

# TOURISM AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXPERIENCES FROM INDONESIA



Mohamad Robbith Subandi

## Propositions

1. Focusing only on “Quality Tourists” is not a viable solution for sustainable tourism development.  
(this thesis)
2. The economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic shows the resilience of global capitalism.  
(this thesis)
3. Every scientific question in social science has a hinterland of power dynamics.
4. Writing a thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic raises not only the question of how and when but most crucially where.
5. Daily hot showers often provide valuable “eureka” moments for thesis writing.
6. Crises often serve as excuse to maintain the status quo.
7. Sustainability and unlimited economic growth are mutually exclusive.

Propositions belonging to the thesis, entitled:

Tourism and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Experiences from Indonesia

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Wageningen, 29 November 2023



# **Tourism and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Experiences from Indonesia

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# **Tourism and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Experiences from Indonesia

**Mohamad Robbith Subandi**

## **Thesis**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	V
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Setting the Scene: Global Tourism and the COVID-19 Pandemic	3
1.1.1. Tourism in Indonesia pre and in the time of COVID-19 pandemic	3
1.2. Relevant literature and core concepts	5
1.2.1. Sustainability in Tourism	5
1.2.2. Tourism development policies and COVID-19 pandemic	6
1.2.3. Experience Co-Creation in time of the COVID-19 Pandemic	8
1.3. Research Questions	9
1.4. Methodology	10
1.4.1. Overview of Methods used in this Thesis	10
1.4.2. Researcher Positionality	12
1.5. Thesis Structure	13
References	14
<b>Chapter 2 Re-negotiating the future for Indonesian tourism after COVID-19: Sustainability as the New Normal?</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1. Introduction	21
2.2. Literature Review	22
2.3. Methodology	24
2.3.1. Data analysis	25
2.4. The New Normal, sustainability and Post COVID-19 Tourism	25
2.4.1. Social Distancing	26
2.4.2. Health and Hygiene protocols	28
2.4.3. Shifting from Quantity to Quality	29
2.5. Discussion and Conclusion	31
References	36
<b>Chapter 3 COVID-19 Pandemic and Tourism Development in Indonesia: Key Government Mitigation and Intervention Analysis</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1. Introduction	43
3.1.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Future tourism development agendas	45
3.2. Methods	47

3.3.	Results	48
3.3.1.	Major government mitigation intervention and their impacts	48
3.3.2.	The development of the 10 New Bali project during the time of COVID-19 pandemic	53
3.4.	Discussion	56
3.4.1.	Indonesian government COVID-19 mitigation strategies for tourism compared to other governments	57
3.4.2.	Post-Covid Tourism: Business as usual?	58
3.4.3.	The luxury and ecotourism development pair: A new guise of accumulation by conservation in tourism?	59
3.5.	Conclusion	60
	References	62
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>The Co-creation of a Pandemic Tourist Experience: The Case of Belitung, Indonesia</b>	<b>69</b>
4.1.	Introduction	71
4.2.	Literature review	73
4.2.1.	Experience co-creation during the COVID-19 Pandemic	73
4.3.	Research methodology	75
4.4.	Findings	76
4.4.1.	Co-creating the experience on-site	77
4.4.2.	Negotiating the pandemic gaze	80
4.5.	Discussion and conclusion	87
4.5.1.	Discussion	87
4.5.2.	Conclusion	88
	References	89
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Conclusion and Discussion</b>	<b>93</b>
5.1.	Addressing the research questions	96
5.2.	How did the COVID-19 pandemic influence tourism development discourse and policy in Indonesia?	99
5.3.	Discussion	99
5.3.1.	Neoliberalism and Indonesian tourism development during the COVID-19 pandemic	100
5.3.2.	Indonesia Tourism Beyond COVID-19: Sustainable Tourism or Business as Usual	104
5.3.3.	Co-creating a more Sustainable Tourism Future	106
5.4.	The conclusion revisited	108
5.5.	Future directions	109
5.5.1.	Rethinking Domestic Tourism	109
5.5.2.	Exploring New Directions Beyond Sustainable Tourism	110

5.5.3. Exploring the Potential of Value Co-Creation in Promoting Sustainable Tourism	112
5.5.4. Unravelling the power dynamics of 10 New Bali tourism development project.	113
References	114
Summary	117
Samenvatting	123
Overview of Completed Training and Supervision Plan	129
About the Author	131
Financial Acknowledgement	133



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. January - September 2019-2020 International Tourist Arrivals Comparison.	21
Figure 2. Worker's truck facing a Komodo	55
Figure 3. Ex-mining fishing pond.	111

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Data Sources	25
Table 2. Social Distancing “Sustainable Consequences”.	26

The image features a large, white, serif capital letter 'I' centered on a dark blue, textured background. The background has a painterly, watercolor-like quality with visible brushstrokes and splatters, giving it a dynamic and artistic feel. The letter 'I' is clean and minimalist, contrasting sharply with the complex, layered blue background. The overall composition is balanced and visually striking.

I

# Chapter I

## Introduction



## I.I. SETTING THE SCENE: GLOBAL TOURISM AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Tourism is a vulnerable industry; it is prone to uncertainty (Santana, 2012; Sigala, 2020) triggered by numerous natural and man-made crises and disasters throughout its history. The emergence of 2019 COVID-19 pandemic also had unprecedented impacts on tourism. In 2020 UNWTO reported that the international tourism worldwide experienced -74% overall decrease in 2020 compared to the 2019, with the Asia-Pacific region suffering the highest drop of -84% (UNWTO, 2021). Along with these figures we also have seen the increased ‘surveillances’ (Hollinshead, 1999) on tourism mobilities, especially in airports and at borders around the world. Although policy interventions have been done in the name of emergency and safety, they have potentially also compromised our privacy and freedom, which will likely shape the way we travel in the future, just like the security checks brought about by the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the past. Although it is remained to be seen how long these new COVID-19 measures will last beyond this pandemic, currently we can still see that some COVID-19 related measures such social distancing, increased hygiene and sanitation awareness are still affecting the way people travel.

### I.I.I. Tourism in Indonesia pre and in the time of COVID-19 pandemic

Tourism in Indonesia has been developed since the Dutch colonial era, notably in Bali (Picard, 1990), and it has been growing ever since. However, the visitor recording efforts only started in 1969 at the start of the era of the so-called “New Order” of president Soeharto’s (Darma & Hitchcock, 2006). In that time Indonesian tourism was developed to attract more international tourists, characterized by a focus on large-scale, capital intensive, tourism infrastructure projects. This resulted first in the development of Bali’s Nusa Dua tourism resort in 1970’s (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2015). Despite the ongoing debates on the effectiveness of this kind of development, fuelled with arguments for a more sustainable and equitable tourism industry (Warren & Wardana, 2018), the trend seems to persist. The Indonesian government has identified tourism as a key driver of economic growth and tourism policy and investment plans have reflected this. Indonesian tourism development has been characterized by rapid growth, with the government making significant investments in infrastructure, destination development, and expansion of the hospitality industry. The tourism sector is increasingly projected to replace palm oil and oil and gas as the main source of foreign exchange revenue (Tempo, 2016).

