



The Dramatic Fall of Tourism Villages Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Reflection on an Indonesia's Primary Tourism Destination

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Abstract. This paper aims to capture the dramatic changes in the tourism village pillars in primary tourist destinations and the stakeholders' responses to the crisis resulted by the Covid-19. Mandalika Area, Lombok Island, one of the five primary destinations was purposively selected as the research area. Five tourism villages were determined as the unit of analysis. Data were collected from questionnaires distributed to tourism village managers and actors in community level. FGD was held with primary and secondary tourism business actors to understand their response to the impacts of the pandemic. Government publications and stakeholder's opinions, analysis, and testimonials from various online media were also used. It was found that the Covid-19 destroyed the pillars of the tourism village massively. In addition to cleanliness and health, six of the seven pillars collapsed and left the highest level of stagnation in all tourist villages. Some of recovery actions taken by stakeholders did not succeed in overcoming the crisis caused by the shock disaster. The restoration of the tourism village pillars would not only be costly and time-consuming, but also depended on the duration of the disaster and the available innovation capacity. The implication in strengthening product innovation was needed to adapt to the crisis and the new normal.

Keywords: Tourism · Village · Destination · Covid-19 · Impact · Changes

1 Introduction

Rural tourism is recognized as one of the village economy's driving forces [1, 2]. Its distinct appeal, small business scale, and ease of management by locals make it a viable option for diversifying the rural economy [3–5]. In Indonesia, for example, tourist villages play an important role in providing jobs, empowering communities, and strengthening entrepreneurship for local workers [6] while also preserving the country's unique culture and landscape [7, 8].

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has altered this strategic role. The main assumption is that restrictions on tourist movement to and within tourism destinations automatically affect the entire tourism village product chain [9]. Large-scale social restrictions in the first half of 2020 reduced people's mobility in workplaces, recreation areas, and transit areas by half, or to 57% [10]. The lack of visitors caused the tourism village pillar to collapse, resulting in the cessation of the product chain, and workers lost their primary source of income and livelihood [11]. In the future, the threat of rising unemployment and declining incomes for local residents will overshadow tourism villages. Based on the above description, this study aims to discover dramatic changes in the pillars of tourism villages, stakeholder responses, and strategies to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. The findings of this study are important in predicting the long crisis that tourism villages will face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The disclosure of the most recent reality of tourist villages, in particular, can be used to develop short and medium-term curation strategies in super priority destination areas that have been the focus of Indonesian tourism development for the last five years [26].

2 Literature Review

When discussing the barriers to tourism development, safety and comfort are always at the top of the list. The history of tourism notes that war, terrorism, pandemics, and disease are major impediments to tourists travelling to destinations [9, 13]. Both tourists and hosts may experience social terror as a result of the last two factors. Viruses as the causes of any particular disease could be carried by tourists from their home country or from their destination and are transmitted during travel to and from the destination.

Because of its location as a tourist attraction, the destination is perceived as a source of disease transmission. This assumption is logically acceptable in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Popular tourist destinations around the world are seeing a decrease in the number of international tourists, as well as domestic tourists. Tourists are vulnerable to this type of disease due to differences in health standards among countries and destinations, and they can easily become the medium for transmitting the disease to their countries or regions of origin. These standards are generally limited in developing countries, for example, in terms of drinking water quality, sanitation, sewage treatment, and epidemic management.

This image is reflected in rural tourism. Tourism villages typically have insufficient facilities to provide international standard health care. Secondary and tertiary facilities are scarce and often rely on outside assistance, particularly in remote areas [14]. Basic health care units and doctor's offices are still scarce. Similarly, other types of amenities, such as cashless services for service transactions, are rarely available. This limitation is one of the reasons why tourists find it difficult to stay in tourist villages for an extended period of time. During a pandemic, the accumulation of such constraints erodes the attractiveness of tourist villages as micro-destinations.

