use of agricultural land while attracting tourists who care about environmental sustainability.



Figure 4: Tujuan dan Sasaran Strategis Program Pembangunan Kota Batu 2024-2029

Source: Document of RPJMD Kota Batu 2024-2029 (2025)

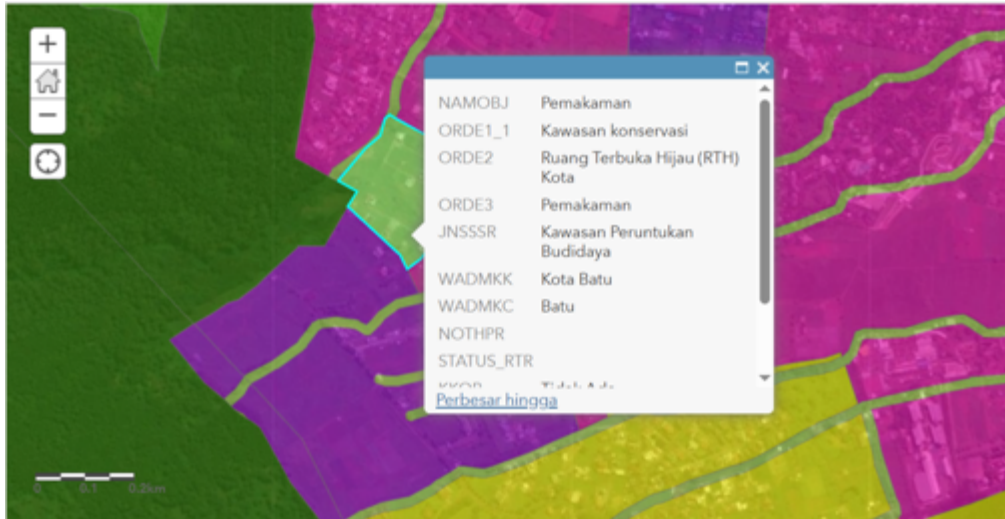
The third mission, which focuses on “Controlling Urban Development and Water Resource Conservation,” also plays a major role in ensuring that the development of green tourism proceeds without damaging ecosystems. Well-planned and environmentally conscious control of urban development is key to maintaining a balance between tourism development and nature conservation. Water resource conservation, a top priority, supports the sustainability of green tourism by preserving environmental quality for future generations. Thus, these vision and missions complement one another to create a sustainable tourism ecosystem that benefits the local economy and communities.

b. The Issue and Urgency of Green Tourism Development

The Batu City Government, as the policy-making authority, is currently facing a serious problem in the form of the high rate of conversion of productive land, driven by economic activity, population growth, and socio-cultural dynamics. This conversion process often disregards established spatial plans, while planning efforts frequently fail to anticipate rapidly evolving conditions, resulting in a delayed government response. The conversion of productive land into industrial, service, or residential zones that deviate from planning frameworks has the potential to cause environmental damage and reduce ecosystem carrying capacity. In Batu City, land-use conversion primarily occurs in rice fields that are converted into tourism activities, residential areas, or other agricultural uses, thereby reducing water absorption areas and driving encroachment into downstream river areas (Batu City RPJPD 2005–2025, 2019). This situation indicates the high vulnerability of Batu City’s land to environmental degradation.

Tourism activities consist of several subsectors, including attractions (natural and man-made), accommodations (hotels, villas, homestays, and others), restaurants, cafes, souvenir centers, transportation, and travel agencies. The main issue in tourism development in Batu City is the development of tourism areas that do not align with their designated land use. For example, compare the two images in Figure 5. There has been a change in land use: in 2019, the land was designated as conservation land and green open space, but by 2024, it had been rezoned for residential use. This, of course, could pose problems regarding the density of green spaces in Batu City.