In 2016, the current president Joko Widodo initiated the development of ten new priority tourism destinations, dubbed as the “10 New Bali” (Salna, 2017) as an attempt to replicate Bali’s tourism success in ten other Indonesian destinations. These

destinations were Lake Toba, Tanjung Kelayang, Tanjung Lesung, Seribu Islands, Borobudur, Bromo, Wakatobi, Mandalika, Labuan Bajo, and Morotai. Through this program, the president, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MoTCE), aimed to increase international tourist visits to Indonesia to 20 million by 2019, almost double the 11.25 million arrivals in 2016 (Kemenparekraf, 2018). However, in 2019, to accelerate the development and subsequently the desired impacts, the president refocused the development plans of 10 New Bali, officially known as '10 Priority Destinations', to only five, which then rebranded as '5 Super Priority Destinations'. Of these five destinations, four were part of the list of ten: Lake Toba, Borobudur, Mandalika and Labuan Bajo, while the fifth is the newly developed destination of Likupang (Kemenparekraf, n.d.).

In 2019 Indonesia managed to attract 16.1 million international tourists (Julita, 2020). Initially, this growth continued in 2020 with a strong 5.85% increase in January 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 (Kemenparekraf, 2020a). However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted Indonesian tourism, even more than some other countries (Djalante et al., 2020). Obviously, the Indonesian tourism industry is not a stranger to crisis. The country has faced several man made and natural disasters, including, terrorism, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis, which have greatly impacted tourism (Rindrasih et al., 2019), but also revealed the resilience of Indonesian tourism (Gurtner, 2016; Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005; Rindrasih & Witte, 2020). However, the advent of COVID-19 pandemic has had impacts on tourism never seen before, with an almost 80% drop in international tourist arrivals resulting in more than 400,000 people losing their jobs in tourism in 2020 (Kemenparekraf, 2021c). The international tourist's arrival was further plummeted to only 1.65 million visitors, which means 61.59% drop in 2021. However, as the pandemic begun to be under control and restrictions are gradually lifted the figure bounce back in 2022 with 5.88 million visitors, a 278.10% increase compared to 2021 (Kemenparekraf, 2023).

In this thesis, I will critically investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced tourism development discourses and policy in Indonesia and explore to what degree dominant discourses were reflected in host-guest relationships in one of the original priority destinations, Belitung. What motivated this focus was an interest in seeing how the circumstances of the pandemic influenced the development trajectory of Indonesian tourism in the short-term, in the form of mitigation initiatives, but also and long-term, in adaptations to the 10 New Bali project. The research results will contribute to debates about sustainable tourism development in Indonesia, but also resonate with broader international literatures on sustainable futures for the tourism industry.

## I.2. RELEVANT LITERATURE AND CORE CONCEPTS

This research project is informed by and will contribute to discussion about three prominent themes in tourism studies: sustainable tourism development; tourism development policies in times of the COVID-19 pandemic; and (experience value) co-creation in tourism.

### I.2.I. Sustainability in Tourism

For decades, ‘Sustainable Tourism’ has been debated the global tourism field and scholarship. We can trace the inclusion of the sustainability paradigm in tourism back in the discussion about sustainable development, which has its origins the introduction of the Brundtland Commission report, *Our Common Future* (Ruhanen et al., 2015). Sustainable development itself has been defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” WCED, 1987:43 in (Keeble, 1988). Sustainable development has since been manifested into strategies and monitoring of indicators to ensure the long-term balance of ecological, economic, and social development goals across vast sectors, including tourism. The World Tourism Organisation (UWTO, 2005) defines sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities”.

Despite being largely agreed as the ‘appropriate way of doing and developing tourism’, the complexity of its concept, including how to define it properly (Ruhanen et al., 2015), and its relatively slow progress in practice (Bramwell & Lane, 2005), has stalled the adoption of sustainable principals and subsequently has limited its impact on the tourism industry in general (Ruhanen, 2013). This situation is further exacerbated by the constant pleading from certain sectors of society for tourism industry to continuously ‘grow’ (and being more profitable) despite the finite supporting ecological resources, which are unceasingly degrading in a faster pace than its recovery.

At the onset of the pandemic many tourism scholars have argued that only a major disruption of the tourism industry could push tourism away from its current unsustainable path and could halt the current capitalistic tourism machinery and the COVID-19 pandemic just might be that major disruption. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic was also considered as an event that presented the industry with an opportunity for re-thinking future tourism development (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020; Hall, Scott, Gössling, et al., 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). The unprecedented circumstances caused by the pandemic has indeed sparked a debate on how to capitalize on the pandemic to direct tourism development towards a more sustainable



path. This also in line with the more general concern of the vulnerability of tourism industry in relation to ongoing climate change (Scott, 2014). Both inside and outside the academic sphere, there have been dynamic discussions concerning the likelihood of a return to 'business-as-usual' or 'business-as-unusual' in the post-COVID-19 era. The latter scenario shifts the focus towards a more profound reconsideration of the organization of tourism and the way we travel.

Many tourism scholars have been urging for a shift to more sustainable tourism policies (Brouder, 2020; Cheer, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). Although some have expressed doubts about the likelihood of this change, considering the pervasiveness of the growth paradigm on which tourism is built, and the need to immediately recuperate the loss of economic accumulation opportunities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hall, Scott, Gössling, et al., 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). This research will contribute to the debate on sustainable tourism development, especially in times of COVID-19, by showing and discussing the evolving discourses on sustainable tourism in Indonesia in the period 2020-2022 and how this was translated in tourism policies.

### **1.2.2. Tourism development policies and COVID-19 pandemic**

The study of tourism policy and policy making have become an important part of tourism studies (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Michael Hall, 2011). Tourism policies itself is often referred as a mode of public policy, manifested in government decisions which are taken at various levels including international, national and local levels (Joppe, 2018)..

The pandemic has not been the first disturbing event that has impacted tourism and initiated tourism policy changes and interventions. Tourism is a vulnerable industry; it is prone to uncertainty (Cavagnaro et al., 2021) triggered by numerous natural and man-made crises and disasters throughout its history. While contemporary disasters such as Ebola (2013), SARS (2003), or tsunami (2004) brought about temporary disruptions to international tourism, the wake of 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001 in New York was arguably the most globally 'transformative' event that has continued to shape today's tourism (Liu & Pratt, 2017). This event and the subsequent 'war on terror' has managed to establish a set of stringent security checks in airports and other vital public areas, and increased 'surveillances' (Hollinshead, 1999) on tourism mobilities, which were previously unthinkable, but now are accepted as part of the norm (Cheer et al., 2021).

However, the rapid onset of the COVID-19 and its devastating impacts, has caught most of governments around the world, including the Indonesian one, unprepared.

The novel nature of the virus initially prevented governments to come up with any appropriate medical solution to contain the pandemic. Hence, Non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) were the main tools used by the governments in their efforts to control the spread of the pandemic (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Among them mobility and travel restrictions, including ‘stay at home orders’, were put in place, which denied people from leaving their homes, let alone allowed them to travel for tourism purposes. Some government responses to the pandemic were even more severe, as for example the draconian style lockdowns in Italy, once they realized that their health facilities would be overrun and overwhelmed if no drastic measures were taken (Pellizzoni & Sena, 2021). Other governments, such as Taiwan, closed their borders swiftly and conducted rigorous tracking, testing and quarantine for the infected (Aspinwall, 2020), while other governments were more cautious and incremental in implementing measures to curb the spread of this pandemic fearing the economic consequences that may come with it. COVID related policies thus varied.

