

The Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Economy in South Sulawesi, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Tourism industry in the region of South East Asia has been subjected to several crises which raise questions about their ability to manage crises and readiness for future eventualities. The importance of such abilities is heightened especially in the current landscape where the rapidity and scale of the Covid-19's pandemic threaten to derail the global economy. Considering the integral role of the tourism sector in the South Sulawesi of Indonesia, this research aims to explore and understand the actual and perceived impacts of Covid-19 in relations to the actions undertaken by the business managers and owners to sustain their operations. To achieve this, an embedded design approach based on the results of feedback related to the impact of Covid-19 on the wide-spectrum of tourism businesses was employed. Descriptive analysis is used to provide a perspective view of Covid-19 impacts and this is supported by the results of interview analysis. The results showed that most tourism businesses across the 24 main destinations in South Sulawesi are economically affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The involvement of several tourism businesses in handling the Covid-19 is initially an apparent misfortune that eventually has good results, in which tourism businesses opted to lay off their employees and leverage digital tools to survive the ongoing crisis.

Keywords:

Covid-19, Tourism Economy, Impact, South Sulawesi

Article Received: 18 October 2020, Revised: 3 November 2020, Accepted: 24 December 2020

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is experiencing a global crisis because of the Covid-19 pandemic. A series of efforts was made to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic after the virus first appeared in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (Chen, Yang, Yang, Wang & Barnighausen, 2020). In China, the government prohibits its citizens from traveling abroad (Kraemer et al., 2020). This approach was undertaken to suppress the spread of the virus by intervening in community's mobility which includes travel restrictions as well as behavioural and clinical interventions. Similar restrictive approaches can also be seen in other parts of the world where governments are implementing preventative interventions such as limiting the distance between citizens in the "social distancing" territory (International Monetary Fund, 2020; World Travel & Tourism Council,

2020). Given the reliance of tourism upon infrastructure, ability to move freely and the perceived safety among the people, it is evidenced that the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has sweeping and detrimental impacts at every level of the sector (Orchiston, 2012; International Monetary Fund, 2020; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). These impacts occurred due to the distinctive nature of the Covid-19 itself as policymakers are required to imposed restrictive containment measures instead of implementing activities that can stimulate economic performance (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Although these measures would subsequently have substantial and negative economic domino effects on large and small suppliers throughout the tourism industry, its importance cannot be understated – considering the potential circulation of a pandemic that can be triggered from the

tourists' activities as they have dynamic interactions with microbes and genetic material, which can be potentially dangerous for others (Baker, 2015; Wilson, 2003; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). With the global cessation of all travelling activities, there is yet to be clarities on the duration and intensity of the economic shock caused by the Covid-19, although it is simulated by the International Monetary Fund (2020) that the developing economies which are reliant on the tourism will be hit particularly hard.

This is the case for Indonesia as the death toll has reached 792 people, with a 7.8 percent mortality ratio reported by the Indonesian Covid-19 Control Team on May 1, 2020 (Kompas, 2020). The situation has forced the temporary closure of many tourism businesses and the President of the Republic of Indonesia ordered several key destination areas to be closed if the number of infected people increased (JawaPos, 2020). These developments do not bode well for many industries in the context of developing economy in Indonesia as the volatility derived from this pandemic will be strongly felt by the micro, small and medium sized businesses – especially among the owners and the self-employed people who make a living in the tourism industry. This group of businesses is important as it is well documented that they constitute a significant part of the stakeholders in tourism industry (Azinuddin, Mior Shariffuddin & Wan Mohd Zain, 2020; Dahles & Susilowati, 2015). Therefore, the resilient level of these businesses is imperative as they sourced for alternative resources in order to withstand the significant turbulence and disruptions caused by the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. However, one of the many challenges faced by these owners are that their businesses are beleaguered by issues ranging from insufficient resources and knowledge as well as lack of formal and external business capital and growth (Azinuddin et al., 2020). On top of that, there are empirical evidences especially within the region of Southeast Asia that the network relations between the public authorities and small businesses are

fragmented, under-utilised and spatially dispersed (Azinuddin et al., 2020; Mior Shariffuddin, Wan Mohd Zain & Azinuddin, 2020).