RDTR Kota Batu 2019



RDTR Kota Batu 2024

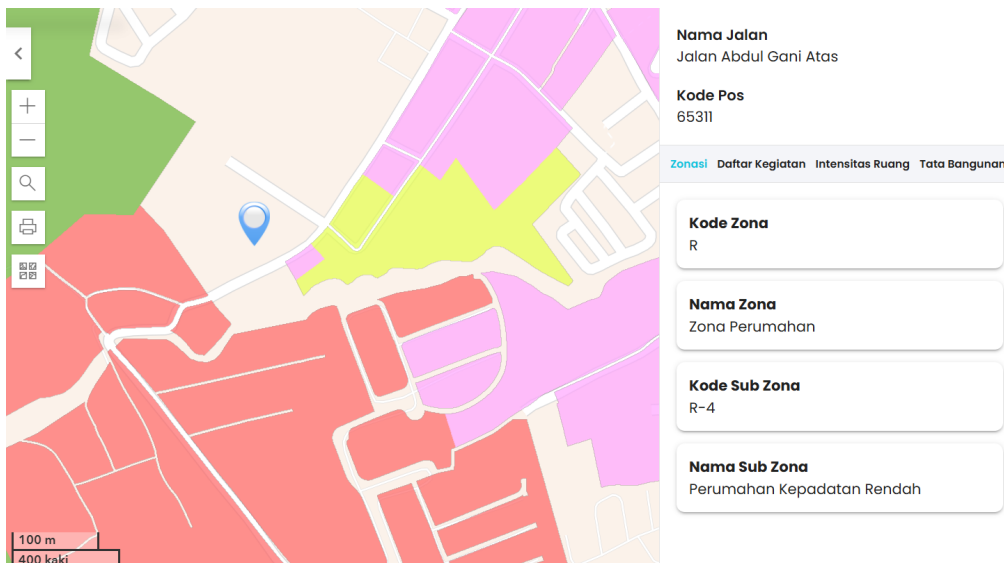


Figure 5: Comparison of the Batu City RDTR Conditions in Oro-Oro Ombo Village in 2019 and 2024

Source: Compiled by Author based on Gistaru dan ArcGIS Document (2026)

Based on interviews with the village heads of Oro-Oro Ombo and Pandanrejo, land conversion continues to occur frequently in the area, carried out by both local residents and outsiders. Most residents, particularly those who have lived in the area for a relatively short time, are unaware of the implementation of the LP2B (Sustainable Food Cropland) or LSD (Protected Rice Fields) policies in their region. Due to a lack of understanding of applicable policies and

regulations, land conversion practices continue unabated without strict oversight. According to Putri et al. (2024), one of the primary causes of this phenomenon is the low level of public knowledge regarding regulations governing land use, which are often not updated or effectively disseminated.

Based on an interview with the Village Head of Oro-Oro Ombo, the majority of this land conversion occurs through land sales, which are used to establish businesses, build housing, or for other commercial purposes. This phenomenon is closely linked to the increasing economic activity in the region, particularly in the tourism and trade sectors. The rising demand for land for property development, lodging, and other tourism facilities has led to an increase in developed land that was previously green space or agricultural land. This results in a reduction in the area of green space in Batu City, which should be one of the key assets in maintaining ecosystem balance (Prayitno et al., 2021). Furthermore, some of this land conversion does not align with the spatial patterns outlined in the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW), indicating a mismatch between planning and on-the-ground implementation (Rahmadi et al., 2023). This mismatch has the potential to cause long-term impacts on environmental sustainability and the quality of life for communities in the region.

c. The Direction of Green Tourism Development

The vision, mission, goals, and development objectives of the Batu City Government have focused on tourism development. However, in practice, implementation has not yet been in line with established regulations. Based on the concept of green tourism by Andari & Setiyorini (2016), there are three benefits that must be present in green tourism. The following are the results of the mapping of green tourism benefits in Batu City.