Some countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam and New Zealand for example took adequate early measures of ‘stopping the virus at the door’ which have provided these countries tourism industry with opportunities to still benefit from relatively undisturbed domestic tourism flows, despite sacrificing their international tourism. On the other hand, tourism sectors in some other countries like some European countries and Indonesia as the focus of this thesis, which suffered massive level of COVID-19 infections nationally were deprived from both international and domestic tourism activities due to their inability to keep the pandemic under control.

However, as more became known about the virus, even if the vaccines or cures were yet to be found, governments across the globe started to cautiously open their tourism businesses and activities with capacity limits and strict health and sanitation protocols meant to give the tourism industry a breathing space while keep minimizing a further uncontrolled outbreak of infections. As the pandemic progressed and vaccines were introduced in early 2021, more and more tourism destinations were re-opened, and travel restrictions were lessened or even lifted, especially for vaccinated travellers. By the late 2021 almost all tourism destinations re-opened their doors for international tourists, despite although the COVID-19 negative test result, vaccinations and mandatory quarantines were still required to enter the borders.

In Indonesia, in the early stages of the global COVID-19 pandemic the government responded by dubious policy making. Notably, the February 2020’s intention to spend some 72 billion rupiah (USD 5.2 million) to pay influencer to promote Indonesia as a tourism destination, was proposed as a way to ‘protect’ the tourism industry from the imminent threat of upcoming turbulence triggered by the looming global COVID-19

pandemic (Gorbiano, 2020). This then continued with seemingly sluggish government efforts to close the borders and impose strict mobility restrictions, even after the official announcement of the first COVID-19 case by the Indonesian president on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2020 (Djalante et al., 2020). As will be explained in Chapter 2 and 3, the Indonesia's government has since then enforced various kind of mobility restrictions which aimed at curbing the increasing number of infections across the country, which also impacting the tourism industry in Indonesia. It also introduced a hygiene and sanitation standardization and certification label for the tourism industry (also known as CHSE). By carefully examining these policy interventions, as well as underlying discourses, this thesis will contribute to the literature of tourism policy making in the time of the pandemic.

### **1.2.3. Experience Co-Creation in time of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

This research will consider that all efforts to mitigate and recover from the COVID-19 impact to tourism industry, regardless of its directions and its forms, are fundamentally a concerted one, a collaborative effort of multiple actors working together, with various interests and resources. Hence this research is drawing from the co-creation theory which, although not originating from tourism studies, has received growing attention and importance among in the tourism literature (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009) (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). However, it is essential to also acknowledge that these collaborative efforts are often beset by by power imbalances, lack of transparency and opportunistic behaviour of its actors (Edvardsson et al., 2011).

Co-creation has become a widely used term to describe a shift in thinking from the organization as a definer of value, to a more participative process where organizations, consumers, and other relevant stakeholders, including governments, work together to generate and develop meaning and value (Ind & Coates, 2013). Using value creation as the fundamental and common element of the concept across all its theoretical and empirical manifestations (Campos et al., 2018; Leclercq et al., 2016; Phi & Dredge, 2019; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) this research will define and subsequently utilize co-creation in tourism in its broader sense and context, not only creating values in tourist experiences, but also in knowledge production, policymaking, and governance (Phi & Dredge, 2019).

The advent of COVID-19 pandemic and its catastrophic impact on tourism has sparked an urge to revisit the concept of co-creation in the tourism realm, especially on how this concept can facilitate the tourism actors to navigate their way in this difficult time and beyond (Cavagnaro et al., 2021). This research therefore will critically examine the knowledge and value co-creation in policy making processes and tourism experience production, in relation to the changing dynamics of the COVID-19

pandemic and its impact towards tourism. The concept of co-creation itself advocates equality of the involved stakeholders to achieve the shared goals and benefits (Esther Binkhorst, 2006; Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Ind & Coates, 2013). However, despite the potential advantages of co-creating in tourism, co-creation is also susceptible to unbalanced power relations among actors and information or resources asymmetries, and opportunistic behaviour which can even lead to co-destruction (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Edvardsson et al., 2011). In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, this research will shed a light on how discourses and policies emerged and formulated during the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the experience co-creation process on the ground, as evidenced by host-guest relations in Belitung.

### I.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis first aims to investigate how various Indonesian tourism stakeholders responded to this COVID-19 pandemic discursively, how impacts of this pandemic and the subsequent mitigation and recovery ideas were discussed and debated which gave rise to certain dominant narratives overlooking others. Second, this thesis will examine to what extent these discourses were translated and manifested in actual tourism related mitigation and recovery policies at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Third, this thesis will also look at how these policies influenced how tourism was practiced on the ground during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the form of experience value co-creation process between hosts and tourists in Belitung.

The main research question of this research is:

*“How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced tourism policies and development in Indonesia?”*

To answer the main research question above, three sub questions are formulated:

RQ1: What tourism discourses emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia?

RQ2: How and to what extent did these discourses influence tourism policymaking in Indonesia?

RQ3: To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic influenced host-guest relationships in Belitung?

### I.4. METHODOLOGY

#### I.4.I. Overview of Methods used in this Thesis

This thesis employed a qualitative approach combining discursive analysis techniques and a case study. The discursive analysis involved examination of tourism webinars, newspaper articles and Indonesian tourism development and mitigation policy documents which were used in the first and second empirical chapters of this thesis. In the third empirical chapter, I employed a case study which is deemed as useful to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Beeton, 2005; Kumar, 2014). This case study involved in-depth interviews with both tourists and host of and participant observations of a small group of tourists visiting a community-based tourism village on the island of Belitung. The Belitung case study is used to enrich the data and strengthen the findings on the national level discourse analysis.

Undeniably, the COVID-19 pandemic and its related mobility restrictions has had a profound impact on my research. Initially, in early 2020, the growing uncertainty of the pandemic situation has made it impossible to carry out the originally planned case studies in some of the 10 new Bali's. Hence this condition forced me to completely revise my original research plan and focus, to still be able to produce scientific data within the available timeframe of my PhD. Considering the increasingly uncertain situation of the pandemic, I decided together with my supervisory team to take the COVID-19 pandemic and its mitigation process at the national level as central focus of this thesis. However, that was not the end of the challenges. The increasing COVID-19 cases globally, including Indonesia where this research is focused on, followed by frequent fluctuations of pandemic related mobility restrictions, has further added complexities in carrying out this research. This challenge not only came in the form of high infection risk of conducting fieldwork, but also the fact that access to the tourism destinations and tourism businesses was denied for prolonged periods and tourism activities were halted because of that. This and the slow vaccination rate in Indonesia, especially in the first semester of 2021, forced me to limit the number of planned case studies and to resort to other sources of data and techniques that were not impacted by the threats and restrictions of the pandemic, namely documents and other information sources which were available online to complement the lack of data that was not possible to be collected through fieldwork.

In the end I first employed a discursive analysis. Apart from the viability of access to the secondary data for this analysis without being compelled to risk fieldwork, a discursive analysis is also a useful tool to understand how this pandemic is perceived by tourism stakeholders and how and to what extent the tourism industry mitigation

policies are influenced by these discourses. Discursive analysis also provided me with a fertile avenue to investigate how a certain narrative is becoming dominant and subsequently manifested (or not) into policies and practices on the ground. However, to complement the findings on the discursive levels I managed to execute one case study. Taking into consideration personal safety and accessibility of the locus, fortunately in mid-2021, just before the outbreak of deadly Delta-variant in Indonesia, it became possible to visit Belitung to collect primary data collected from participant observation and in-depth interviews with local tourism stakeholders, including one of the first group of tourists who visited Belitung's community-based village again after the pandemic started.