Due to the scarcity of supporting facilities, tourism villages are vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Basic health service units that appear to be unrelated to primary tourism services can function very simply when, for example, tourists suffer from disease while participating in tourist activities in tourism

villages. The limitations of this facility may be an important consideration for tourists planning to stay in the village for an extended period of time.

Most of the facilities in tourism villages are run as businesses by community groups. The entity consists of tourism-related products and services, either directly or indirectly because these parts or elements are inextricably linked to one another in order to create tourism services as a whole, thus they are referred to as the tourism supply chain (TSC).

A tourism supply chain can be defined as “a network of tourism organizations supplying different components of tourism products/services such as flights and accommodation for the distribution and marketing of the final tourism products at a specific tourism destination, and involves a wide range of participants in both the private and the public sectors” [15]. Professional and semi-professional groups with varying numbers and specializations represent service providers. The supply chain in tourism villages is relatively simple, with strong links between product and business units. The variety of service elements represents the variation in the needs or consumption of tourists during their trip, and is typically provided as a complete package.

The supply chain for this product/service includes accommodation, transportation to and from destinations, food and beverages, social and cultural events, and natural and cultural resources [16]. All of these elements must be in place for tourists to travel and for transactions to take place between them and hosts at the destination. The volume and types of these elements typically vary depending on the destination’s level of development and the characteristics of tourists.

In the context of a tourism village, the supply chain can be identified by the activities that are routinely carried out by villagers to provide services. This study focuses on several aspects of the tourism supply chain that are more prevalent in tourism villages, including product, marketing, institutional and human resources, CHSE practices, adaptation strategies, and external support. This specialization stems from the realization that the concept of a standard supply chain does not apply entirely in the context of a tourist village. Aviation, for example, is relatively exclusive or outside the activities of a tourist village, but it can still have an impact on tourist flow.

Product management is ingrained in tourism villages. The term “product” refers to a collection of activities and symbolic attributes designed to meet the needs of tourists and shape tourists’ experience [17]. This activity is carried out when there are requests from tourists because the governments of all countries impose a lockdown policy during the pandemic, demanding decreases or ceases entirely [13].

Several proposals can be made to see real changes in tourism villages during the pandemic. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has halted the majority of tourist traffic to and promotion of tourist villages. Second, tourist travel restrictions result in fewer visitors to tourism villages. Third, the low number of visitors has halted some product and service supply chains. Fourth, the cessation of tourism supply chain activities limits the adaptability of tourism village managers, resulting in institutional activities and human resource development that do not function optimally.

Table 1. Sample of Village Tourism in Mandalika Area, Lombok Island

Super-Priority Destination:	Village	Development phase
Mandalika Area	Bilibante	Advanced
	Kembang Kuning	Advanced
	Rembitan	Developed
	Sesaot	Developed
	Pemenang Barat	Initial

Source: Field research, 2021

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed mixed methods [18] to document real changes in key elements of tourism villages, such as product activities, marketing, institutions and human resources, CHSE practices, adaptation strategies, and external support. The study was carried out in one of five super-priority destinations identified in the Mid-Term Development National Plan (RPJMN), namely the Mandalika Region of Lombok. Five tourism villages were purposefully chosen as samples (Table 1) because the reserachers wanted to see the most recent development conditions based on their development status before the pandemic. The five tourism villages were chosen based on differences in their level of development prior to the pandemic, so that changes during the pandemic could be compared.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Three main methods were used to collect data. The first step was to conduct a structured questionnaire-based interview [19, 20]. The questionnaire was designed to collect data on conditions before and during the epidemic in seven tourism village elements, namely: a) product, b) market/marketing, c) institutional/HR, d) CHSE, e) investment, f) adaptation strategy, and g) urgent needs. The data for the seven elements was broken down into 29 question items organized in a unique way to avoid redundant data (Table 2). To ensure readability, the questionnaire was tested on five potential respondents. A total of six respondents were chosen at random from tourism village economic actors who were still active in order to find more focused and specific tourism data. There could be up to 30 total respondents.

