

The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the MSMEs Economy in Rawa Pening Eco-tourism (Case Study on Eco-tourism in Asinan Village, Bawen Sub-district, Semarang Regency)

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Abstract

Rawa Pening has been famously known as a potential tourism site seen from its multiple natural and artificial attractions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the numbers of visitors coming to the Asinan Village Eco-tourism can even be said to be stable. This study aims to reveal the visitors' characteristics, the impact of Covid-19 on the MSMEs actors' economy, and the strategy of the Asinan Village Eco-tourism in Rawa Pening. This study was qualitative descriptive. Respondents taken were visitors and MSMEs actors in the Asinan Village Eco-tourism. The results indicate that the Covid-19 impacts the MSMEs actors' economy at the Asinan Village Eco-tourism. Even though tourism still stands and comes up better than other sites—especially on weekends, most MSMEs actors find their income decreased. This condition is due to the escalating number of MSMEs actors, while the buying interest on the visitors tends to go lower. The decline can be influenced by changing purchasing power, consumption behavior dynamics, and social distancing as a part of the health protocols implementation.

Keywords

Covid-19 Pandemic; MSMEs; Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Rawa Pening is a natural lake located in the lowest basin on the slopes of three mounts, namely Merbabu, Telomoyo, and Ungaran. This lake is at fewer than 470 meters above sea level (ASL). It covers an area of 2,670 hectares, stretching across the Ambarawa, Bawen, Tuntang, and Banyubiru Sub-districts. Rawa Pening is located between the two major highways, connecting Semarang-Salatiga and Semarang-Ambarawa.

Rawa Pening possesses potential fishery resources utilized by the community to hold fishing and fish farming activities. Besides,

its natural beauty makes this place a leading tourist destination in Semarang Regency. Attractions attached to its extensive view include Banyubiru Love Hill, Ambarawa Swamp Village, Tuntang Tourism Village, and Asinan Village Eco-tourism.

One of the most popular tourist spots in Rawa Pening is Eco-tourism in Asinan Village. This site is located downstream of the lake, or more precisely in Sumurup, Asinan Village, Bawen Sub-district, Semarang Regency. Providing a massive blue bridge as a center point, Asinan Village Eco-tourism accommodates visitors to enjoy the scenery, take pictures, do fishing, boat

tours, culinary tours, and sometimes watch art and cultural performances.

This eco-tourism becomes a livelihood for the local community. Although it is not an official tourist attraction, the continuous visits come up as a blessing for the local community to offer various goods and services. To further increase visits, the local community even independently builds public facilities.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic appeared, the tourism sector has been the first to feel its impact. Social restriction policies end up with a significant decrease in visitors. The government even had to close tourist attractions for some time. This certainly impacts the income of people who depend their lives on the tourism sector. However, based on preliminary observations made at Asinan Village Eco-tourism, the conditions are slightly different. The number of visitors at the place is not quite different compared to the previous situation—before the Covid-19 pandemic.

TEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Economic Growth

Tourism can be a superior sector to jack up economic growth if adequately managed. Economic growth is any development of economic activity causing the increase of goods and services production. It conveys the financial activities to generate additional income for the community at a particular time. So, it can be said to be an increase in real national income or GDP in the long term, encouraging escalating goods and services produced in society and rising people's welfare.

By days, some theories of economic growth are coined by experts such as the Classical Economic Growth Theory, Schumpeter Theory, Harrod-Domar Theory, and Neo-Classical Growth Theory.

Economic growth has a very close and positive relationship with entrepreneurship. According to Schumpeter, innovators and entrepreneurs are the primary keys to economic development. The economic progress of a country can only be realized through innovation by entrepreneurs as they will continuously make updates or innovations in economic activities. These innovations include introducing new goods, increasing efficiency in producing goods, expanding markets, developing new sources of raw materials, and making efficient changes in the organization.

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) activities are a form of entrepreneurial activity. In Indonesia, its definition is stated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2008 on MSMEs. MSMEs have specific criteria, namely micro, small and medium enterprises. Its classification includes livelihood activities, micro-enterprises, small dynamic enterprises, and fast-moving enterprises.

MSMEs can be defined as businesses run by individuals, households, or small business entities. It possesses specific characteristics, namely relatively simple bookkeeping system, business margins that tend to be thin considering the very high competition, minimum capital, limited managerial experience in managing companies, very small economic scale, minimal marketing and negotiation skills, and limited market diversification.