The overarching theoretical framework employed in this thesis is a critical lens that focuses on power relations to understand and analyze the phenomenon under study. By adopting this critical perspective, the research aims to explore the dynamics of power within the context of the research topic, seeking to uncover hidden power structures, inequalities, and their implications. Power-relations are underlying elements of human interactions including in tourism, it is not only oppressive but also productive by creating new knowledge (Cheong & Miller, 2000). Therefore, this research will investigate how power operates through and around the COVID-19 mitigation and recovery efforts of tourism sector in Indonesia. By incorporating a critical power analysis, I anticipate unravelling how COVID-19 mitigation strategies and the responses from stakeholders are influenced and determined by the existing structure of power, and the competing interests of the involved stakeholders, where dominance and resistance are evident in the discursive and practice realms as each stakeholder is attempting to secure their interests alongside the shared goals. In doing so I will be drawing from the Foucauldian concept of discourse analysis where this research is interested in not only the content of the discourse (as we will see: The New Normal) itself but also its 'condition of existence'; a set of rules that allowed a certain discursive formation to flourish while preventing others the same opportunities (Foucault, 1972). Subsequently this research will examine how these discourses are translated into mitigation and recovery policies, to what extent disruption brought about by the pandemic discursively enunciated and formulated affected the tourism policy making related to Indonesia's short- and long-term development program. Another manifestation of power is also being studied in this research, namely power dynamics in host-guest relationship. In critically examining the power dynamics manifestation in host – tourist relations on the ground, this research will also be drawing from another Foucauldian inspired concept of 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1992) as the way of seeing (and doing) tourism. In doing so this research is critically investigating how both the tourist and host gazes are constructed, and then negotiated and re-constructed continuously during the host-tourist interactions to maintain the possibility of 'shared

values' co-creation in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, this research is also drawing from the Foucauldian notion of 'governmentality' which insinuates various kinds of control techniques and mechanisms which are used to maintain the subject, including biopolitics (biopower). In this pandemic context this research critically examines how a neoliberal capitalist paradigm may affect the underlying reasoning of policymaking and its policy products created during the pandemic as a part of mitigation and recovery strategies.

### I.4.2. Researcher Positionality

In this research project I had to balance between my position as an 'insider' and at the same time being an outsider (as PhD researcher). As native Indonesian and an officer of The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of Republic of Indonesia I relatively had better access to information valuable for this research that otherwise would not have been easily available. But at the same time, I also felt responsible to treat the information with more care and to be more rigorous in the analysis and the presentation of the findings. As an insider, I was and am also not in the position to cast the Indonesian government unnecessarily and unfairly in a bad light. At the same time, as an 'outsider' (PhD researcher), it was my job to make a critical analysis of the discourses and the subsequent policies pursued.

My choice of Belitung as a case study was taken not only because at that time it was 'safer' to conduct fieldwork there, due to it being a small island with limited connectivity and smaller population, subsequently lower infection rate. It was also informed by my previous working experience as The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy destination facilitator for Belitung in 2016-2017, which has left me with great admiration for its hospitality and spirit to develop Belitung as a prominent tourism destination in Indonesia, despite being relatively new to tourism compared to other more established tourism destinations in Indonesia. Thanks to that previous work I did in Belitung, I also had the advantage of knowing relevant 'key' tourism stakeholders in Belitung, which helped me a lot during my fieldwork there.

Finally, despite the 'complexity' brought by my status as an 'insider' and challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe that the result of this thesis reflects my integrity as a researcher and a well-intentioned academic curiosity and contribution as Indonesian and as a government officer.

## I.5. THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis is structured in themes according to the sequence of the research questions, where this introduction chapter is followed by three (3) empirical chapters that address the research questions and a fifth chapter with discussion and conclusion. The empirical chapters are structured as follows:

### 1. *Re-negotiating the Future for Indonesian Tourism After COVID-19: Sustainability as the New Normal?*

This chapter investigates the situation of Indonesian tourism in the early stage of the pandemic, particularly by examining the emergence of various competing and complementing narratives concerning how to deal with the pandemic and how the recovery process should be formulated and executed, in relation with short- and long-term tourism development plan of Indonesian tourism.

### 2. *COVID-19 Pandemic and Tourism Development in Indonesia: A Key Government Mitigation and Intervention analysis*

This chapter is a continuation of the first empirical chapter, by examining the COVID-19 tourism mitigation efforts by the Indonesian government in the form of recovery policies, and their short-term and long-term impact on the agenda and trajectory of Indonesian tourism development, specifically the plans focusing on the 10 New Bali and subsequently the five super priority destinations.

### 3. *The Co-Creation of a Pandemic Tourist Experience: The Case of Belitung, Indonesia*

This Chapter examines the influence of the previously identified dominant discourses and narratives surrounding Indonesian Tourism in the time of COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent manifestation in the form of tourism mitigation and development policies on the host-guest relationships on the ground, especially in the context of tourism experience co-creation. This Chapter delves into understanding how the dominant narratives and the subsequent related policies are internalized, but then ‘negotiated’ by both hosts and tourists in their quest for a safe and memorable tourism experiences.



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The image features a large, white, serif-style number '2' centered on a dark blue, textured background. The background has a mottled, painterly appearance with various shades of blue and some white speckles, suggesting a watercolor or ink wash effect. The number '2' is clean and stands out prominently against the darker, more complex background.

2

# Chapter 2

## <sup>1</sup>Re-negotiating the future for Indonesian tourism after COVID-19: Sustainability as the New Normal?

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## 2.I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only had a devastating impact on the tourism industry as it looks today, but is also predicted to substantially change the course of its future development (Gössling, Scott, Hall, et al., 2020). The suspension of tourism activities caused by the crisis has not only forced tourism stakeholders to think of ways to cope with and survive this crisis, but also presents an opportunity for a range of stakeholders to re-negotiate the future of tourism (Brouder, 2020; Nepal, 2020). Within and outside academia we have seen lively debates about the probabilities of a return to 'business-as-usual' or to 'business-as-unusual', the latter scenario directing the discussion to a more fundamental reorientation of the way we have been travelling and have organized tourism. Although a general belief – or perhaps hope – of many is that tourism will rebound as it has from previous crises, there is also much evidence that COVID-19 will be different and transformative for the tourism sector (Gössling, Scott, Hall, et al., 2020).