Taking note of these challenges, it is postulated that they can potentially inhibit the recovery of the tourism sector as the key element for a successful destination management is to possess a reasonable level of consensus among the various stakeholders on the desired strategic directions (Ritchie, 1993). Given the dependency of the success and livelihood of the tourism sector on the small-scale tourism businesses, it is important for this study to explore the impacts of a sudden loss of vital source of income because of Covid-19 pandemic. Equally important, this study also looks to understand the owners' expectations on the role of the public authorities in managing this crisis.

This is consistent with the research call by Sigala (2020) as more body of knowledge is needed in understanding the owners' knowledge, awareness, capacity and willingness to recognize and respond (proactively and reactively) on the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic, both of which can equally affect their attitudes, behaviours and potential for change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Tourism Crises

Similar to many other theoretical conundrums, there has been no universal agreement on the definition of crisis in tourism. In fact, the terms of crisis and disaster have been used interchangeably as one can be substituted into the other within the realm of tourism (Faulkner, 2001; Kim & Lee, 1998, Ritchie, 2008). However, some commentators argue that they do have distinctive differences. For instance, disasters usually can be linked with external factors whereas crises are predominantly discussed within the context of organizational stresses which are the by-products of outside happenings (Faulkner, 2001; Ghaderi, Mat Som & Henderson, 2012). Over the past decades, the global tourism sector has undergone many crises or disasters including terrorist attacks,

political turmoil, economic crisis, threats to biosecurity, and natural disasters (Ritchie, 2004). Destinations that are prone to such crises or disasters can be significantly impacted across all layers of their economy (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015). In other words, the tourism crisis or disasters can be understood as a condition caused by natural and non-natural factors that negatively influence tourism ecosystem performance. For this reason, integrated responses at every level of tourism sector is needed in the times of crises or disasters as the whole country can be potentially implicated when a destination is hit (Ghaderi et al., 2012).

Tourism Crisis Management

One of the critical factors in creating sustainable and highly profitable tourism is the industry's stability in coping with crises that can be both triggered by nature and non-nature factors. There are different ways of coping with the tourism crisis faced by tourism-related organizations which comprise of public, private and hybrid stakeholders. Rowen (2020) argues that several commentators have been advocating different approaches to solving tourism crises, including responsible tourism, multi-stakeholder strategies, and increasing socio-economic disparity and causing irreparable ecological harm. The primary key in coping with crises, however, is recognizing the connection between cause and effect, and the consequences of policies and actions, although the mechanism is quite complicated. Bear in mind that the type, scale and magnitude of incidents, crises and disasters would have an impact on strategy development and implementation as well (Rowen, 2020). For this reason, a systematic and comprehensive management of crises are important. From a manager's viewpoint, this process can be pictured as a series of steps covering signal detection, prevention, preparation, containment, damage limitation and recovery (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992).

While at the organizational level, proactive managements in the shape of attempts to

understand and navigate crisis as well as to manage those that occur by utilizing learning lessons from past experiences are vital in policies' formulations for coping (Mitroff, Pauchant, Finney & Pearson, 1989). Despite the documented series of adapting and coping to the potential crises, commentators acknowledge the difficulties in anticipating and managing many of tourism crises given the complex and multi-faceted nature of the industry (Prideaux, Laws & Faulkner, 2003). Especially in the context of Covid-19 where across space and time, the impacts on tourism are unequal and, aside from the human resources, figures indicate a significant international economic impact (Sigala, 2020). Furthermore, it is asserted by Gössling *et al* (2020) that all we have are the methods that were used to control epidemics in the early 20th century as we have no 21st century tools to fight Covid-19, and there is no vaccine or treatment. As many operations of travel, hospitality, tourism and events are closed in many parts of the world due to this pandemic, Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) contend that this may offer a rare chance to rethink and reset tourism toward a better pathway for the future. In line with this notion, Gössling et al (2020) argue that there is a pressing need not to revert to business as normal after the crisis is resolved, but to rethink a restructuring of the global tourism environment more consistent with Sustainable Development Goals. They concluded that Covid-19 offers compelling insights for tourism sector, politicians, and tourism researchers on the impact of global change, and the goal now is to jointly benefit from this global catastrophe to drive sustainable tourism transformation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Indonesia has been one of the countries that have been severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the central Indonesian government announced that Covid-19 is a national disaster, the disruption of all tourism businesses' travel activities was significant. The emergence of lockdown status worsens this condition (in

