

Research article

Collaboration Challenges in Helping the Rural Creative Tourism Sector to Recover During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract.

This research aimed to determine the challenges faced by the rural creative tourism sector in recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, this sector was well-developed and provided many contributions to the local economy. However, the pandemic has badly inhibited the development of the rural creative tourism sector. This study used a post-positivist qualitative approach in which the researchers collected the data based on the formulated cross-sector collaboration theory or conceptual framework, which was then reconfirmed. Interviews with several informants consisting of creative tourism actors and regional tourism officials were conducted to identify the challenges in cross-sector collaboration. The research findings showed that cross-sectoral collaboration was required to figure out the impacts of activity restrictions on the local economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the limited government budget and the absence of appropriate empowerment strategies for rural creative tourism were obstacles faced by the creative tourism sector in trying to recover from the impacts of this pandemic. We can conclude that an effective collaborative strategy model should build on the assets of local village communities and other strategic sectors, such as education, media, technology and business. This could be adaptively performed through local government support and village government policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, by maintaining opportunities to help the creative tourism sector in rural areas to recover.

Keywords: rural creative tourism, COVID-19, cross-sector collaboration, pandemic

1. Introduction

The pandemic of COVID-19 has impacted the tourism sector. Health protocols implemented to limit crowds and prevent the transmission of infectious COVID-19 diseases have limited the tourists' mobility. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourist mobility has globally decreased up to 22 percent and continuously declined up to 60-80 percent starting from the first three months to the end of 2020 [1]. Due to the decreasing

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visits, the tourism sector has experienced loss in revenue up to 910 billion to 1.2 trillion US dollars and earnings for 100 to 120 million workers in tourism sector [1].

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia can be seen from the decreasing national economic growth in tourism sector experienced by many provinces relying on tourism sector, such as Bali, Riau Islands, and West Java. Statistics Indonesia has recorded that in the second quarter of 2020, Bali has experienced a drastically decreasing economic growth rate up to 10.98 percent as well as Riau Islands up to 6.66 percent and West Java up to 5.98 percent over the years [2].

During the first 8 months, the creative tourism village destinations have been closed due to the implementation of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (known as *PSBB/Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*) since March 2020. Since those creative tourism activities were temporarily closed, many people who greatly depending on creative businesses, have lost their earnings for living. Although in October 2020, the government has loosenthe tourism sector and health protocol, there was a drastically decreasing number of tourists coming to the creative tourism sites.

Since it is unpredictable when the COVID-19 pandemic will end [3], various efforts should be made to empower the rural creative tourism. due to its vital role for the economy of the village. Meanwhile, tourists were given opportunities to develop their creative potentials. In this case, tourists were invited to actively participate in creative tourism programs and involved in the learning process in accordance with the characteristics of creative tourist destinations [4].

In the context of village development, tourist villages developed through a creative economy approach has received great attention from the policy makers. Village funds can be directed to empower creative communities to develop their creative potentials existing in villages. The village enormous potentials both from the cultural and ecological aspects can be used as the bases for developing the creative tourism due to its great impacts on the community empowerment and welfare [5,6]. However, the development of creative tourism to empower communities from the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic requires collaboration with stakeholders. Public knowledge and confidence in developing creative tourism were still at poor [7]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, both health and safety risk required adequate knowledge on creative tourism management. Thus, stakeholders can provide supports from various sectors and play an important role in restoring the creative tourism sectors in these pandemic situations. This research aimed at figuring out various challenges to recover the rural creative tourism sectors in the middle of this pandemic through cross-sector collaboration.

Creating a strategic alliance and collaboration is not a simple matter. Collaborating with numerous sectors to promote village tourism requires various efforts, such as with the village government, business actors, and local governments. The results of some previous research show that the collaboration process failure was related to the unequal abilities and capacities belonging to all stakeholders in the transformation processes [8]. In addition, collaboration process requires trust which has previously become a problem causing the collaboration system failure. The collaboration process strongly believes that all stakeholders should act in good faith, share relevant materials, information, and experiences without involving their personal agendas or those harming others. Profits or benefits should be transparently, accountably, and legitimately received [9] by all involved parties. Therefore, collaboration process should be really made by the stakeholders and shareholders receiving direct benefits from the process. Thus, the collaboration process could sustainably run and even had the mutually-formulated long-term goals.

The sustainable community transformation process required new innovations in response to challenges and collaborations with the creative economy actors in various fields in the society with knowledge and various practices, including civil society [10]. The research results found that civil society involvement in innovation systems has provided various contributions for greater transformation of society to change consumer behaviors, production patterns, development of technology, infrastructure, as well as norms and values.

Collaboration should open participations to any sector [11,12]. Each effort should possibly accommodate more stakeholders, or at least provide more participation opportunities to avoid the legitimacy process failure. Thus, stakeholders should be capable of making various actions [13, 14, 15].