Despite their small economic scale, MSMEs play an important role in a country's economic growth. Its existence might absorb and provide employment opportunities to the community to increase economic growth. Ultimately, it can also contribute to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth.

Eco-tourism

Indonesia is known as one of the rich countries in the world—in terms of possessing massive wealth and natural beauty. Indonesia thus has many tourist destinations. Eco-tourism is a form of tourism closely related to the principles of nature protection. The Eco-tourism Society defines eco-tourism as the implementation of responsible tourism activities to natural areas, supporting environmental conservation efforts (nature and culture), and improving local communities' welfare.

Eco-tourism refers to tourist travel to an undeveloped area. Visitors can enjoy although the trip is full of adventure. Eco-tourism always maintains the quality, integrity, and protection of nature and culture by ensuring community preferences. The role of local communities in maintaining those aspects is essential. This role is assumed during the planning time, development, implementation, and usage monitoring period.

World Conservation Union (WCU) defines eco-tourism as environmentally responsible travel visiting pristine areas to enjoy and appreciate natural beauty (including local culture), promoting conservation with the least possible negative impact, and providing opportunities. In terms of market perspective, eco-tourism continues to develop as a concept and as a tourism product (such as tour groups).

In recent years, tour packages with the concept of “ecology” or “green” have become a trend in the tourism market. Most consumers interested in nature protection efforts and want to participate in the tourist destinations choose the “back to nature” concept. Tourism products such as accommodation and tourist attractions based on the idea of returning to nature are increasingly in demand.

Tourist objects are often the center of the growth and development of the creative industry and MSMEs. This means that the development of the tourism industry will also positively impact the development of MSMEs and economic growth.

Covid-19

Covid-19 is a reasonably newly discovered virus. This virus infects the respiratory system. Its existence requires us to adapt to new things in various fields in life. This virus can be hazardous for those who have previously suffered from respiratory illness. Therefore, although they have been declared cured of Covid-19, survivors will still have the potential to experience acute respiratory problems and several other health problems. Symptoms of this virus include fever, cough, runny nose, dizziness, and disturbances in the sense of smell and taste. However, some sufferers usually show no symptoms with a robust immune system.

One can be infected by others with Covid-19 directly or indirectly. This virus can spread directly through small droplets from the nose or mouth. It can also spread indirectly if the droplet sticks to objects around. If someone else touches the contaminated object then touches the eyes, nose or mouth, that person can be infected with Covid-19. Maintaining a distance of at least one meter from sick people is thus exceedingly notable. Due to the ease and speed of transmission, Covid-19 is now a pandemic occurring in many countries around the world.

Unila Medical Journal (2020) explained multiple preventions to minimize the transmission of Covid-19, namely increasing understanding in accessing information through knowledge or education provided through appeal posters, updating the latest information on Covid-19, implementing health protocols such as

wearing masks and keeping a distance, and filtering any information to avoid false news (hoaxes). According to the *Abdimas Mutiara Journal* in 2020, people are advised to wash their hands for 20 seconds. If there is no water and soap, they can use a hand sanitizer containing at least 70% alcohol. They must also avoid touching the mouth, nose, and eyes, use a mask in the right way, and cover the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing.

The Covid-19 has forced the government to issue travel restrictions, implemented almost all over the world on an international, regional, and local scale, and thus affecting the tourism dynamics. The restriction is regulated in the Minister of Health Decree Number HK.01.07/MENKES/382/2020 on health protocols for the community in public places and to prevent and control the Covid-19. This policy is a form of anticipation of the transmission of Covid-19 to residents who are potentially infected.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was field research utilizing the qualitative method. Qualitative research aims to understand individual or group phenomena and depict humanitarian and social issues. This present study specifically tries to explore, describe, and explain the economic conditions of MSME actors at the Asinan Village Eco-tourism.

The research took location at Sumurup, Asinan Village, Bawen Sub-district, Semarang Regency. Data collection techniques used were direct observation and interviews with respondents. Researchers chose this place as it had many visitors—even during the Covid-19 pandemic.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the Asinan Village Ecotourism Visitors

Based on the research conducted, visitors to Asinan Village Ecotourism are quite multifarious—in terms of age and profession. The activities done there also vary, ranging from fishing, taking pictures, culinary tours, enjoying the scenery, exercising, and so on.