These debates have also been prominent in Indonesia, where a range of stakeholders have engaged in lively discussions about the prospects for Indonesia's tourism industry. Tourism in Indonesia was a growing sector before the pandemic, due to government policies placing tourism as one of the country's priority economic sectors. Tourism arrivals have increased over the last 5 years; in 2019 Indonesia attracted 16.1 million International tourists (Julita, 2020). Initially, this growth continued in 2020 with a strong 5.85% increase in January 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 (Kemenparekraf, 2020a) However, with the rapid onset of the global COVID-19 outbreak, the number of international tourists dropped drastically after January, as shown in figure 1 below:

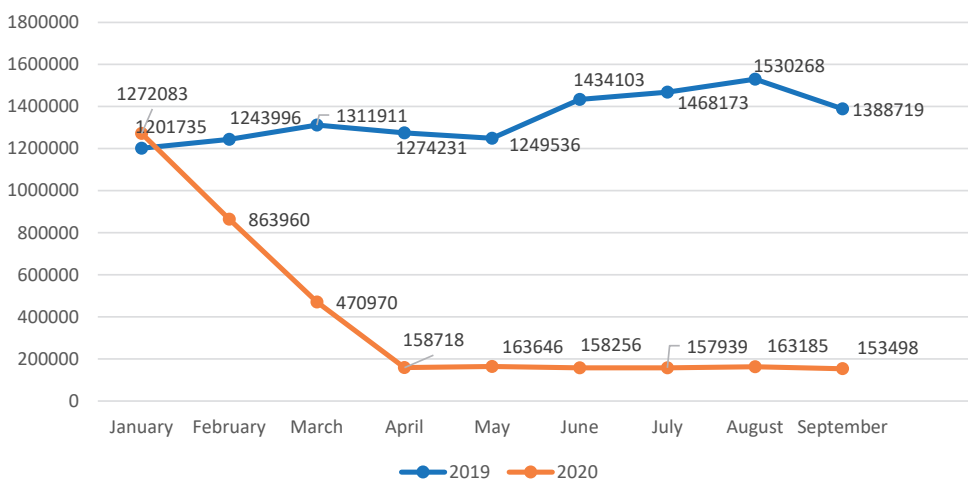


Figure I. January - September 2019-2020 International Tourist Arrivals Comparison.  
source: Kemenparekraf, 2020a



Figure 1. above clearly shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on Indonesian tourism, with a more than 80% drop in international visitors since April 2020 compared to 2019.

Since March, Indonesia, like many other countries, gradually saw the emergence of several competing discourses and narratives around the short-term recovery of tourism, as well as the potential long-term future development of the Indonesian tourism sector post COVID-19. Often these discourses included and reframed notions of sustainability. In this chapter we analyse the key discourses that emerged between March and September 2020, voiced by Indonesian tourism stakeholders, including the Indonesian central government and academics, to identify the dominant discursive themes and what they reveal about the impact of the current crisis on the evolving sustainability debate in Indonesia.

Our analysis of the construction of a post-pandemic New Normal in Indonesia contributes to broader examinations of how the global tourism sector is mobilizing ideas of ‘responsible recovery’ as an effort to move the industry in a more sustainable direction post COVID-19 (UNWTO, 2020c) by analysing how this plays out in the Indonesian context.

In the following section we briefly outline the pre-existing paradigm of sustainable tourism to contextualise the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on this evolving debate. The chapter then progresses with a methodological account followed by an in-depth discussion of the three key themes upon which the Indonesian New Normal discourse rests; a) social distancing; b) health and hygiene protocols, and c) a shift from quantity to quality tourism. We argue that in Indonesia the New Normal discourse, which essentially pivots around the question of how-to re-start tourism and only occasionally embraces sustainability language, so far has done little to re-imagine the future of tourism sustainability in the national context.

## 2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Worldwide, the notion of ‘sustainable tourism’ has become one of the most salient topics of debate within the field of tourism studies and scholarship since it was popularized following the 1987 publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development’s (WCED) report, the so-called ‘Brundtland report’ (Ruhanen et al. 2015). In Indonesia, as around the world, the concept of sustainability has emerged as a prominent paradigm in tourism development, and has become part of the vernacular of governments, tourism-related industries, and tourism researchers.

Indonesia's commitment to, and adoption of, this paradigm is recently exemplified by the 2016 issuing of a Ministerial Regulation on *Sustainable Destination Guidelines*, and the joining of the UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) in the same year. However, despite the wide acceptance of this new paradigm of sustainable tourism – which developed alongside, but separate to, sustainable development projects, such as the Bali Sustainable Development Project (1989) – debates have continued over its conceptualization, and how to best interpret and implement its call for 'a more balanced approach to redressing the cumulative negative impacts of tourism activity' (Ruhanen et al., 2015, p. 517).

The considerable literature on sustainable tourism globally can be characterized by its ongoing and circular definitional debates (Gössling et al., 2008), its lack of progress (Bramwell & Lane, 2005), and the fact that the concept has still, to a large extent, not been adopted in practice (Ruhanen, 2013)

The global paradigm of sustainable tourism, which is dominated by the global North and often constructed in reaction to excess development and environmental degradation in the Western context, tends to prioritize environmental conservation over dealing with the sociocultural issues that local communities in the global South find more pressing (S. Cole, 2006; Wieckardt et al., 2020). In the global South, the emphasis may be on maintaining the balances of existing (but threatened) ways of life and resisting neoliberal policies that commoditize local natural (and cultural) resources with devastating consequences for both social equity and the environment. In the Indonesian context, sustainable tourism - despite being advocated as a means to boost local communities' benefits from tourism, especially in the form of Community Based Tourism and Ecotourism - has not been a central focus of tourism development in practice. Many tourism development projects are still focusing on building "mega projects" which favor large investors, despite their claims of sustainability, exemplified by the *Tirta Wabana Bali International* (TWBI) resort development project in Benoa, Bali (Warren & Wardana, 2018), and more recently the new development in Komodo National Park, dubbed as 'Jurassic Park' (Souisa, 2020b). These developments draw concerns and fierce opposition from local communities, which often find themselves sidelined in processes of intense commodification (Warren & Wardana, 2018). On the part of the Indonesian government, the substantial contribution of tourism to the national economy seems to eclipse any concerns about the social sustainability of local communities, and their equitable participation in tourism destination development.

In relation to sustainable tourism development, crises in tourism can serve as opportunities for reassessment of the status quo, and the COVID-19 crisis is not an exception. The unprecedented impact of this crisis is touted as a chance to shift tourism devel-

opment in a more sustainable direction (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020; Romagosa, 2020), this sentiment is evident also in the Indonesian tourism debate. However, in the analysis that follows in this chapter, we examine to what extent the first six months the pandemic can truly be understood as ‘transformative’ for Indonesia’s future tourism development, including its sustainability agenda.

### 2.3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter is based on a discourse analysis of the public debate in Indonesia concerning the impact of COVID-19 on its tourism sector. Discourse refers to a set of concepts that structure the contributions of participants in, for example, a public debate. It can be understood as an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations which are co-created, and through which meaning is allocated to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced in an identifiable set of practices (Hajer, 2006)

The text-based data comprised of newspaper articles, webinars (online seminars), and press releases and articles published on the official webpages of the Ministry of Tourism, with a date-range of the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2020 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2020. The newspaper articles were collected from the online editions of two of the most prominent news media outlets in Indonesia, targeting national and international audiences respectively; Kompas, published in Indonesian, and the English language newspaper, The Jakarta Post. Google search tool was used for keyword searches in the content of the websites to identify relevant articles published during the specified timeframe. The keywords used were “Pariwisata Indonesia” for Kompas, and “Indonesian Tourism” for The Jakarta Post. The searches resulted in 326 articles in Kompas, and 294 in The Jakarta Post. After a content-check, 81 articles (61 from Kompas and 20 from The Jakarta Post) were selected as relevant for further analysis.

The webinars selected for analysis were organized by a range of Indonesian tourism stakeholders, including tourism business associations, central government, academics/universities, and tourism consultants. Nine webinars were selected based on the relevance of their contents, and the accessibility of the recordings, which had been made publicly available on YouTube.

