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TOURISM IN PALEMBANG CITY, SOUTH SUMATRA, INDONESIA: IS IT MANAGED IN AN ECONOMICALLY SUSTAINABLE MANNER?

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Abstract

Sustainable tourism management of Kemaro Island (KI), Palembang is crucial for the economic development and well-being of the local community. As a premier destination in Palembang, KI requires comprehensive and effective management. This study aimed to identify the factors that are contributing to the sustainable tourism management of KI from an economic perspective. Economic sustainability (ES) was evaluated through six variables: income enhancement and distribution (IED), employment opportunities (EO), supporting local businesses (SLB), infrastructure development (ID), economic diversification (ED), and community development (CD). The data for each variable was collected through field observations and interviews and analysed using qualitative descriptive methods. The findings highlighted the essential roles of stakeholders, including local communities, tourism managers, government organisations (GOs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in advancing ES. Key aspects such as EO, IED, CD, and community participation significantly impact ES. The study also addressed the challenges and opportunities in achieving ES in KI, emphasising the importance of collaborative efforts, policy alignment, and community engagement. By understanding and implementing sustainable tourism practices, KI can continue to grow economically, while preserving its natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords: Economic Sustainability, Tourism, Management

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism development (TD) plays a pivotal role in economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Economically, the tourism sector contributes significantly to foreign exchange earnings from international visitors and the gross domestic product (Mudrikah et al., 2014; Hermawan, 2016; Moayedfar & Fatemi, 2021). The tourism industry fosters favourable conditions for the effective utilisation of a country's tourism and recreational potential within the context of balanced development, thereby enhancing the positive impacts on socio-economic development (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022; Dutta et al., 2021; Kyrlyov et al., 2022). Tourism exerts a substantial impact on economic, social, cultural, and political aspects, which are interrelated (Waridin & Astawa, 2021; Ryan et al., 2011; Zielinski et al., 2021; Pérez et al., 2021; Salinas et al., 2018; Cavalheiro et al., 2020; Henderson, 2002; Bui et al., 2020; Williams & Gonzalez, 2017). Policymakers also play a crucial role in shaping the tourism landscape (Boukas, 2013; Brown, 2006; Allaberganov & Catterall, 2023; Duval & Smith, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Weng et al., 2021). Tourism development (TD) strategies involve enhancing attractions that encompass natural, cultural, and artificial elements, which are integrated spatially to leverage global advantages and competitiveness, highlighting the importance of cultural heritage (Astina & Kurniawati, 2021; Costa & Carneiro, 2021; Andreyanova & Ivolga, 2018). The scale of TD impacts every country, region, city, or smaller territorial unit. Additionally, the relationship between tourism and regional development is marked by spatial differentiation (Hacıa, 2019). Sustainable management of tourism must be supported by tourist satisfaction, which serves as a post-visit response (Rajesh, 2013). This satisfaction is a signal that objectives have been achieved. Satisfied tourists share positive experiences with others, providing free advertising that can promote consistent travel to attractions (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000).

The river tourism sector is a strategic tourism area that is being promoted by the Palembang City government. It encompasses attractions, infrastructure, general facilities, tourism amenities, and community empowerment (Nugroho, 2011; Ratman, 2016). Kemaro Island (KI), a premier tourist destination in Palembang, is recognised as a Category A Heritage City in Indonesia. The island is highly favoured by domestic tourists, with 17702 visitors being recorded in 2023, and attracts approximately 80500 international tourists annually, particularly during major Tri Dharma religious holidays. Visitors include local residents from various cities and districts within South Sumatra, neighbouring provinces such as Jambi, Bengkulu, Lampung, and Medan, as well as thousands of Chinese descendants from Singapore, Hong Kong, and China, who come to enjoy the island's beauty and perform religious rituals. Despite the influx of tourists during the Cap Go Meh celebration, KI suffers from a lack of

attractive features, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and insufficient awareness among the community and tourism managers to enhance the island's appeal. This significantly impacts the ES management of KI as a tourist destination. The role of GOs in the management and development of the tourist area has been suboptimal. This study was aimed at analysing the ES aspects of KI in Palembang and was focused on identifying the key factors that contribute to the ES management of tourism on the island. The research is intended to provide insights into improving the attractiveness and infrastructure of KI to support its development as a sustainable tourist destination, thus, benefiting the local economy and community.