Second, a focused group discussion (FGD) [20] was held to investigate the following data: a) special actions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, b) opportunities/barriers to continue the tourism business, c) capital that was still available in tourist villages, d) how to reactivate village activities tourism and the priority scale of support required, e) how to obtain support, and f) the most urgent form of assistance. The FGD was attended by 15 tourism stakeholders.

Third, non-participant observations [20] were carried out to assess the appearance and physical completion of the most recent tourist village facilities and infrastructure. As a result, data on changes in the number and quality of available facilities was produced.

Table 2. Score Calculation of Tourism Village Changes

No.	Dimension	Number of items	Sub-total of Score		Number of respondents	Score total	
			Highest	Lowest		Highest	Highest
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7) = (4)x(6)	(8) = (5)x(6)
1	Product	9	35	0	30	1.050	0
2	Visitor and Marketing	4	17	3		510	90
3	Institution	3	11	0		330	0
4	CHSE	6	24	1		720	30
5	Investment	2	8	0		240	0
6	Adaptation	3	12	0		360	0
7	Urgent needs	2	8	0		240	0
Total		29	105	4	-	3.450	120

Source: Authors' calculation, 2021

Fourth, documentation techniques [20] were used to collect data on the general development of destinations in general, such as: trends in the number of tourists over the last three years, tourism events, national, regional, and local policies for destination development, statistics, study reports, and the opinions of business, government, and public actors.

3.3 Methods for Identifying Change Indicators in Tourism Villages

The total score of the seven dimensions measured, namely product, market and marketing, institutional, CHSE, investment, adaptation, and urgent needs, was used to calculate changes that occurred during the pandemic. The weights of these seven dimensions were the same, but the number of question items varied depending on the likelihood and volume of activity in each dimension. The seventh dimension contained 29 question items, and the answer options for each indicator item ranged from 0 to 4 (Table 2).

3.4 Data Analysis Method

The information was presented in a tabular format. Data differences and/or similarities before and during the pandemic were interpreted objectively. The meaning of the changes that occurred as shown by the data was described first, followed by a critical interpretation of how and what the consequences of these changes were to continue the management of tourist villages. Second, the data discussed the strong and weak elements of tourist villages in two different time periods, as well as the implications for future tourist village development. Third, the narrative discussion of the tourist village's position was consistent with the concept used thus far, namely the change in the context of the tourist village's development stage during the pandemic. Fourth, based on their current

situation, the analysis developed logical explanations for the need for intervention in tourism villages.

4 Results

The central government has designated the Mandalika area of Lombok as a super-priority destination, which is consistent with previous West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Provincial Government provisions compiled in a Tourism Master Plan (Provincial Regulation Number 7 of 2013). In addition, 99 tourist villages [21] have been designated as priorities for 2019–2023 as a model and pilot project for community tourism. Because of the strength of natural attractions and local culture, the development of tourism villages is also intended to provide more diverse options for tourists. The province of NTB, particularly Lombok Island, is by far an alternative destination for local and international tourists due to its clean beaches, clusters of small islands (Gili Trawangan, Meno, and Air), and Mount Rinjani [22, 23].

4.1 General Changes in Tourism Village

Data show that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on tourist villages on the island of Lombok, particularly in the Mandalika area [24]. A drastic negative change in the performance of six of the seven dimensions or elements of the tourism village was seen as the blow. The reduced activity of adding product elements to be offered to visitors had the greatest impact on the performance of tourism products (Table 3).

Not only has development ceased, but tourism product maintenance has also declined sharply due to a drop in tourist demand. The decrease in the number of requests for tourism village products automatically reduced routine management activities. Products that tourists typically enjoy in tourist villages, such as traditional food, cultural attractions, sight-seeing, and lodging, were nearly non-existent.