Table 1: Mapping the Direction of Green Tourism Development in Batu City

No	Benefit	Item	Implementation
1	Social	Building tourism with local communities	The Draft Local Regulation on the Provision of Incentives and Investment Facilitation for 2025 contains a provision requiring the involvement of local communities in tourism development, even if the investors are from outside Batu City.
		Involving local communities in tourism activities	The Draft Regional Regulation on the Provision of Incentives and Investment Facilitation for 2025 contains a provision stipulating the obligation to involve approximately 30–60% of Batu City residents in tourism operations or the recruitment of tourism-supporting MSME partners from Batu City.
2	Ekonomi	Promoting local economic development by encouraging the consumption of local goods and	There are currently no regulations directly governing the involvement of the local economy in tourism activities. However, in some tourist areas, local SMEs are already contributing to tourism activities. Examples include SME stalls in souvenir markets and the use of local products

No	Benefit	Item	Implementation
		services	to supply certain souvenirs and culinary items.
		Increasing the economic benefits derived from tourism	Several Village Heads stated that the presence of tourism in Batu City has significantly helped increase the income of local residents, whether through the recruitment of workers, supplier partners (vendors), or SMEs.
3	Environment	Reducing the density of existing buildings in tourism areas	In the Draft Regional Regulation on the Provision of Incentives and Investment Facilitation for 2025, there is a provision regulating building density according to land use designation. In other words, the number and type of buildings are adjusted based on the land they occupy (green space, residential land, industrial land, tourism land, etc.). The closer the land is to green space, the lower the building density becomes, and in some cases, the construction of permanent structures is even prohibited.
		Monitoring the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the context of tourism	There are currently no local regulations governing the monitoring of CSR implementation, so the authority responsible for monitoring CSR implementation remains unclear. To date, the Batu City Government's approach to CSR monitoring involves tracking the land allocated for public facilities (fasum) contributed by each investor, which amounts to 30% of the total land to be invested.

Source: Compiled by Author (2026)

Based on Table 1, it is evident that to date, the Batu City Government has sought to align its tourism policies with a green tourism concept. However, this effort has not yet been fully realized. From the mapping results in Table 1, not all aspects of the green tourism concept are covered in the draft regional regulation regarding the provision of incentives and investment facilitation. The social aspect has been well accommodated through policies on local community involvement and community empowerment within the tourism value chain. However, the economic and environmental aspects still leave significant gaps in the Draft Regional Regulation (Ranperda) regarding incentives and investment facilitation.

Economically, the policies have not fully ensured the strengthening of local economic circularity capable of mitigating economic leakage. This phenomenon is common in developing tourist areas where large-scale investments often do not directly correlate with an increase in the absolute prosperity of local residents. On the environmental side, weak regulations regarding building density limits in water catchment areas pose a serious threat to the sustainability of Batu

City's environmental carrying capacity.

By comparison, research by Lagodiienko et al. (2020) confirms that the effectiveness of green tourism is highly dependent on the integration of holistic policies; failure to align investment incentives with environmental sustainability parameters will trigger the degradation of natural capital, which is the primary attraction of the destination. Furthermore, Higgins-Desbiolles (2022) cautions that without strict economic regulations prioritizing local interests, tourism risks becoming an instrument of marginalization that benefits only large capital owners at the expense of ecological damage.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion presented in this study, it can be seen that the Regional Long-Term Development Plan document, commonly referred to as the RPJPD, is a regional planning document that contains the regional government's development plan for the next 20 years. In preparing this document, a musrenbang forum is required, namely a development deliberation that can be held at the regional level, both at the provincial and district/city levels. This musrenbang brings together stakeholders in the government realm, including district governments, legislative councils, communities, and private companies. The RPJPD document contains the aspirations of the regional government, including the regional development vision, regional development mission, and the direction of regional development policies, followed by a mapping of local potential and the development of an implementation agenda and achievement indicators.

The integration of RPJPD documents can be done by aligning other government documents where these documents are interrelated with the development ideals of a region. Documents that are integrated in the RPJPD include: the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN), the National Spatial Plan (RTRW), the Provincial Long-Term Regional Development Plan (RPJPD), the Provincial Spatial Plan (RTRW), the Regency/City Long-Term Regional Development Plan (RPJPD), and the Regency/City Spatial Plan (RTRW) which can be derived in the preparation of the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), spatial structure and pattern, determination of strategic areas, and determination of flagship areas in a region. Then the RTRW document contains related policies and strategies of the Regional RTRW, Main Program Indications that are integrated with the Regional Development Vision and Mission, RPJPD Policies, and 5 (five) year main targets or commonly referred to as RPJMD.

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