This research aimed to significantly enhance government and local community revenues both locally and nationally while boosting the creative economy sector of Palembang. Tourism development (TD) must have a direct impact on local communities as they play a crucial role in supporting the sustainability of tourism (Sumarmi et al, 2021; Astina et al., 2021; Sumarmi et al, 2020). The primary goal of this research was to align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting tourism that is economically, environmentally, socio-culturally, and institutionally beneficial. Emphasis was given to sustainable TD (Muis et al., 2016), particularly eco-cultural tourism, to ensure that the influx of tourists will not compromise the preservation of local cultural values. Local wisdom plays a vital role in environmental management as a sustainability measure (Marlina et al., 2020). Although numerous studies on tourism have been conducted, spatial perspectives on tourism, particularly in Palembang, remain underexplored. Therefore, it is essential to focus on the ES development of tourism in Palembang by improving the management of KI. This study addressed the need for sustainable tourism practices that do not disrupt the cultural fabric of local communities, ensuring long-term benefits and preservation. This study aimed to uncover the factors that play a crucial role in the sustainable tourism management of KI, with a particular emphasis on the economic perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The ES of tourism management is a critical aspect for ensuring long-term benefits for local communities and economies. Kemaro Island (KI), a notable tourist destination in Palembang, Indonesia, has seen increasing visitor numbers, necessitating a sustainable approach to its tourism management. This literature review explores the theoretical framework of ES in tourism, examines previous studies on the economic impacts of tourism in similar regions, provides an overview of TD and policies in Palembang, and identifies research gaps and justifications for further investigation. Economic sustainability (ES) in tourism refers to the capacity of tourism activities to generate continuous economic

benefits for local communities while preserving the environmental and cultural resources on which they depend. Elkington's (1997) triple-bottom-line framework, which emphasises economic, social, and environmental performance, is foundational to understanding sustainable tourism. This framework suggests that TD should not only focus on economic gains but also ensure social equity and environmental protection. Researchers such as Swarbrooke (1999) and Weaver and Lawton (2004) expanded on this by highlighting that sustainable tourism management must include fair income enhancement and distribution (IED), employment opportunities (EO), and supporting local businesses (SLB). These components are crucial for maintaining a balanced approach that benefits all stakeholders involved in tourism.

Studies on the economic impact of tourism in regions similar to KI provided valuable insights into best practices and potential challenges. Nicholas and Thapa (2010) examined the economic benefits of tourism in the Caribbean islands and discovered that equitable IED and community participation were key to ES outcomes. Similarly, Gursoy et al. (2007) found that in Southeast Asian destinations, tourism significantly contributes to EO and economic diversification (ED). In the context of island tourism, Razović (2013) and Wiwattanakantang and To-Im (2014) highlighted the importance of SLB and ensuring infrastructure development (ID) to enhance the tourism experience. These studies underscored the need for a holistic approach that integrates economic activities with community well-being and environmental stewardship.

Palembang, as the administrative centre of South Sumatra, has prioritised tourism as a strategic sector for regional development. The local government's tourism policies aim to enhance infrastructure, promote cultural heritage, and increase the city's attractiveness to tourists. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2013), these efforts are in line with global standards for sustainable TD. The city has implemented various initiatives to boost tourism, including the development of tourist facilities and the promotion of events such as cultural festivals. However, despite these efforts, the management of KI's tourism resources remains unbalanced, particularly in terms of infrastructure and community awareness (Pickel-Chevalier et al., 2021; Zhang & Chan, 2020). While there has been substantial research on the economic impacts of tourism, specific studies focusing on KI are limited. The existing research tends to generalise the findings from broader regions without addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of KI. This gap highlights the need for targeted research that explores the island's specific context and identifies tailored strategies for ES management. Furthermore, previous studies often emphasised the immediate economic benefits without adequately addressing long-term sustainability. There is a need for comprehensive research to examine the

interplay between economic activities and their social and environmental impacts over time.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study area was KI. The research presented a detailed account of the ES of tourism management, obtained through field observation and interviews. This research used qualitative methods and thematic analysis to assess the ES of tourism in KI, focusing on the Musi River area in Palembang. The ES aspects that were examined included the IED, EO, SLB, ID, ED, and community development (CD) (Elkington, 1997).