Five articles and 23 press releases from The Ministry of Tourism official webpages were also included in the analysis. For a breakdown of data sources, see Table 1 below;

Data type	Number
Newspaper articles Jakarta Post	20
Newspaper articles Kompas	61
Webinar transcripts	9
Ministry of Tourism press releases	23
Ministry of Tourism articles	5
<b>Total number of texts analysed</b>	<b>108</b>

Table I. Data Sources

### 2.3.I. Data analysis

The analysis focused on the Indonesian tourism discourse as it was manifested in news media, governmental texts and verbal debates during webinars, in the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic (March-September 2020). The analysis drew inspiration from Foucauldian discourse analysis, which places power-relations at the centre of its analysis (Sharp & Richardson, 2001). The 108 texts that comprised the final data sample (see table 1) were manually coded to identify regularly occurring themes within the larger debate, with attention to how these key themes were constructed, what the mechanisms of dispersion were, and which voices were heard above others.

Through the analysis, it became clear that the dominant function of the debate was to discursively construct what can be termed ‘the New Normal’ for the tourism sector, and within this broader discourse a number of sub-themes could be identified. Given the focus on sustainability in this volume, we chose to include only the three most prominent sub-themes that most directly related to sustainability, but it should be noted that further themes were identified in the data, including digitalization and human resources.

## 2.4. THE NEW NORMAL, SUSTAINABILITY AND POST COVID-19 TOURISM

Our analysis of newspaper articles, webinars and government websites shows that the discussions on sustainable tourism in the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia were essentially part of a broader and more prominent discourse around the notion of the ‘New Normal’. The New Normal and its subsequent impacts (including the opportunity of developing sustainable tourism) was by far the most salient and reoccurring narrative in the post COVID-19 pandemic discourse. It gradually became a central theme in the Indonesian tourism and COVID-19 discourse, especially after governments and some tourism destinations were planning to re-open their destina-

tions and businesses from July 2020, despite the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia.

This discourse on the New Normal fundamentally triggered almost every other discourse. Although increasingly articulated in the literature on post COVID-19 tourism, the New Normal as a term is not yet clearly defined, but it reflects a wish for society to regain a sense of ‘normalcy’ and to continue with their lives while also adapting to the restrictions and constraints dictated by COVID-19. This discourse is mostly proliferated by government officials and academics but to some extent it is also adopted and (re)produced by tourism business representatives. Below, we discuss the three key sub-themes of social distancing, health and safety protocols and quality tourism, and how these three themes reflect and reframe pre-existing paradigm of sustainable tourism.

2.4.I. Social Distancing

Social or physical distancing forms part of health protocols implemented to limit the transmission of COVID-19 and involves always keeping a distance of minimum 1-2 meters from other people. This topic is discussed in 18 newspaper articles and frequently discussed in the webinars as part of the New Normal “constraint” that limits the ability of the tourism industry to quickly recover, but at the same time it is also perceived as one of the underlying conditions of the ‘New Normal’ that will “force” the industry to shift in the direction of sustainability.

The practice of social distancing as a new and persisting international norm of social interaction has clear impacts on all aspects of daily life, including tourism. Based on our analysis, we found that stakeholders discussed several potential consequences of the new social distancing norm which were predicted to impact on tourist travel and holidaymaking. These consequences are described in Table 2 below.

New Normal	Consequences	Relation to Sustainability
Social Distancing	Tourists will prefer places that are natural, remote, and less crowded.	- Reduce overcrowding in destinations and subsequently “slowing down” environmental degradation due to overtourism.
	- Tourists will be vacationing closer to home and increasingly in small groups and using private cars (proximity tourism)	- Boosting local and domestic tourism

Table 2. Social Distancing “Sustainable Consequences”. Source: Author’s elaboration

Indonesian tourism stakeholders believed that this social distancing norm will have serious consequences for the way tourists travel and their choice of destination. Tour-

ists were predicted to seek out more secluded, nature-based destinations which offer isolation away from the 'danger' of overcrowding:

*As people get used to the "new normal", tourists might also prefer to go to quieter places and opt for nature-based tourism and outdoor activities* (tourism practitioner cited in The Jakarta Post, (Rahman et al., 2020)

*"If they [the tourists] were okay with going to packed and crowded places, they are not anymore. They will be more aware to the social and physical distancing concept"* (government official cited in The Jakarta Post, (Rahman et al., 2020)

The above shift in preference to more nature-based and remote destinations resonates with (Carr, 2020b) forecast from New Zealand, which predicted the increasing needs of tourists to re-connect with nature in the post-lockdown time. This new tendency itself may be associated with sustainability through its potential role in re-distributing the tourists from regularly overcrowded tourism hot-spots to the periphery, as tourists adhering to social distancing protocols look to avoid overcrowding, and subsequently seek lesser-known alternative destinations.

Stakeholders also argued that tourists are more likely to choose destinations that are closer to home in favour of long-haul international trips. They will opt for short and 'safe' getaways, or visiting friends and relatives (VFR), boosting interest in domestic and regional tourism, as exemplified by these quotes below.

*"Tourism villages will be an option because our (domestic) guests won't risk going far, so the first thing to be tested is a (nearby) tourism village."* (Academic in Webinar, 30 April 2020 (Institute, 2020)

*"So, people will do this when they are about to go out on a trip, visit their closest friends and relatives, or we Indonesians say "silaturahmi", this is what we will do first, then we will visit destinations that are close to home or domestic or one that is not too far."* (tourism practitioner in Webinar, 1 May 2020 (Sarungu, 2020)

This potential trend of vacationing near home in smaller groups also resonates with Huijbens' (2020) prediction that tourists see this as an opportunity to 'rediscover adventure opportunities' near home without having to 'jet off' to distant places halfway around the world, which - although not mentioned in the analysed transcripts - may ultimately reduce the tourism carbon foot print, especially if this trend persists beyond

the COVID-19 crisis. This trend may also benefit local SME's and community-based destinations such as tourism villages, and galvanize domestic tourism, which is indeed considered as the potential main target market for Indonesian tourism in this recovery phase.

*“There will be a surge of emerging small-scale, community-based destinations in the future, as people would cease to go to popular destinations like Bali, the country's main tourism hub [...] There will be more destination diversification,”* (academic, cited in The Jakarta Post (Mufti, 2020)

*“It is true that the recovery of domestic tourism is something that is most instant and fast after this pandemic”* (minister of tourism in Webinar, on 2 May 2020 (Ramidjal, 2020)

With the Indonesian central government's plan to still largely shut off access for international tourists until at least the end of 2020, regaining domestic tourism is seen as an essential first part of the recovery process of the Indonesian Tourism sector.

