



CSSR 2021

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8th International Conference on Science & Social Research
8 - 9 December 2021, Virtual Presentation



Survival Strategy of Indonesian Tourism Business Actors during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The restriction to travel during the Covid-19 pandemic made an economic loss for business tourism actors. This paper aims to identify and explain the survival strategy of tourism business actors during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 in Karimunjawa Island, Central Java. Qualitative research was employed in this study. The data collection was conducted through interviews, focus group discussion, observation, and document analysis. The results show that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Karimunjawa Island made tourism business actors lose their jobs and income. Most tourism business actors used their savings to survive and find other jobs possible.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic; Karimunjawa island; survival strategy; tourism business actors

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v7iS18.3919>

1.0 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread to almost the entire world since the beginning of 2020 and has changed how we live. The process of transmission of the coronavirus is speedy. It has resulted in very high casualties throughout world history, with more than 290 million cases and 5 million people who died on 31 October 2021 (Worldmeters, 2021). Various strategic sectors were shaken, so the government needed to issue a disaster emergency policy to survive the onslaught of the impact of Covid-19, one of which was the regional quarantine policy known as the lockdown (Sharma, Thomas, & Paul, 2021). This policy requires restrictions on human mobility due to the high risk of spreading a virus that is difficult to control. Meanwhile, the tourism sector cannot live without tourists who travel from one place to another (Beh & Lin, 2021).

Tourism is a sector that absorbs local labor and improves the regional economy (Pendit, 2006; Pitana & Gayatri, 2005). However, at the same time, tourism is a sector vulnerable to various factors, such as natural disasters, terrorism, and other security disturbances (Yeh, 2020). Tourism activity is a significant factor in social, cultural, and behavioral changes for local people. Coupled with the presence of COVID-19, it is inevitable that there will be a tremendous panic from the tourism industry players and, of course, the local government about the future of the tourism industry. The impact of this pandemic is expected to last a long time and is almost evenly distributed throughout the region (Li et al., 2021). Many experts argue that recovery from the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector is heavier than natural disasters, natural damage, climate change, and even terrorism issues (Yeh, 2020; Campbell et al., 2013).

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In Indonesia, the spread of COVID-19 has made the tourism sector suspended. The island of Bali, which has been a destination for foreign tourists, has suffered losses, including middle-level tourism business actors (Sutrisnawati et al., 2020). The condition is more severe in the small islands of marine tourism destinations just developing in the tourism industry, as in Karimunjawa Island, Jepara, Central Java, Indonesia, a destination for domestic and international tourists. Karimunjawa Island relies on marine natural wealth, which is its people's primary livelihood source (Campbell et al., 2020). Most island communities depend on marine resources, most live as fishermen, and they are the most vulnerable to poverty (Suleman, Pratikno, & Sandiah, 2019). The amount of their income is very dependent on nature, so the results are uncertain. Then, tourism came to Karimunjawa and gradually broke the poverty cycle. The community benefited from the tourism activity in Karimunjawa, which brought immediate and indirect economic improvement (Setiawan, Rijanta, & Baiquni, 2017). Tourism creates many job opportunities, such as entrepreneurs, tour guides, and food services. The tourism industry in Karimunjawa is also supported by the rapid growth of hotels and resorts to accommodate the needs of tourists (Limbung & Soetomo, 2014; Puryono & Suryanti, 2019).

Although some observers have stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has given the ecosystem positive things because it gives to nature, especially under the sea, to recover from the density of tourist activities that have the potential to damage nature (Ketut et al., 2020). However, of the many studies on Karimunjawa Island, none has highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic or regional quarantine on the resilience of tourism business actors in surviving on Karimunjawa Island yet. Therefore, based on the explanation, this paper aims to identify and explain the survival strategy of tourism business actors during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 until 2021.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector

The COVID-19 pandemic disaster is something that no one can imagine. This dangerous and deadly virus has spread rapidly across continents and countries, making all countries implement regional quarantine policies. Indonesia has implemented a large-scale Social Restriction (PSBB) system policy for several periods. Places that can gather large numbers of people are closed, and various community activities are restricted. All tourist attractions are closed for tourist visits, which impacts the area's economic independence (Utami & Kafabih, 2021; Sinulingga, 2021). The retribution for tourist attractions and the surrounding community who depend on their income from tourist visits are also affected. For example, hotels, restaurants, travel services, tour guides, producers, and sellers of souvenirs; are the groups of business actors most affected by this pandemic. Worse yet, many employees were laid off because their place of work suffered losses (Walakula, 2020). Therefore, many studies agreed that the tourism crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic is perfect timing for tourism stakeholders to reconsider the transformation of the global tourism industry to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2021).