Table 1. The variables of ES.

No.	ES instrument	Variable	Indicator
1	Income Enhancement and Distribution (IED)	Increasing Regional Income Income Equalisation	Total revenue generated from tourism activities. Distribution of tourism revenue among local businesses and residents.
2	Employment Opportunities (EO)	Increased Job Creation Improved Quality of Work	Number of jobs created by tourism activities. Job satisfaction and tourism-related employment stability.
3	Supporting Local Businesses (SLB)	Supporting Local Businesses Building Capacity	Percentage of local businesses involved in the tourism supply chain. Training and development programmes for local businesses.
4	Infrastructure Development (ID)	Investing in Infrastructure Improving Infrastructure Accessibility and Quality	Amount of investment in tourism-related infrastructure. Quality and accessibility of tourism infrastructure (e.g., roads, facilities).
5	Economic Diversification (ED)	Diversifying Economic Activities Increasing Resilience to Economic Shocks	Variety of economic activities supported by tourism. The community's ability to withstand economic downturns.
6	Community Development (CD)	Reinvesting in the Community Improved Community's Living Standards	Amount of tourism revenue reinvested into community projects. Perceptions of improved living standards due to tourism.

Table 2 lists the details of the interviews conducted at the KI's tourist attractions.

Table 2. Tourist Attraction Observation Methods

Kemaro Island (KI)	
Reasons for Observing the Tourist Attraction	Located on the banks of the Musi River, inhabited by ethnic communities, considered a prominent tourist attraction in Palembang City. Palembang is a Category A Heritage City in Indonesia.
Technical Observations	Secondary data collection and semi-structured interviews.
Observation Dates (Month/Year)	February-March 2024.
Interviewees and their Roles	1. Administrator/Caretaker of the Toa Pekong Kemaro Island Foundation, Mr Burhan (1 person) 2. Visitors/tourists (10 person) 3. Palembang City Tourism Officer, Mr Oki (Head of the Kemaro Island UPTD) (1 person)

The research location was KI in Palembang City, Indonesia, the details of which are shown in Figure 1.

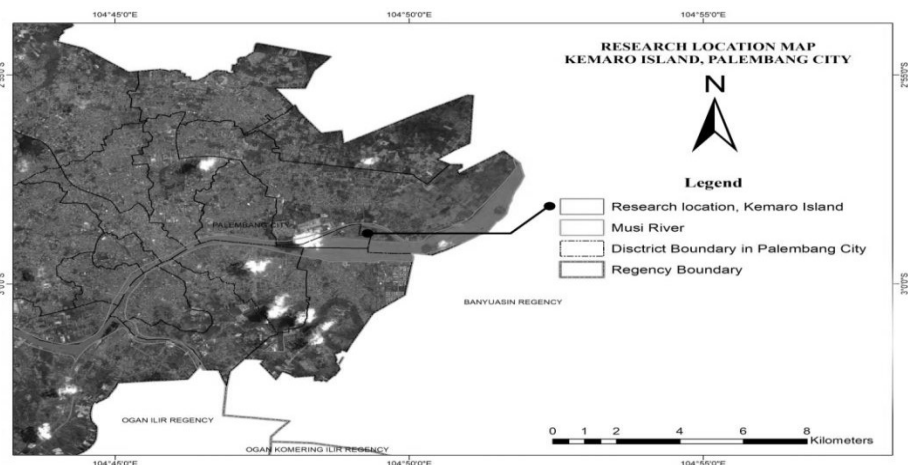


Figure 1. The research location: Kemaro Island, Palembang City, Indonesia.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism in KI is managed by a foundation in collaboration with the local government to ensure ES management. The results of the research interviews with the Management and Tourism Department of Palembang City can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of the analysis of the tourism management of KI from the ES aspects.

Theme	Code	No. of Respondents	Representative Responses
Income Enhancement and Distribution (IED)	Total income generated from tourism activities.	[R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9 & R10]	<i>“Total income from domestic and international tourists reaches around 10 billion rupiah a year. Kemaro Island (KI) has other sources of sponsorship or funds from the Cap Go Meh festival, parking, and tour guide services.” [R8]</i>
	Distribution of tourism income among local businesses and residents.	[R2, R3, R5, R7, R9, & R10]	<i>“Income from tourism on KI allocated through active partnerships with local entrepreneurs, namely restaurants, transportation providers, and creating EO for local residents in souvenir shops and drink and food shops. This approach not only improves the visitors’ experiences but also ensures the growth of the local economy sustainable development.” [R4]</i> The economic activities on KI are depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Economic activities on KI.