Indonesia, it is called Large-scale Social Restrictions) because people's mobility for tourism activities is also prohibited. The Large-scale Social Restrictions in South Sulawesi province began to be implemented at the end of March 2020. All flights' access to this area was closed, and the government closely monitored people's mobility in several major cities in South Sulawesi Province. These containment measures are crucial as it is reported that the South Sulawesi Province ranks the second highest after East Java with 2,383 people infected by the Covid-19 with an increasing daily trend of above 50 cases reported by Covid-19 Cluster Team in South Sulawesi on June 10, 2020 (InewsSulsel, 2020). Given the serious development of the Covid-19 cases in this particular area of developing economy, the South Sulawesi Province is considered as a suitable research setting in understanding the actual and perceived impacts of this pandemic on micro, small and medium-sized tourism business operations. With this in mind, the researchers used a mixed-method with an embedded design approach (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The embedded design approach is a research method that combines the use of quantitative and qualitative research methods simultaneously (or vice versa), but the one of the approaches becomes the primary method and the

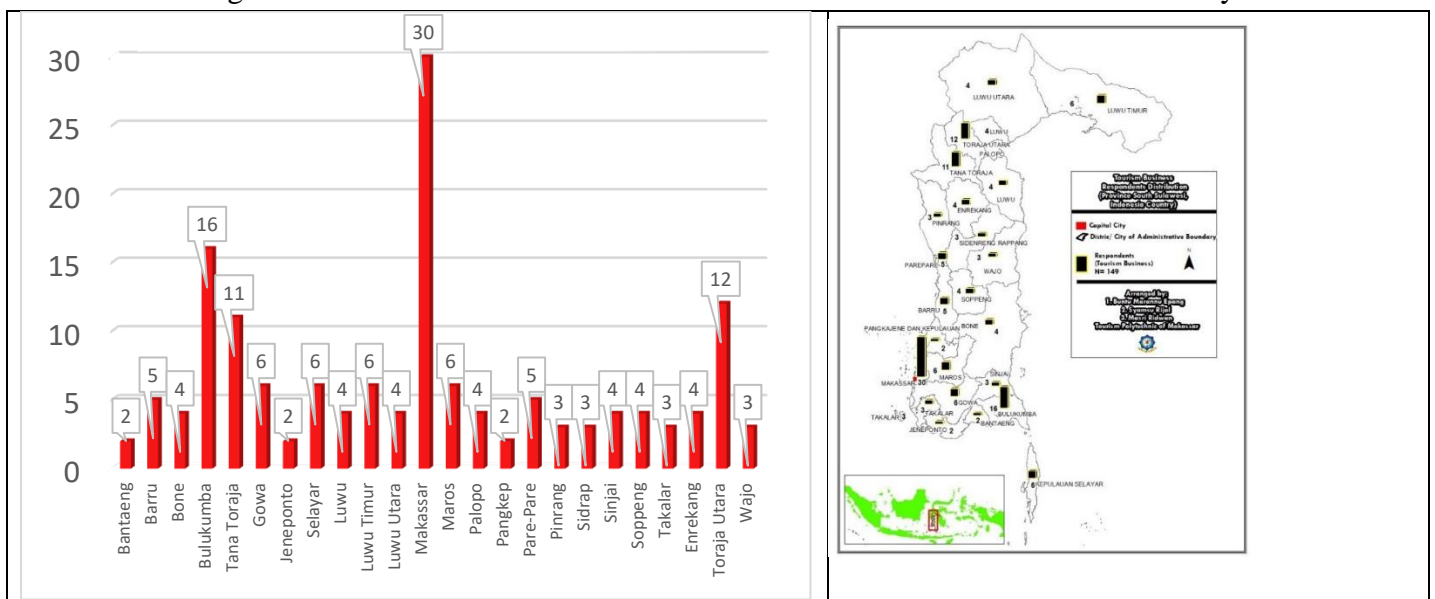
other method is the secondary method. The primary method is used to obtain primary data, and the secondary method is used to obtain data to support data obtained from the primary method. The quantitative method is the primary approach of the study, and the qualitative approach is used to support the quantitative data in explaining the phenomena of the data presented. Quantitative data was obtained from the questionnaire designed given to respondents online (Application of ArcGIS Survey123 by Esri.com). 149 respondents were purposively selected who were tourism business managers, general managers and owners in South Sulawesi. Furthermore, qualitative data were obtained by telephone interviews with several important informants for this study. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency distribution analysis and followed by the results of interview analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents

Respondents in the quantitative approach were managers and owners of micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses scattered randomly throughout South Sulawesi Province. The distribution of respondents in this study can be seen as follows:

Figure 1: The Distribution of Tourism Businesses in South Sulawesi of the study



The Figure 1 above illustrates the distribution of micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses used as respondents in this study. Based on the figure above, most respondents are in 4 destinations because the destination is a fairly developed tourism destination, namely Makassar City as the capital city of South Sulawesi (30 respondents), Bulukumba Regency (16 respondents), Tana Toraja Regency (11

respondents) and North Toraja Regency (12 respondents). Other districts have less than six respondents, and those districts are supporting tourism destinations in South Sulawesi.