Beh & Lin (2021) examines the impact of COVID-19 on the ASEAN tourism industry and conclude that international tourism can seriously be affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. For example, Malaysia's tourism industry is affected by the spread of this virus, where many tourists cancel or delay their visits. Consequently, the Malaysian government issued an economic stimulus package to assist the tourism industry in surviving this crisis (Foo et al., 2020). Maritime tourism is also heavily affected, as in Bali, for example. As the largest tourism industry in Indonesia, Bali's island also experienced a significant decrease in tourists and destroyed the economy of Bali's MSMEs (Paramita & Putra, 2020). Santen Island in Banyuwangi also experienced the same impact (Nurhalimah et al., 2020). Although the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is mainly in the economic sector, the study also found that people are more aware of personal and environmental hygiene, especially implementing health protocols for mutual safety. Observers also conveyed that there were positive things from this pandemic. When all tourist attractions are closed, tourism that relies on natural potential can restore its natural functions. Reduced human and tourist activities lead to reduced air pollution and improved air quality and provide an opportunity for the earth to recover (Ketut et al., 2020; Crossley, 2020). Many agreed that after the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism stakeholders could rethink the direction of tourism development (Nepal, 2020).

2.2 The Survival Strategy

Humans use common sense to develop the strategy to survive any condition, even the worst. The ability to survive and overcome obstacles is an essential skill as a member of society. People have a specific strategy to survive in all conditions to sustain the community. The survival strategy is an effort or a way someone makes to survive both in this life. Many studies explain the survival strategy of some groups. Kiranantika (2021) studied the survival strategy of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong. She found that Indonesian migrant workers could survive in another country by establishing a social network essential to forming social capital. In line with Kiranantika's study, Wekke & Cahaya (2015) stated that social capital also makes poor fishers' communities in coastal areas in Bone, Indonesia could, survive. This social capital is formed from close kinship, help, trust, and cooperation among the poor fishermen's families.

Meanwhile, Suharyanto et al. (2019) mentioned in their study that lives survival strategy of villagers after the relocation consists of an active strategy (farming and trading), passive strategy (reducing family expenses, children helping their parents in the field, and implementation the subsistence lifestyle), and network strategy (forming cooperative with the governmental offices and maintain good relation with the customer). Those studies about survival strategies could contribute to this study regarding the various survival strategies conducted by different communities in Indonesia and abroad. Therefore, this paper will identify the survival strategy of tourism business actors in Kemujan Village, Karimunjawa Island, during the Covid-19 pandemic where there are no tourism activities, and Karimunjawa has been closed to tourists for almost two years (2020 – 2021).

3.0 Research Method

This research applies a qualitative approach to understand the survival strategy of tourism business actors coping with the pandemic Covid-19 on Karimunjawa Island. A qualitative approach is a research procedure that produces descriptions of written or spoken words of people and observable behavior (Moleong, 2014). Based on that, this study aims to understand the meaning of events related to specific situations. The data will be more in-depth in describing the impact of the pandemic Covid-19 on the tourism business on Karimunjawa Island.

The data were collected from August to September 2021 in Kemujan Village, Karimunjawa, Jepara, Central Java, Indonesia. The data collection was conducted online and offline because of the government's policy that made Karimunjawa closed to outsider visitors. Fortunately, in September 2021, the research team obtained permission from the local government to enter Karimunjawa Island. The process of data collection employed four research methods. First, semi-structured interviews were used to understand the tourism business actors surviving the Covid-19 pandemic comprehensively. The informants were chosen through purposive sampling based on their type of business—for example, hotel owners, tourism agents, and culinary entrepreneurs. In addition, the informants from the local tourism awareness group are also essential to hear their perspectives. Second, focus group discussion (FGD) with the governmental staff in the Karimunjawa sub-district and Kemujan village. The research team also invited tourism actors, both organizations and individuals, to discuss the topics raised, namely the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their tourism businesses and the strategies they have to survive in a pandemic situation without tourists. The FGD was conducted online in August 2021 via google meet/WhatsApp call applications because it was impossible to visit the location due to the government's PPKM (travel restriction) policy. Third, observation was carried out in September 2021 when the local government lifted the travel restriction from/to Karimunjawa Island. Based on the observation, supported by the results of interviews and FGDs, the situation in Karimunjawa is indeed tranquil as an effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. The tourism industry, starting from lodging, and restaurants, is tranquil; even in some places, it seems that it is not well maintained.