The involvement of many cross-sectoral parties has been recognized as having a positive impact on the community changing efforts. In a public administration study, stakeholders' involvement in various public activities is marked by the presence of governance concept. Governance is a broad concept simultaneously representing the relationship quality among (private and general) people and government related to fairness honesty, responsiveness, and efficiency values [16]. With the development of governance concept, government dominance in every public activity is reduced to provide more opportunities for stakeholders to give their valuable contributions to public activities.

The involvement of many actors in public policy making, transformation, and innovation processes in organizations and society is one effort to change the unopened into

more democratic processes. The term "quadruple helix" is used as a way to expand and open the policy-making and innovation system processes which were relatively closed, become more democratic [17]. The quadruple helix model is a synthesis from the previous model, known as triple helix. According to the quadruple helix model, the transformation, innovation, and policy making processes require the involvement of various parties, including academia or universities, governments, industries, and civil society [17]. This model was then refined into a quintuple helix model, which explains the importance of natural environment, education system, economy, media, culture-based society, and political system in the transformation, innovation, and policy making processes. The quintuple helix model explains that the natural environment and society aspects based on media and culture are as important as educational, economic, and political systems [18].

Along with the development of quintuple helix concept, the Penta helix concept has also developed and widely used by the researchers in the context of innovation [19]. There are 5 components of Penta helix Model proposed by [20]: 1) academician, 2) government, 3) private sector, 4) community, and 5) non-government institution. Meanwhile, Calzada in [20] have proposed the Penta Helix Model innovation framework with the following components: (1) Academician, (2) Government, (3) Private (4) Civil Society, and (5) Social Entrepreneur. According to [19], Penta helix model has been widely used by experts to conduct studies related to the innovation phenomena as well as the economic-based innovation. The research results have proven that the Penta helix Model's components were proven significant.

2. Method

The study was conducted in several villages of Banyumas Regency due to their creative tourism based on nature, culture, and technology as follows: 1) Karangsalam Village of Baturraden District offers cultural events attracting thousands of tourists as well as creative villages managed by SMEs, 2) Kalibagor Village of Kalibagor District offers historical knowledge tourism destinations, 3) Karangnangka Village of Kedung Banteng District offers historical knowledge tourism destinations, 4) Pakunden Village of Banyumas District offers culinary tours and practices of making Banyumas typical food to the tourists, 5) Dawuhan Village of Banyumas District offers culinary tours and practices of making batik to the tourists, 6) Linggasari Village of Kembaran District offers the agricultural-based tourism including the agricultural cultivation processes. The research locations were purposively selected based on the initial discussions with the

creative economy actors and Banyumas Regency Tourism, Youth, and Sports Agency coordinating the creative economy's technical activities.

This study aimed at examining a cross-sectoral collaboration approach in developing the creative tourism in rural areas based on the perspective of village development decentralization policies. The informants' perceptions and opinions were deeply explored to interpret and formulate an adaptive creative tourism development policy model based on the community empowerment. Thus, a qualitative approach was employed in this research rather than the quantitative one. To complete the qualitative data, a survey on creative tourism actors was conducted.

Denzin and Lincoln [21] defined that qualitative research focuses more on the actual social construction aspects. Qualitative research was conducted to uncover the meanings and experiences related to socio-cultures of the non-numeric phenomena as subjects in this study. A case study was then implemented to deeper investigate the creative economy actors' perspectives on the required public policy model. Case study, as one qualitative research type, explored a certain complex and unique model of various actors' perspectives [22].

The study used interviews in depth and employed Focus Group Discussion (known as FGD) involving the creative economy actors and government officials. The purposively selected informants represented the creative economy sectors on fashion, culinary, activists of creative economy communities, and regional bureaucracy including the apparatus of regional development planning, industries, and trades, labors as well as cooperatives and SMEs. After interviewing the informants, the creative economy actors, and local governments were invited to validate the interview results to examine the cross-sectoral collaboration approach to develop the creative tourism based on the village community empowerment in Banyumas Regency.

The research data were then analyzed using an interactive analysis method [23] based on the following three stages: (1) Data condensation, including summarizing, selecting the main aspects, emphasizing on the important elements, finding patterns and themes from the numerous numbers of data obtained in the field. This process was continuously made until the research results were obtained; (2) Data display, including presenting data limited as one set of the structured information possibly results in conclusion drawing and the undertaken actions. Based on the presented data, the researchers have understood what actually happened and should be completed. The presented data were possibly in the form of graphs, charts, networks, and matrices; (3) conclusion drawing or verification, including conclusion drawing or also known as verification. In this stage, the researchers started looking for the meanings, and

recording regularities, possible configurations, causal pathways, propositions, patterns, and explanations. Meanwhile, a descriptive statistical analysis was intended to obtain the opinion trends among creative tourism actors related to their efforts in restoring the creative tourism during the pandemic.