Reduced tourists and marketing activity were other effects of the decline. During the pandemic, which caused a halt in the tourist market, tourism villages cannot afford or

Table 3. Change of Tourism Villages in Mandalika Area

No.	Dimension	Sum of Score		Change	
		Pre-pandemic	During pandemic	(-/+)	%
1	Product	813	637	-176	21,6
2	Visitor and Marketing	342	279	-63	18,4
3	Institution	258	237	-21	8,1
4	CHSE	402	639	237	59,0
5	Investment	147	144	-3	2,0
6	Adaptation	308	266	-42	13,6
7	Urgent needs	152	101	-51	33,6

Source: Field survey, 2021

view promotional and marketing activities as ineffective. Large-scale social restrictions that lasted for a long time prevented tourists from leaving their homes, and those in tourist villages quickly returned to their original areas.

Because tourism products and marketing activities have ceased, the institutional activities of tourist villages also ceased. The practice of very intensive stakeholder partnerships prior to the pandemic was forced to be reduced or even temporarily suspended. Because the intensity of tourist activity decreased significantly, services based on the regular division of labor were no longer effective. Because tourist activities were limited and brief, a culinary worker could work multiple jobs at the same time.

The only aspect of the tourism village that retained a visible routine was the practice of CHSE. The implementation of health protocols in a number of locations for a small fee continued, particularly because of special recommendations and controls carried out by the local government. The recommendation has been shown to significantly increase CHSE activity in the Mandalika tourist area (59%). Tourism village managers saw this as a way to persuade the safe market to visit.

4.2 The Demise of Tourism Village

4.2.1 Product Service Decline

Tourism village product services included the following activities: (a) providing food and local crafts, (b) providing diverse and wide-ranging tourist attractions, tourism events, and arts attractions, (c) amenity services and sanitation availability, and (d) access to tourist village and public facilities. These four elements can be thought of as a series of major tourist village product chains.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on activity in these four components. Tourist attractions in various forms that provided basic services to tourists could not avoid being directly affected by the pandemic. To avoid increased losses from vacant visitors during the pandemic, tourist village managers were forced to act passively or reduce the services of all tourist attractions. The reduction in activity volume reached 50% from the year before the pandemic. Culinary and sanitation activities were also significantly reduced (Table 4).

Table 4. Change of Product Dimension

No.	Dimension	Sum of Scores		Change	
		Pre-pandemic	During pandemic	(-/+)	%
1	Local food & souvenirs	209	168	-41	19.6
2	Tourist attraction, event, and arts	232	116	-116	50.0
3	Amenity & sanitation	161	142	-19	11.8
4	Availability of the accessibility & facilities	211	211	0	0.0

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 5. Change in Market and Marketing Efforts

No.	Dimension	Sum of Scores		Change	
		Pre-pandemic	During pandemic	(-/+)	%
1	Number of visitors per week	191	144	-47	24.6
2	Frequency of marketing & promotion	151	135	-16	10.6

Source: Field survey, 2021

Due to social restrictions and tourist visits, tourism villages usually enlivened by artistic attractions, whether presented to tourists or to fulfill socio-cultural functions in society, had to be abolished. The demand for local food and handicraft products decreased by -41, or about 20%, compared to the year before the pandemic.

4.2.2 Diminished Market and Marketing Activities

The decrease in tourist numbers is reflected in the balance of tourist numbers and length of stay before and during the pandemic, while changes in marketing can be seen in the balance of marketing activities and promotion of tourist villages. It is clear that the average number of tourists per week dropped by nearly a quarter compared to the year before the pandemic (Table 5). When compared to the lockdown situation during the peak of the pandemic crisis from April 2020 to mid-2021, this decline appeared not to be as severe at first glance. However, given the scarcity of foreign tourists, this figure remained significant. This means that almost all visitors to tourist villages were domestic tourists.