Theme	Code	No. of Respondents	Representative Responses
Employment Opportunities (EO)	Number of jobs created by tourism activities.	[R1, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, & R10]	<i>“Tourism on KI has created around 100 new jobs in the last year. The types of jobs available include tour guides, photography services, hotel and restaurant staff, to construction and infrastructure maintenance workers. There are also many local residents directly running small businesses, such as souvenir shops, boat rentals, and transportation service providers, and also indirectly.” [R2]</i>
	Job satisfaction and stability of tourism-related employment.	[R1, R2, R4, R5, R6, R8, R9, & R10]	<i>“We are quite satisfied with the quality and stability of the jobs created by tourism on KI. Most of the jobs are seasonal or short-term contracts but still provide important income for the community. The wages received are adequate, but there are not many opportunities for career development.” [R10]</i>
Supporting Local Businesses (SLB)	Percentage of local businesses involved in the tourism supply chain.	[R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, & R9]	<i>“Nearly all local businesses on KI, around 90%, are active in the tourism supply chain. They play an important role in maintaining the local cultural identity for better tourism experiences.” [R1]</i>
	Training and development programmes for local businesses.	[R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, & R10]	<i>“Provides a range of training programmes designed to SLB in the tourism sector. Currently, we are holding digital marketing workshops that help local entrepreneurs leverage modern technology to increase their competitiveness. We also provide special skills training for local craftsmen to improve the quality of their products.” [R8]</i>
Infrastructure Development (ID)	Amount of investment in tourism-	[R2, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8,	<i>“The Palembang City tourism office is investing in developing and improving tourism infrastructure on KI. This includes various projects,</i>

Theme	Code	No. of Respondents	Representative Responses
Economic Diversification (ED)	related infrastructure.	R9, & R10]	<i>such as building access roads, renovating public facilities (toilets, parking areas, and rest areas), repairing docks and providing ships, adding cleaning facilities, as well as installing information signs and directional signs.” [R5]</i>
	Quality and accessibility of tourism infrastructure (e.g., roads, facilities).	[R1, R3, R4, R6, R8, R9, & R10]	<i>“The quality and accessibility of tourism infrastructure on KI has increased significantly in recent years. Public facilities, such as toilets, parking areas, and rest areas, have been renovated to ensure greater comfort and cleanliness for visitors.” [R10]</i>
	The variety of economic activities supported by tourism.	[R1, R2, R3, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, & R10]	<i>“As a positive impact of TD on KI, various new economic activities have emerged in our community. The souvenir industry is thriving with products, such as key chains and jade jewellery, which are highly sought after by tourists as mementos of their visit. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of kiosks and food stalls offering Palembang specialties, such as pempek and tekwan, which are favourites among visitors. We see the importance of ID, such as tourist boats and cable cars, to optimise the economic potential of this tourism sector.” [R7]</i>
	The ability of the community to withstand economic downturns.	[R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, & R10]	<i>“We are confident that our community is resilient enough to face any possible economic downturns thanks to the diversification of the tourism activities on KI. This was accomplished by not only relying on tourism, but also by developing various training programmes, such</i>

Theme	Code	No. of Respondents	Representative Responses
			<i>as handicraft making, local culinary delights, tour guides, and homestay management. The goal is to maintain various sources of income that can support our economy in the long run.” [R9]</i>
Community Development (CD)	The amount of tourism revenue that is reinvested into community projects.	[R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, & R10]	<i>“We are committed to allocating around 20-25% of the total tourism revenue to community projects. This investment includes basic ID, environmental preservation, and supporting micro and small businesses to create a positive impact on the community.” [R7]</i>
	Perception of increased living standards due to tourism.	[R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, & R10]	<i>“Tourism here has a significantly positive impact on the community's standards of living. Through job creation and increased local income, our residents can develop their local businesses, such as food stalls and souvenir shops. Infrastructure and public services have also been improved, improving access to essential facilities such as clean water and roads.” [R3]</i>