Most visitors go to this destination for recreation, taking pictures, or looking for beautiful photo spots to post on social media. People these days, along with the social media massive development, love to post or update their activities with impressive things to escalate their status. However, some visitors come to this place only to spend their leisure time continuously working or studying.

On weekdays, the majority of visitors are anglers. They are generally people who just want to channel their hobbies or spend time working from home (WFH). Besides, there are also teenagers (18-24 years old). They usually just stop by, take pictures, and enjoy the beauty of Rawa Pening from the Blue Bridge spot. On average, visitors on weekdays are people who have free jobs such as online motorcycle taxi drivers, students, and those with no permanent jobs (odd). They admit that Rawa Pening is comfortable to relax their minds—entertained by vast impressive scenery.

Meanwhile, for holidays, most visitors are families, social communities, groups of teenagers, and young couples who usually want to spend time off with their beloved ones. Apart from having a charming view, a notable reason to visit the Asinan Village Tourism is that the tourists do not need to pay an entrance ticket.

The Impact of Covid-19 on the MSMEs Actors Economy

More than 60 MSMEs depend their economic life on the Asinan Village Ecotourism. The Covid-19 pandemic has had impacts on them—just like other places. MSME actors face multiple problems such as a decrease in the number of tourists and shopping interest—although it is not as bad as in other tourism sites. Rawa Pening Ecotourism with the Blue Bridge spot is actually not an official tourist attraction. Hence, this area was often overlooked when the government closed tourist attractions due to area restrictions. Only during the Emergency Restriction (*PPKM Darurat*) in July 2021, the access is entirely closed, guarded, and supervised by apparatus and authorities.

During the pandemic, most of the MSMEs actors' income decreased slightly. Lilis (55 years), a floating stall owner, stated that many visitors come to Rawa Pening. However, they just took a walk and pictures; only a few did the culinary tour. The shopping interest has also got lower. This could be due to the change of purchasing power and consumer behavior due to the Covid-19. Some people reduce spending on consumption as a precaution against economic uncertainty that may occur. The behavior of social distancing as part of health protocols can also encourage the decreasing shopping interest in tourists.

The decline in business turnover for MSMEs actors is also due to tight competition among fellow sellers. Sugiyanto (58 years old), who also owns a floating food stall and a canoe rental business, believes that. For example, the number of food sellers in the Blue Bridge area is quite high, but the culinary menus are almost the same, for instance, the grilled fish.

The Development Strategy of the Asinan Village Ecotourism

Rawa Pening deserves to be developed into an international standard tourism destination. After establishing Borobudur Temple as a priority destination in 2017, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy targets potential places to become supporting tourist destinations. Rawa Pening is considered to meet all aspects to be developed into a supporting tourism destination with international standards.

There are several hopes expressed by the visitors and MSMEs actors that can be formulated as a strategy for the site development, namely:

- a. Adequate facility development;
- b. Arrangement of a specific place for MSMEs;
- c. Arrangement of water areas;
- d. Travel promotion;
- e. Innovation and addition of new spots;
- f. Tourism village development.

CONCLUSION

The development of a tourism sector will positively affect the economic level there—as visitors will directly or indirectly improve the welfare of the surrounding community. Tourism is a potential sector to be developed in the Rawa Pening area. Its beauty and accessibility might be two great capitals to come up as an international tourism destination. It thus definitely needs to be supported with international-class infrastructure development.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected tourism development, including the Asinan Village Ecotourism. Although this area still got visited by quite many visitors, the decrease of MSMEs actors' income is absolute. The tourists' buying interest has been decreasing. The decline in tourist spending interest can be influenced by the changing purchasing power and consumption behavior of

tourists and social distancing behavior as part of the implementation of health protocols by tourists. Besides, the number of MSMEs actors with the exact offers is known to escalate by days.

Suggestion

MSME actors at the Asinan Village Ecotourism are affected by the Covid-19. Departing from this situation, suggestions proposed in this research are:

- a. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government should pay more attention to MSMEs in the tourism sector, for instance, by giving specific equitable distribution and assistance;
- b. Tourism innovation must continue to be carried out for MSME actors at the Asinan Village Ecotourism;
- c. All parties, including the government, academics, businessmen, communities, and other related parties, must jointly preserve and advance the Rawa Pening tourism industry;
- d. The research program on the tourism sector must continue to be executed, and its scope must also be expanded. This effort is essential to explore the potential and formulate a better tourism development strategy.

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