The study only collected the directly involved informants in the creative tourism activities of to gain more valid and reliable data. Data triangulation was then used to validate the data. Various data collected from various methods using interviews, observations, and documentation were then compared to reduce the research bias [24].

3. Results and Discussion

In the context of rural tourism development, the important components are e communities and the rural areas'

natural aspects. Villages are traditional communities with cultural strengths as a part of the transformation processes. Therefore, the collaboration process is built to develop the village tourism by prioritizing the community aspects including the rural natural conditions. In addition, the role of academicians or universities is also greatly required in economic sector and dealing with government political system. Thus, the Quintuple Model linking to the natural environmental factors becomes more relevant in the context of village tourism development.

Four stakeholder groups in industry, government and civil society, academia, and the environment's physical sense or problems generally represented the Quintuple Helix model [10]. Although first there are four helices producing the knowledge and natural environment aspects, the process of producing knowledge should be also well considered. This Quintuple helix Model is sustainably utilized in the rural tourism development context due to the current transformation era (digital pandemic era). This proposed model increased the civil society's involvement related to the systems of innovation required for greater transformation of society to change the tourism consumer behaviors and patterns of production, development of technology and infrastructure, as well as norms and values.

In these COVID-19 pandemic situations, creative tourism activities were greatly limited in order not to cause more COVID-19 transmission clusters. However, the impacts of physical and social distancing policies have paralyzed the creative tourism. People highly relying on tourism visits were forced to reduce the activities at tourism sites and even temporarily stop their activities.



Figure 1: Cross-sector collaboration to recover rural creative tourism in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic.

The interview results obtained from various informants revealed that cross-sectoral collaboration was greatly needed to figure out the impacts of activity restrictions on local economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cross-sector collaboration involved 4 main actors, consisting of government, academician, creative community, and private sector. These four actors had a vital role to recover the creative tourism during the pandemic.

Both district and village governments have the authorities and budget resources possibly used to assist the creative tourism actors experiencing bankruptcy due to the implementation of Large-Scale Social Restrictions. Various regional and village development programs were allocated to provide social assistance to the creative tourism actors. Besides, the government has also disseminated health protocols and CHSE to the creative tourism actors to make preparations for the new normal situations in tourism areas.

Academicians can play an important role to provide assistance to the creative tourism actors in the form of knowledge and capacity to increase the creative tourism actors' technical capabilities to adapt with the new normal situations by providing trainings to improve the quality of creative tourism products and services for their preparations for the next tourism visits when the tourism sites are reopened.

Creative communities had social network power to obtain information and experience exchanges for the creative tourism actors. In addition, creative community has the role to restore the creative tourism through technical assistances. Due to the provided moral supports the creative tourism actors can build their confidence to adjust with the new normal situations.

The private sectors during the pandemic were expected providing CSR budget supports to the creative tourism actors. CSR funds were not only used to reduce the economic problems experienced by the creative tourism actors but also to assist the production of creative products. Based on the information given by the research informants, one unfortunate situation was that on holidays, much spending was made by the private sectors or CSR to buy the creative tourism products, especially culinary and fashion. In fact, if the private sectors and governments spent their budgets for buying creative tourism products, a major impact might happen to reduce the economic problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The other problems were related to the limited government budgets and absence of appropriate empowerment strategies for the rural creative tourism. These problems have become the obstacles to recover the creative tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it can be explained that in general, cross-sectoral collaboration has involved Penta helix actors, such as academicians (*Amikom*), local governments (SME and labor offices as well as industrial and trading offices), communities (Banyumas Small Entrepreneur Association/*Aspikmas*). However, the involvement of businesses and media to assist the recovery of creative tourism has not been maximized. This was because the business sectors have not been able to gain benefits from the collaboration process, because in establishing the collaboration processes, all parties should obtain the same benefits.

The government dominance in the collaboration processes was still very high. Consequently, cross-sectoral collaboration relied heavily on local government budgets. During the pandemic, the policy of budget refocusing caused the assistance activities not optimally implemented. This certainly impacted the collaborative development efforts in improving the tourism sectors. The Large-Scale Social Restriction policies during the pandemic were considered by the creative tourism actors incompatible with the public aspirations. The objectives of Large-Scale Social Restrictions were considered by the creative tourism actors illogical and not based on scientific research. The evidence-based policies could not be considered as an approach to formulate the creative tourism recovery policies during the pandemic.

4. Conclusion

This research has concluded that an effective collaborative strategy model is required by involving the village communities' local potentials and other strategic sectors. They

consist of education, media, technology, and business sectors which should be supported by the local government with its adaptive policies to the COVID-19 pandemic situations in maintaining opportunities to recover the creative tourism in rural areas. This cross-sector collaboration will connect the tourism communities and creative tourism industry, so that all parties will contribute to recover the creative tourism in rural areas.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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