Furthermore, the respondents' profile based on the type of micro, small and medium-sized tourism business in this study can be seen in the following Figure 2:

Figure 2: Number of Type of Tourism Businesses of the study

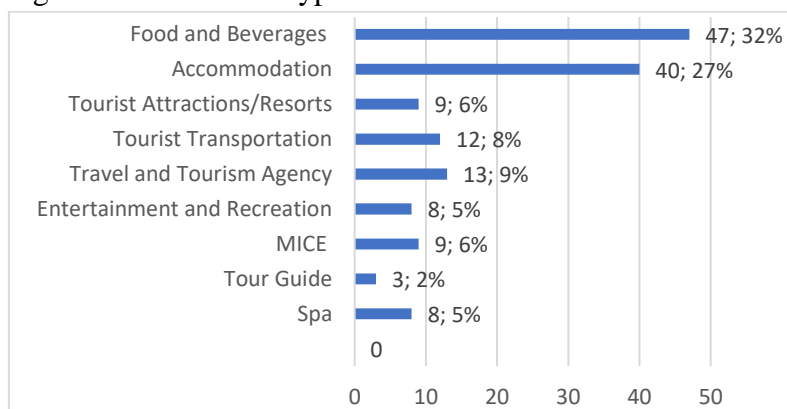
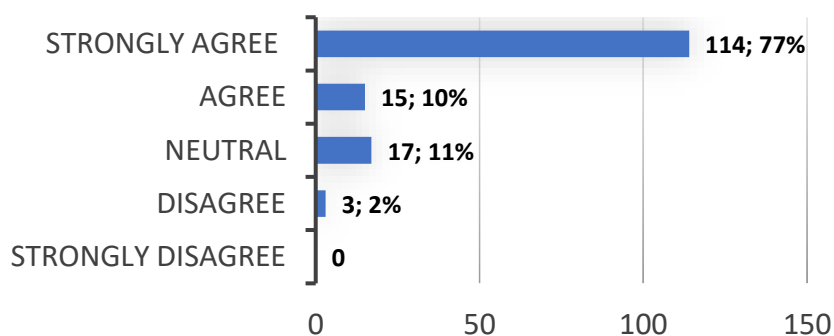


Figure 2 above shows the types of micro, small and medium-sized tourism business based on the Indonesian Tourism Law and are the study's object. The culinary and accommodation sub-sectors are the most businesses in the tourism sector; the number of samples used was 47 businesses for culinary and 40 businesses for accommodations in South Sulawesi. Other sub-sectors recorded smaller portions because the number of businesses is not as many as the two sectors above.

Perception on Large-scale Social Restrictions

The lockdown implementation in Indonesia is called Large-scale social restrictions or *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar (PSBB)*. This policy was introduced since the transmission rate of Covid-19 in major Indonesia provinces increased, such as Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, including South Sulawesi. The following is the response of micro, small and medium-sized tourism business managers about their agreement to the implementation of the lockdown.

Figure 3: Response on Large-scale social restriction



The viewpoints of micro, small and medium-sized tourism business managers and owners regarding the implementation of Large-scale social restrictions can be seen in Figure 3 above. The figure shows that more than three-quarters of managers and owners of the micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses strongly agreed with the implementation of Large-scale social restrictions, while those who disagree was only about 2% of total respondents. The interview result shows that one of the reasons they agreed

was their concern about the spread of the virus to their businesses, and they were worried that their business area would become a source of the virus for others.