The management of tourism in KI has a significant economic impact on local ES through various factors. Revenue from domestic and international tourists, contributions to the local GDP, equitable IED, SLB, ID, cultural and environmental conservation, community participation and engagement, stakeholder collaboration, and local ED are the key elements in promoting sustainable tourism management. Collaboration among various stakeholders and transparency in IED play crucial roles in ensuring that the benefits of tourism are experienced by all the community members, thereby supporting inclusive and ES growth. The research also revealed that equal and affordable access to attractions on KI, along with comprehensive support facilities, provide safe and enjoyable recreational opportunities for both locals and tourists. However, there are shortcomings in the provision of suggestion and complaint boxes, as well as visitors' knowledge of the preservation of local sites and culture, indicating areas for improvement (Williams, 2021). Government policies in the management and

development of KI's tourist attractions, in line with the vision and mission of Palembang City, demonstrate strong support for sustainability and the advancement of cultural tourism destinations. Active participation by the government and the community in strategic discussions and policy development reflects an inclusive and collaborative approach to TD (Liu & Brouder, 2020). On comparing and contrasting the practices on the island with international case studies, the findings of this research indicate that the development of tourism on KI results in sustainable tourism. Similar research on cultural tourism destinations in other countries demonstrates that integrating strategies for environmental preservation and local socio-economic development in TD can strengthen the cultural identity and enhance the well-being of local communities (Nguyen & Cheung, 2020). This discussion can deepen the understanding of the importance of a holistic and participatory approach to tourism management, by considering not only the economic aspects but also the social and environmental sustainability.

The preservation of cultural tourism resources relies heavily on the roles of managers and the local community. Managers and administrators are instrumental in upholding preservation efforts, not only of physical structures but also of cultural heritage, which is deemed invaluable and should be conserved as ancestral legacies. This commitment is evident in their efforts to organise events such as cultural festivals and artistic performances, which attract a significant number of tourists. The government, particularly the Tourism Office, plays a pivotal role in preserving the resources of KI's tourist attractions. Sustainable development is aimed at cultivating tourism areas that prioritise both natural resources and human needs (Pickel-Chevalier et al., 2021; Zhang & Chan, 2020). Institutionally, alignment and support are essential from local, regional, and national government policies related to the tourism sector to ensure sustainability and inclusivity. Active participation from both the government and local communities is crucial for the successful management of cultural tourism destinations through the planning process, decision-making, and implementation of tourism programmes, thereby creating more effective and sustainable strategies. Managers, communities, and institutions must collaborate to establish partnerships with various stakeholders, including local businesses, indigenous communities, educational institutions, and NGOs, to support the development and promotion of cultural tourism destinations. The ultimate vision is to position cultural tourism destinations in Palembang City as attractive, valuable, and ES destinations.

The findings of this study revealed that the economic impact of tourism on KI is substantial, corroborating the research of Carvache-Franco et al. (2022) and Dutta et al. (2021), which emphasised the significance of tourism in local economic development. The considerable revenue generated supports the

argument that sustainable tourism can drive economic growth while fostering CD (Kirylov et al., 2022). However, unlike some other studies, this research highlighted the critical roles of ID and community engagement, indicating that these factors are essential for the sustainable management of tourism.

CONCLUSION

The tourism sector of KI has significantly bolstered local economic growth, EO, and CD. This study identified the key factors that are essential for the sustainable management of tourism in KI from an economic perspective. These factors include IED, EO, SLB, ID, ED, and CD. The findings indicate that tourism activities have generated substantial revenue, thereby supporting various sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and local crafts. This economic impact highlights the critical need for ongoing efforts to address environmental challenges, improve infrastructure, and provide comprehensive training programmes for the community. Collaborative efforts among GOs, the community, and stakeholders are imperative for achieving a sustainable and inclusive TD. Such collaborations will ensure long-term benefits for the local community and help preserve the island's cultural and natural heritage. By fostering these partnerships and emphasising sustainable practices, KI can become a model for other tourist destinations seeking to balance economic growth with environmental preservation and cultural integrity. In summary, the sustainable management of KI's tourism sector necessitates a multifaceted approach that integrates economic, environmental, and socio-cultural dimensions. The key findings of this study offer a roadmap for stakeholders to enhance the sustainability of tourism on the island to ensure that it continues to benefit the local economy while preserving its unique cultural and natural assets for future generations.

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