The decrease in the number of tourists visiting tourism villages was almost evenly distributed in this region and had a significant impact on income. This was clarified by the informant's;

“In 2019, the number of foreign tourists visiting this village could reach three thousand. This equates to approximately 100 people staying at the homestay each week. [...] We haven't had any more visitors since March 2020... The impact on revenue is obvious”.

Because of this condition, any promotional activities were counterproductive. Tourism village managers used these considerations to halt promotional activities. Aside from being potentially ineffective, promotional activities, particularly in international markets, were perceived as psychologically risky, for example: “There's a sense of forcing things that don't seem to fit the current situation” (Informant 3). Managers consider promotions to attract tourists to tourist villages during the pandemic to be counterproductive because they give the impression that comfort is not guaranteed.

Table 6. Change in Institutional Dimension

No.	Institutional Dimension	Sum of Scores		Change	
		Pre-pandemic	During pandemic	(-/+)	%
1	The existence of management institution and regulation	185	170	-15	8.1
2	The activity & networking	73	67	-6	8.2

Source: Field survey, 2021

4.2.3 Passive Institutions

Institutional practices were common in the pre-pandemic period. Entities in charge of business units and activities operated in accordance with the rules and mutual agreement. For example, the division of labor between the homestay management unit and the culinary business was more assertive, and human resource allocation was relatively structured. *Pokdarwis* (Tourism Awareness Group) activities were held on a regular basis to provide better service to tourists. During the pandemic, however, conditions changed dramatically. Organizationally, *Pokdarwis* institutions existed, but the intensity of their activities was remote.

Table 6 shows a decrease in maintenance activities as well as network expansion with third parties. Tourism village managers tended to reduce network activities to other partners based on the understanding that “almost all of them are affected by the pandemic, so the willingness to add networks is reduced” (Informant 3). In a crisis, network expansion was seen as having no positive impact, and partners’ interests were also seen as “only a verbal commitment without consequences” (Informant 2).

4.2.4 CHSE Practices Improve

Tourism activities rely heavily on cleanliness, health, and a comfortable environment. During the pandemic, CHSE is mandatory in tourism services, and government policy requires it. The tourism village manager saw CHSE as a requirement that provided security and health guarantees for both tourists and residents to participate in activities. Village tourism managers were encouraged to improve these fundamental services as a result of increased awareness and demand. They provided visitors with more detailed information about the implementation of health protocols at entrances and gathering places, including homestays. Basic health services such as hand washing stations, soap, thermo-guns, trash cans, and other amenities were provided to ensure the safety of visitors while they are in the tourist village. This was supported by regular environmental cleaning to keep the tourism village looking beautiful. Overall, the practice of CHSE was the only positive performance of tourism villages during the pandemic (Table 7).

All of these reflected changes in the mindset and behavior of tourism village managers in response to changes in the tourism situation that occurred during the pandemic. The government also continued to support the positive image of tourist villages as healthy destinations, such as the Bilebante Tourism Village’s healthy village program [25].

Table 7. Change in CHSE Dimension

No.	CHSE Dimension	Sum of Scores		Change	
		Pre-pandemic	During pandemic	(-/+)	%
1	Availability of information & tools of health protocols	89	222	+133	149.4
2	Availability of health protocols control	44	106	+62	14.9
3	Basic health services facilities	100	107	+7	7.0
4	Frequency of sanitation and cleanliness activities	78	103	+25	32.1
5	Availability of security for the visitors	91	101	+10	11.0

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 8. Change in Investment Dimension

No.	Investment Dimension	Sum of Scores		Change	
		Pre-pandemic	During pandemic	(-/+)	%
1	Freq. of investment	61	57	-4	6.6
2	Source of investment	86	87	+1	1.2

Source: Field survey, 2021

4.2.5 Slump in Investment

Prior to the pandemic, investment was made to increase the number and quality of tourism village infrastructure and services. One of the primary reasons for this was the demand for better tourist services. In normal times, the addition of service units, for example, occurs quite frequently as a result of increased visitor demand. Before the pandemic, Bilebante Tourism Village, for example, invested in spa rooms and therapist training. During the pandemic, however, everything changed. Spa activities that required physical contact between the therapist and the customer saw a significant drop in activity volume. As a result, physical investment was halted, and professional training and certification were delayed (Table 8).