Moreover, the local government does not allow tourists to visit Karimunjawa. Inspections at the "Kartini" Port of Jepara are also strict; passengers who want to board the ferry must submit the results of a COVID-19-free rapid test. Fourth document analysis. This technique is used to obtain the basics and opinions in writing, which is done by studying various literature related to the problem. Secondary data is obtained through this method by browsing the internet, reading various literature, results of previous research studies, lecture notes, and other relevant sources.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 General Discription of Kemujan Village, Karimunjawa

Kemujan Village has a population of 3,070 as of 2019 out of 10,122 residents of Karimunjawa District. The population details of Kemujan Village consist of 1,543 men and 1,527 women. Judging from the employment status data, most people work as fishermen and entrepreneurs. In addition to these two jobs, the community engaged in some jobs in the agricultural sector, animal husbandry, teaching staff, state civil servants, and health workers. Kemujan Village has a heterogeneous community; this can be seen from the diversity of ethnic groups who live in Kemujan Village. Among them are Javanese, Bugis, Madurese, Bajau, and Mandar tribes. Kemujan Village is a multicultural area with high social integration; this can be seen in several activities involving people from every ethnic group. In addition, the absence of discrimination is evidence of high social integration in Kemujan Village. However, as an area moving towards the label of a tourism area, Kemujan Village is still not sufficiently adaptable when tourists carry out activities outside the values and norms believed by the people of Kemujan Village.

Kemujan Village has potential in the tourism sector and home industry. The list of tourism sectors in Kemujan Village is mainly natural tourism, such as Ambar Beach, Asari Timo Beach, Baracuda Beach, Bungo Jabe Beach, Kohin Beach, Laendra Beach, and Pokemon Beach. In addition to these tourist places, there is a religious tourism destination that pilgrims from various regions often visit. In the economic sector, Kemujan Village has a promising home industry. Kemujan village is the center for producing various processed coconuts and seafood. Salted fish processing involves some of the marine products used and forms economic commodities in Kemujan Village. In addition, many marine products such as seaweed and squid are used by the people of Kemujan Village. Kemujan Village also has a good mangrove ecosystem and is the most extensive in the Karimunjawa Islands. The mangrove forest in Kemujan, which is still natural, can be used as a tourism area. Karimunjawa National Park has 44 species of mangroves belonging to 25 families. Mangrove forest in the land use zone has a mangrove tracking area of 29,242 hectares located in the Kemujan Island canal. The mangrove tracking area is an area developed as a mangrove tourism object. Mangrove tracking has a 1500-meter-long track which is entirely located in the canal area of Kemujan Island.

4.2 The Survival Strategy

Since the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia in March 2020, it has negatively impacted the people of Karimunjawa, especially Kemujan Village, and the activities of beach businesses, homestays, inns, and restaurants around the coast. These negative impacts impact decreasing income to meet the necessities of life. Without assistance from policymakers, business actors must have a survival strategy to meet their daily needs. The people of Kemujan Karimunjawa Village, especially business people, have various adaptation strategies to survive during the Covid-19 pandemic. Internal and external factors influence this, gradually training the community to adapt to current conditions.

First, back to their old profession as a fisherman. As a result of the closure of the tourism sector, people no longer carry out activities as business actors. Thus, to meet the needs of life and support family life which leads to the welfare of life, business actors have again

switched professions as fishermen. Fishing is a profession that most people do regardless of all work involved in the community. The ancestors of people in Kemujan Village were fishermen, and the next generations became fishermen. However, after Karimunjava, well known as a tourism destination, most fishermen change their job in the tourism sector. Being a fisherman cannot be ascertained that his income depends on the weather and other natural factors and requires much capital to purchase diesel fuel. Nevertheless, due to pandemics, they have to back to their old profession as Fishermans. Even though the income is small, it is better than no income from the tourism sector. According to Fisheries Law 45 of 2009, fishermen are people whose main job is catching fish.