### 2.4.2. Health and Hygiene protocols

The second prominent theme, constantly (re)produced by various tourism stakeholders, focused on health and hygiene protocols. 46 newspaper articles mentioned and discussed this health and hygiene protocols, and it was also discussed in the webinars and the ministry press release. Many of the discussions on these protocols are related to the Tourism Ministry program of launching a 'New normal' and guidelines, which will be further discussed on the following page. Although this sub-theme clearly relates to the practical issue of re-starting tourism post (or in the midst of) a global health crisis, the link of these protocols with sustainability more likely emerged from the central government's effort to capitalize on the pandemic to simultaneously combining within one integrated program, the need of new rigorous health and hygiene protocols in the current COVID-19 pandemic with addressing Indonesia's poor performance on hygiene and environmental sustainability in The 2019 *Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI)*. Our analysis identified a uniform narrative, with repetitive messages in line with the central government narrative on the importance of implementing health and hygiene protocols in the New Normal era:

*“One of the important things in this new normal period, and this one can also be sustainable later in the post-vaccine period, namely the issues of health, hygiene, safety and security.”* (minister of tourism in Webinar on 11 June 2020 (Dynamics, 2020)

Another prediction came from a tourism practitioner:

*“If in the past we chose a 5-star hotel that offered extraordinary facilities with comfort, maybe in the future we will choose accommodation or a destination that says first they will provide health or safety procedures and maybe more importantly hygiene”* (tourism practitioner in Webinar on 1 May 2020 (Sarungu, 2020))

This pattern also mirrors an international discourse on COVID-19 mitigation and recovery initiatives by UNWTO (UNWTO, 2020b, 2020c) which encourages governments and other tourism stakeholders to link the growing needs of hygiene and safety protocols with sustainability (UNWTO, 2020c), which later was adopted and (re)produced by the Indonesian central government and other Indonesian tourism stakeholders respectively

The (re)production of the discourse around these health and hygiene protocols into more concrete practices was beginning to take shape on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, when the central government through the Ministry of Tourism launched the *Indonesia Care (I do Care)* campaign to communicate the importance of health and hygiene protocols in tourism destinations (Prabawanti, 2020). This campaign also marked the official introduction of protocol guidelines labelled *Cleanliness, Health, Safety, Environmental sustainability* (CHSE), for a range of tourism and hospitality businesses and activities such as attractions, accommodation, transportation, restaurants (Kemenparekraf, 2020c).

#### 2.4.3. Shifting from Quantity to Quality

The other prominent sub-theme related to sustainability is on Quality tourism, despite only discussed explicitly in 10 news articles, Quality tourism was extensively discussed in the webinars, where this form of tourism was discussed as an ideal and ‘sustainable’ way forward for post COVID-19 tourism. This discourse on shifting from quantity to quality is not new, nor it is a direct consequence of the New Normal, but it has resurfaced as part of the dominant discourse in the current pandemic era. This shift was also discussed in 2019 when Indonesia once again failed to meet its international tourist target of 20 million. This failure has provoked debates ever since, particularly on the pertinence of using tourist numbers (quantity) as a main indication of success in the first place.

Following the inability of his predecessor to achieve the 20 million international tourist targets, in 2019 the newly appointed Minister of Tourism has opted for a dif-



ferent approach by focusing on ‘quality’ instead of ‘quantity’ in measuring Indonesian tourism progress and success:

*“Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, we are somehow have been preparing to shift Indonesia’s tourism strategy from quantity to quality”* (minister of tourism in Webinar on 11 June 2020 (Dynamics, 2020))

In the tourism recovery discourse, this shift from quantity to quality was also embraced and (re)produced by other tourism stakeholders:

*“The indicator of success in developing a tourism village is not only based on the number of tourists but should be based on quality tourism”* (academic in webinar on 30 April 2020, (Institute, 2020))

*“We all know that something which is zero waste or eco-friendly is not cheap, but Indonesia should have go to that direction in order to attract quality tourism and not only mass tourism”* (tourism practitioner in webinar on 1 May 2020, (Sarungu, 2020))

In relation with the above, our analysis also showed that the term ‘quality tourism’ in the Indonesian discourse was largely linked with sustainability and other terms such as *local wisdom*, *authenticity*, *uniqueness*, *participation*, on the one hand and *high-spending*, *premium*, *revenue* on the other hand. Hence, based on the findings, the way that Quality tourism is constructed has a lot to do with improving the quality of experiences to attract high-spending tourists who appreciate local culture and nature, and are ‘less destructive’ to the Indonesian cultural and natural resources, and at the same time bring more revenue to the economy. This narrative can be exemplified by the central government’s proposition to develop ‘super-priority’ destinations, including ‘premium’ Labuan Bajo, which are also claimed to be more sustainable. A Ministry of Tourism representative in Labuan Bajo (Komodo National Park) makes this link between ‘super-premium’ developments and sustainability goals explicit:

*“We want to change the new governance (of destination), not make it mass tourism but exclusive so that it is sustainable,”* (government representative cited in Kompas on 3 March, (Khairunissa, 2020))

However the relation between luxury consumption and sustainability is paradoxical, where luxury is deeply rooted in inequality, and thus inherently unsustainable (Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010). The consequences of this paradox are to some extent also visible in the confusion around the central government tourism development

plan on ‘super premium’ destinations such as Labuan Bajo. The proposed development does not necessarily directly involve reducing the number of tourists, but as a way to increase the economic gain through ‘managing accesses’ of tourists to different parts of the National Park as explicitly stated by the Ministry of Tourism.

*Super premium in Labuan Bajo, I see that the government is building an airport with a longer runway, and a lot of hotels are also built there. This means that there will definitely be more tourists and more income* (minister of tourism cited in Kompas on 3 March, (Khairunissa, 2020)

The proposed shift to quality over quantity will not bring much of the desirable changes in terms of environmental conservation, social equality and justice if the conceptualization of what ‘quality tourism’ entails, and what its consequences might be, is not well understood by policy makers and tourism stakeholders in general.

## 2.5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter we analysed the emerging discourses – from March to September 2020 - as voiced by Indonesian tourism stakeholders, including the government and academics, and examined to what extent these discourses included the notion of sustainability. Our analysis clearly identified the ‘New Normal’ as an overarching discourse which was consistently repeated and reproduced across the platforms we looked at. As part of this discourse the notion of sustainable tourism gradually moved to the foreground as we entered the second half of 2020. Under the heading of the New Normal, three issues prevailed: social distancing, health and hygiene protocols and Quality Tourism.

First, as part of the New Normal discourse and reflecting the environmental sustainability debate, it was argued that social distancing could lead to an increase in the desire for nature-based tourism; tourists were predicted to opt for more nature-based destinations as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This prediction resonates with Baillie (2020) who contended that social distancing has revitalized people’s love for nature by giving them an opportunity to know and appreciate nature close to their home. The newly found, or re-invigorated, love for nature is also argued to lead to more support for nature conservation efforts in general. Alongside a rediscovery of nature, it was also argued, in reference to social sustainability, that social distancing measures (especially if continued for an extended period) may harm social interactions in tourism. A similar concern is also posed by others (Butcher, 2020; Huijbens, 2020) who fear that social distancing will undermine conviviality, which is one of the

## Chapter 2

fundamental elements of tourism. Strict social distancing limits may discourage hosts and guests from engaging in meaningful interactions in a hospitable manner. These interactions may turn into brief and 'transactional' encounters around essential services, which could result in a serious set-back for mutual social and cultural exchange within tourism.

The second – and related – part of the New Normal discourse focused on health, hygiene and safety protocols. While the link between these protocols and the New Normal in the context of the pandemic was obvious, it is less clear how these protocols relate to furthering the sustainability agenda, except that the increased 'cleanliness' can contribute to overall environmental sustainability by reducing the waste problem which is currently a major tourism issue in Indonesia (Syaifullah, 2017). Awan, Shamim, and Ahn (2020) further suggest that these protocols may also relate to 'economic sustainability' in the sense that implementing rigorous health, hygiene and safety protocols may restore touristic trust and confidence to re-visit and use certain tourism services again.