Financial Impact

Business managers were asked whether their businesses have been negatively affected financially by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Responses of the managers and owners can be seen as follows:

Figure 4:Response on Financial Impact due to the Covid-19 Pandemic

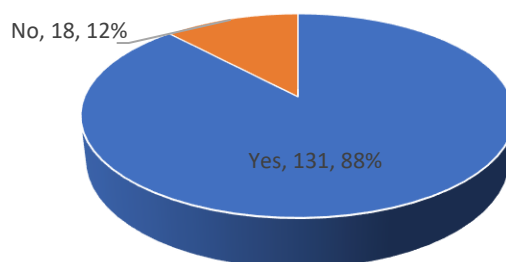


Figure 4 above shows tourism business managers' response to the negative financial impact on the Covid-19 Pandemic. It cannot be denied that a large part or 88% of tourism businesses were financially affected. Those that were not significantly affected were only 12%. Researchers explored through interviews the reasons why some tourism business enterprises that were not affected could still survive. Researchers found that among 12% of the tourism businesses, most of them were engaged in accommodation and culinary businesses. For accommodation, we found that one of the significant reasons that they were not financially affected because the hotels decided to work together with the local government in handling the Covid-19. These hotels serve as

quarantine places for infected people without symptoms, positively infected people, patients in care, and medical personnel, so that their occupancy rate is still high for continuity of their business. In most culinary based businesses, they still survive because they run online business to deliver food to those who are confined at homes.

Loss of profit

The next question asked to managers and owners of micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses was whether they suffered from losses during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The result of the responses of the tourism business managers and owners is as follows:

Figure 5

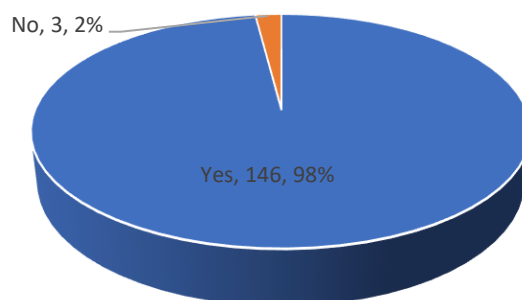


Figure 4 above explains the financial situation of micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses concerning their profit during the Covid-19 Pandemic period. A very significant result shows that almost all tourism businesses, around 98% of tourism businesses, suffered losses resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Our interview result indicated that operational costs such as employee wages, electricity abonnement (especially hotels), and water supply abonnement burdened most tourism businesses. An interesting

result shows that only 2% of the tourism business did not suffer losses, and the justifications based on the interview results were similar with the above.

Reaction to employees in facing Covid-19 Pandemic

Reactions to employees facing the Covid-19 were one of the main questions in this survey. The results of the response from business managers and owners are as follows:

Figure 6: Reaction to employees in tackling Covid-19 Pandemic

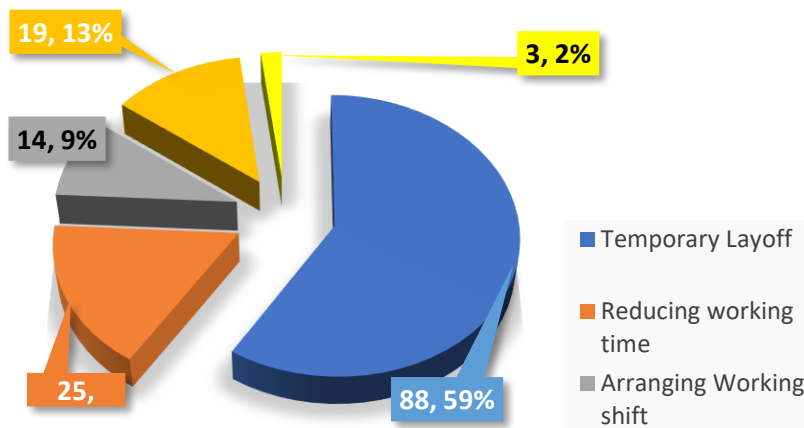


Figure 6 above illustrates employers' reactions to their employees in dealing with Covid-19. Nearly 60% of micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses laid off their employees while only 13% terminated their staff because they could not afford to continue their tourism business. Based on interview results tourism businesses, that did not lay off employees, opted for temporary closure until the situation return to normal. Another strategy is to reduce working hours for tourism businesses that are still operating (17%). Based on interviews, the way to reduce working hours is to force employees to take unpaid leave so that

employers can reduce emolument expenditures. Furthermore, adjusting working hours (9%) is to reduce businesses' operations and maintain social distancing.