Fig 1: Fisherman

Meanwhile, small fishers are people whose livelihood is fishing to meet the needs of daily life. Apart from that, in the process of catching fish, fishers also depend on the seasons of the arrival of fish, so fishermen's income is increasingly uncertain. Until now, even though their income is small. But they are still grateful because their fishermen's income is still sufficient for them to eat.

Second, one of the jobs that the people of Kemujan Village did during the Covid-19 pandemic was trading. The community opened small stalls and opened building shops and minimarkets. Each informant provided information on one of the strategies taken to survive during the pandemic. Trading is one of the informal jobs chosen as one of the strategies to survive for coastal business actors. This job is vital in helping people's income meet their daily needs.



Fig 2: A food stall in a house's terrace

Third, doing gardening. The tourism closure of Kemujan Village made the local community no longer depend on their life by "entertaining guests." Facing a situation like this, some of the people of Kemujan Village have returned to their original professions: gardening. With a large land area and a beautiful area, the community uses the land to become an alternative source of income or personal consumption. Commodities include sweet potatoes, cashew trees, peanuts, eggplant, and others. Gardening is an alternative and a side job when people are not looking for fish in the sea. The community cultivates land in the yards of their houses to plant various plants according to the soil climate in Kemujan Village.

Fourth, make a saving. As long as the Karimunjava community does not get an income, one solution is to make savings. People must be frugal and prioritize the most critical needs. From the interviews, people in Karimunjava or island communities find saving easier than people in urban areas. This is because the needs of urban communities are more complex and more consumptive.

Five became seaweed farmers. One of the commodities and sources of income for the people of Kemujan Village is to become a seaweed farmer. Being a seaweed farmer is one of the professions that existed before the entry/existence of tourism in Kemujan Village. Seaweed is usually used as a source of income and processing for some people in Kemujan Village. This profession is one of the strategies

taken when tourism is closed; even tourist attractions are often used as a place to dry seaweed. Not having to travel to the middle of the sea was one of the factors in choosing this strategy.



Fig 3: Women dry seaweed after harvesting

From the results explained above about the survival strategy of tourism business actors in Kemujan Village, Karimunjawa, it can be seen that many business people have been forced to switch professions due to the cessation of tourism activities. However, there is not much they can do on their own. Some people rely on agriculture, such as coconut and cashew. In contrast, others develop home industries, including culinary businesses. With a bit of money, they try their luck amid limitations. People whose main livelihood is in the tourism sector have run out of capital and savings to survive. Even though the government has assisted, it is not sufficient. Efforts can be made to develop the potential possessed by the Karimunjawa community so that they can support tourism activities later when they return to normal. Although this home product assistance takes time, the potential and enthusiasm of the community will be able to revive the Karimunjawa economy.

5.0 Conclusion

In the first half of 2020, Karimunjawa Island was completely closed to tourists to prevent the spread of COVID-19. During the several months of absence, it was difficult for business actors in Karimunjawa Island to find tourists, resulting in a huge local economic loss to tourism stakeholders. The tourism industry, hotels, boat rental, and travel services have stopped and resulted in the loss of the main income for the majority of the people of Karimunjawa. These business owners feel devastated because, for more than one year, there have been no visitors to Karimunjawa to use their service. It means they do not have income for at least a year before finding another job. Not many options they have in this pandemic situation, but one thing is for sure they willing to have tourists again. During this difficult time, the business actors in Kemujan Village develop their survival strategy.

The survival strategy that business actors commonly use is using their savings. Then, back to their old profession as a fisherman to get income, fishing could be their best option. Besides that, as they had more spare time, the people of Kemujan Village started to become seaweed farmers. Many households developed unique and specific products, most of which are food products. These products have a future and could be introduced as unique from Karimunjawa.

Therefore, for future research, the researcher could focus on developing small-middle businesses from the household's family. This research topic could explore the potential natural products from Karimunjawa to be developed by villagers so that it could strengthen tourism and the local economy during the tough days.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia and Universitas Negeri Semarang in providing the Research Fund (Project Number: 423.26.4/UN37/PPK.3.1/2021) for conducting the research and completing this paper. This research is a collaboration research scheme between Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), Indonesia, and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. The authors also appreciate the valuable input from the anonymous reviewers.

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