Nonetheless, efforts were still being made to maintain the tourist village's image. During the pandemic, the crisis was used to gain support from various parties for the provision of supportive facilities. Some of them received responses, particularly from the central government, for investment in "toilet buildings, wellness facility development, and traditional fishing market development..." (FGD, 13 May 2021).

Table 9. Change in Adaptive Dimension

No.	Dimension of Adaptation	Sum of Scores		Change	
		Pre-pandemic	During pandemic	(-/+)	%
1	Change of tourist facilities' units	93	91	-2	2.2
2	Change of labor units	103	65	-38	36.9
3	Community support for tourism management	112	110	-2	1.8

Source: Field survey, 2021

4.2.6 Adaptation Failure

Tourism villages implemented adaptation strategies in response to the pandemic crisis. Even though the results could not be calculated precisely, the survival strategy was still carried out. Three adaptation indicators were measured in this study: changes in the function of the tourism business unit, changes or job transfers, and willingness to support the management of tourist villages.

Table 9 shows that all of them are negative. This means that before the pandemic, the number of business units increased, but during the pandemic, the number decreased or became inactive.

The decrease in the number of workers was striking (- 37%). Business units that were not fully operational automatically reduced the number of employees or provided minimal income. To ensure survival, the workforce turned to related activities, particularly agriculture. This transition was temporary in the sense that the workforce sought alternative sources of income while hoping that conditions improved, and tourism will resume normalcy, at which point they intended to return to work in this service sector.

4.2.7 Shift in Priority Needs

In comparison to the pre-pandemic period, tourism village managers continued to hope for financial and technical assistance because demand for tourism services increased, but these two resources were limited. During the pandemic, the situation was reversed. Business units that were not operating optimally necessitated a continuous re-operation (Table 10).

The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the financial need for business recovery significantly. Tourism village actors did not have many options for obtaining financial assistance for tourism-related activities. This dramatic reduction or deficit was quantifiably recorded by nearly 61% (Table 9). A more realistic hope would be to obtain technical and skill training assistance, which could lead to business opportunities in non-tourism activities.

Table 10. Change in the Urgent Needs

No.	Dimension of Urgent Needs	Sum of Scores		Change	
		Pre-pandemic	During pandemic	(-/+)	%
1	Financial support	76	30	-46	60.5
2	Technical & skill training	76	71	5	6.6

Source: Field survey, 2021

5 Conclusions

The findings of this study describe the dramatic fall or shock of a tourist village in one of Indonesia's mainstay tourism destinations, the Mandalika Region of Lombok, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The tourism village product chain is not only broken, but also nearly non-existent, posing serious consequences and risks to tourism's long-term viability. The shock of a disaster (pandemic) has proven effective in paralyzing the entire chain and altering the economic structure of the tourist village as a whole. Although there were mitigation opportunities, such as assistance from the Ministry of Tourism for tourism MSME units [26], the process was lengthy, and the amount was insufficient. This is almost universal in tourist villages in disaster-stricken countries [14], making it difficult for business actors to make business breakthroughs.

The decline of tourist villages as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic teaches a valuable lesson: tourist villages require strong links with related sectors and must avoid a single reliance on tourism in the entire rural economic system. This linkage can provide assistance as well as a channel for tourism business actors to adapt when a disaster strikes unexpectedly, allowing the village economy to last longer. Support from and strong ties with various rural economic sub-sectors are important prerequisites for tourist villages to be more adaptable in the face of disasters.

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