Estimated time of business survival in the Covid-19 Pandemic

This study also explored the response from entrepreneurs and managers of micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses related to survival period, which can be seen in the Figure 7 below:

Figure 7: Estimated time of business survival of Tourism Business

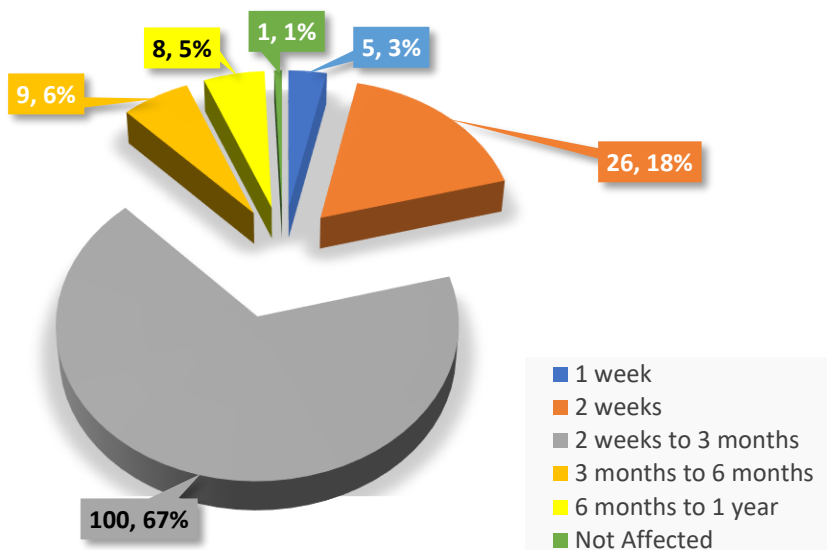
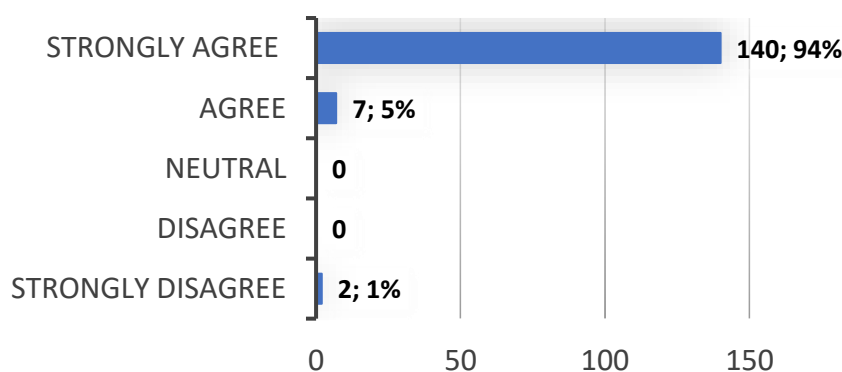


Figure 7 above indicates the survival period of the tourism business to survive during the Covid-19 pandemic. Around 76% of tourism businesses will last up to 3 months, and 6% will last up to 6 months to face Covid-19 pandemic. A small percentage of them lasts up to 1 year if the Covid-19 outbreak continues to worsen in South Sulawesi province.

Financial support from the government to redundant employees

Financial support to redundant employees is an interesting issue for tourism businesses, employees, and the response can be seen in the following figure:

Figure 8: Response on Financial Support to Redudant Employees



The figure above illustrates the expectations of micro, small and medium-sized tourism business managers concerning financial support for employees who are affected. Almost all tourism business managers/owners express their agreement for the redundant employees to receive financial support from the government. Only a small number of tourism businesses do not require

financial assistance because they are still running normally, especially online businesses.

Financial grants from government to spur tourism business

Every micro, small and medium-sized tourism business may require financial grants to continue

the business, and the response can be seen in the following figure:

Figure 9: Response of tourism business on financial grants from the government to spur tourism business

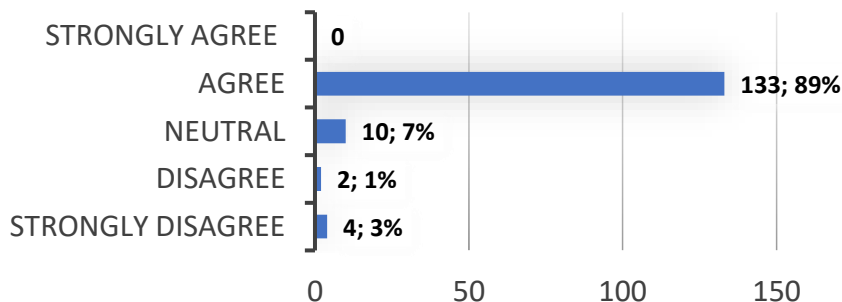


Figure 9 shows the agreement on tourism business enterprises receiving financial grants from the government to spur their business. It is interesting to see that none of them answered strongly agree, but most of them only answered agree (89% of them) on this question. Result from interviews showed they understood the government has so many economic burdens in handling the Covid-19,

and they agreed the government provided financial supports to redundant employees.

Credit/Loan Relief

Most businesses were established from bank loans, and this can be a difficult situation for business enterprises to deal with the loans because of the pandemic, and the responses can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Response on Credit/Loan Relief

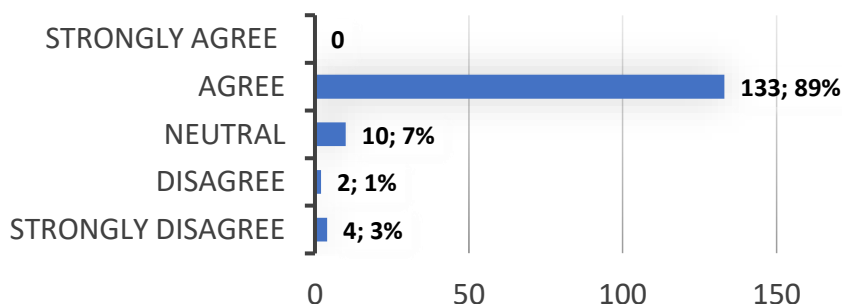


Figure 10 indicates micro, small and medium-sized tourism business enterprises' agreement on receiving credit or loan relief for their business during the Covid-19 pandemic. It can be seen from the graph that almost all business enterprises (142 tourism businesses or 95%) strongly agree to receive credit or loan relief during the Covid-19 pandemic to cover operational costs such as electricity, water, emolument and other costs. They need to provide special funds from their savings to deal with related costs for the next few months.

Most tourism businesses in South Sulawesi are economically affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic include financial disruption and loss of profit, and as a result, most of them can only survive within one to three months (per March 2020). This situation is in line with what Rowen's (2020) claims regarding socio-economic disparity because of the crisis, and people need creative ways (Lew et al., 2020) in times of crisis. As Dahles and Susilowati (2015) put it, entrepreneurial activity may thrive as the businesses are severely disrupted by crisis and disaster. In coping with this situation, most micro, small and medium-sized tourism business

CONCLUSION

enterprises apply temporary layoffs for their employees, hoping that if the new normal is totally implemented, the enterprises will rehire the employees. Some of the businesses opted for digital tools to survive the ongoing crisis. These two measures demonstrate reactive responses to the crisis of Covid-19 as well as their adaptive capacity to survive in the face of this turbulent change. Although these measures are reactive, minimum and necessary in nature, they are nevertheless crucial to be undertaken for recovery and economic development of South Sulawesi province. At the same time, there is yet to be a certain duration and intensity of the disruptions caused by this pandemic (International Monetary Fund, 2020) which raises the need for further innovative solutions at every level of stakeholders in the tourism industry. For these businesses to survive in the three months' period, a significant investment on life-saving loans and tax breaks from the government is needed. Managers and owners of these businesses also need to consider flexible specialization, diversification and a combination of different sources of income within and across sectors in order to be resilient (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015). This can be achieved with substantial entrepreneurial knowledge as this attribute is important in decision making especially in the context of economic, social, cultural and psychological (Wu & Li, 2011).

For this reason, a strong and stable formal network relation between the public and private stakeholders in South Sulawesi province are important as it improves the possibility of a business to have access to resource and knowledge, which are vital for business sustainability and growth (Hoang & Antocic, 2003). The cultivation of such network relations is important since there are numerous empirical evidences from different contextual settings that these businesses are lack in resources, and their decision to enter entrepreneurship may not be based upon the entrepreneurial knowledge – which may be indicative of the level of learning and exchange of knowledge to manage tourism

crisis or disaster (Morrison, Lynch & Johns, 2004; Schoonjans, Cauwenberge & Bauwhede, 2013; Zarhari, Azinuddin, Wan Mohd Zain & Mior Shariffuddin, 2020). Taken altogether, businesses form an integral part of a wider economic system and the combination of internal capacities as well as external capital in the shape of formal remedial assistance is paramount in the times of crisis.

Acknowledgement

We gratefully acknowledge the Tourism Office of South Sulawesi Province for supporting this study.

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