Thirdly, as part of the New Normal discourse, the notion of 'Quality Tourism' (re)appeared as an important means to achieve sustainability. To capitalize on the suspension of activity caused by the pandemic and to push the Indonesian tourism sector toward a more sustainable directions, some stakeholders proposed a shift from quantity to quality as a 'solution' for the poor performance of Indonesian tourism sector. However even though this terminology of quality tourism is not new to the tourism literatures, scholars have not been conclusive on the definition of *quality tourism* or *quality tourism experiences* (Jennings et al., 2009). Despite the lack of consensus of the meaning of quality tourism, the apparent inclination of the Indonesian tourism stakeholders to link quality with sustainability may mirror early literatures on sustainable tourism which have discussed this relation, exemplified in the following quote; 'if the overall goal of tourism development is to achieve economic, social, and ecological sustainability, it must provide a first quality visitor experience, conserve natural and cultural resources, and bring substantial benefits to local communities' (Hohl & Tisdell, 1995, p. 533). However, the concrete ways in which the notion of quality tourism – and its underlying benchmarks of 'local wisdom', 'authenticity', 'uniqueness', and 'participation' – will contribute anything new to the development of sustainable tourism after COVID-19 remains unclear.

In the dominant discourse outlining the New Normal, we have seen remarkably little evidence of including voices from the communities that presumably are billed to at least partly host the quality tourism revolution, in order for their voices to be heard on what their role might be in tourism post-COVID-19, and how an increased attention

to sustainability may benefit them. Buzzwords such as ‘local wisdom’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘uniqueness’ abounded in the debate, but how these notions (as defined by whom?) would translate into practice, and how they would potentially further the sustainability agenda through so-called quality tourism, was unclear.

The central government retained a dominant role, not only in framing the discourse in terms of the New Normal, but also in promoting sustainability issues as part of it. For example, the Indonesian government’s effort to push health, hygiene and safety protocols and an environmental sustainability agenda as part of central themes in the COVID-19 mitigation and recovery efforts did not come out of the blue, but likely emanated from the intention to align their policies with the global narratives on handling the COVID-19 crisis and sustainability in general. On the one hand, Indonesia aspires to bring their policies into line with UNWTO guidelines on restarting tourism, expressed by the UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili in June 2020.

*“Sustainability must no longer be a niche part of tourism but must be the new norm for every part of our sector. This is one of the central elements of our Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism. It is in our hands to transform tourism and that emerging from COVID-19 becomes a turning point for sustainability” (UNWTO, 2020c).*

On the other hand, the Indonesian government’s emphasis on health and hygiene protocols and the environmental sustainability improvement agenda in their recovery plan is also a result of the poor performance of Indonesian tourism on *Health and Hygiene* (rank 102<sup>th</sup>) and *Environmental Sustainability* (rank 135<sup>th</sup>) in the 2019 *Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report* (World Economic Forum, 2019), which for the last few years has been a major reference-point for the Indonesian government in measuring tourism sector performance.

The emphasis of sustainability as part of the New Normal discourse was also supported and reinforced by tourism scholars which saw and took the opportunity to ‘ride the wave’, pushing the sustainable tourism agenda by - to some extent - re-aligning their stance to central government narratives on sustainability.

However, there was some reluctance from tourism businesses, which were less enthusiastic in embracing sustainability as part of the New Normal. Concrete steps for a significant business and operational overhaul towards sustainability were not noticeable in our data. Tourism businesses tended to discuss sustainability less in terms of operational changes and more in terms of marketing potential. Sustainability was

identified as a potential post COVID-19 market trend, due to tourists being predicted to have gained a higher awareness of (cultural and environmental) sustainability issues and be likely to use this as one of the considerations when it comes to choosing destinations or activities. In our dataset, tourism businesses advocated for a return to ‘business as usual’, only now under the guise of sustainability.

We also observed a general reluctance to voice more daring visions for transformative change of the sector, as we have seen reflected in Western (academic) tourism debates, for example, in a special issue of *Tourism Geographies* published in June 2020, espousing visions of how ‘the pandemic events of 2020 are contributing to a possibly substantial, meaningful and positive transformation of the planet in general, and tourism specifically’ (Lew et al., 2020a, p. 455). The dominant role played by the central government in shaping Indonesian tourism discourse is a likely reason for the absence of more lofty future visions for tourism and society.

These findings not only illustrate that sustainable tourism remains an ‘open concept’ (Kooij et al., 2014) that is prone to multiple interpretations, which further complicate its implementation (S. Cole, 2006; Mebratu, 1998), but also that the concept itself is not ‘neutral’ and thus susceptible to relations of power; also in this case particular interest groups have adopted and defended their own language of sustainability (Cohen, 2002; Mowforth & Munt, 2015). The concept of sustainability was brandished liberally in relation to almost anything, both by those with genuine interest in conserving nature and promoting social equality, and those more interested in simply promoting tourism growth. In reference to the latter, the discourse on sustainability remains part of a persistent ‘growth’ paradigm (Bianchi & de Man, 2020; Huijbens, 2020), the evident contradiction notwithstanding; goals of sustainable tourism directly oppose the paradigm of unfettered growth which has been the central driving force of the industry (Bianchi & de Man, 2020), yet the same goals are utilized in promoting further tourism growth. Therefore, to accelerate the widespread acceptance and implementation of the notion of “sustainability” in post COVID-19 global tourism industry, any move toward a more sustainable form of tourism should not only mirror global concepts and perspectives but be deeply grounded in the local context. Further appreciation and effort should be given to recognize and distil local views on what sustainability means, how to achieve (and maintain) sustainability and what sustainable tourism has to gain from forms of ‘local wisdom’.

Despite the breakthrough at the end of 2020 in the discovery of COVID-19 vaccines, and the subsequent vaccination effort across the globe in the beginning of 2021, the situation may not be improving anytime soon. Limited production capacity and distribution challenges make vaccines not yet within close reach of most of the world’s

population. Hence the future of tourism continues to be at a crossroads. It remains to be seen if – and if yes, in which ways – the New Normal will remain the dominant discourse in the period emerging after COVID-19 and to what extent 2021 will become a turning point for sustainability. As discourses will shift as broader influences and circumstances change, a continuous discourse analysis is needed to monitor whether the envisioned sustainability improvements will materialize or merely remain rhetorical.

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# Chapter 3

## <sup>2</sup>COVID-19 Pandemic and Tourism Development in Indonesia: Key Government Mitigation and Intervention Analysis

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2 This chapter has been submitted to *Tourism Planning and Development* as COVID-19 Pandemic and Tourism Development in Indonesia: Key Government Mitigation and Intervention Analysis and is currently under review.



### 3.I. INTRODUCTION

Since the President Soeharto's era in 1969, Indonesian tourism development has been characterized by a large-scale, capital-intensive tourism infrastructure project, with Bali's Nusa Dua tourism resort in the 1970s as primary example (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2015). Despite the ongoing debates on the effectiveness of this kind of development towards a more sustainable tourism industry (Warren & Wardana, 2018), the trend persists. Tourism sector is becoming increasingly important economic sector in Indonesia, supplanting palm oil and oil and gas in the near future (Lestari, 2019).

In 2016, the current president Joko Widodo initiated the development of ten new priority tourism destinations, dubbed the 10 New Bali (Salna, 2017), to replicate Bali's tourism success in other developing Indonesian destinations. These destinations were Lake Toba, Tanjung Kelayang, Tanjung Lesung, Seribu Islands, Borobudur, Bromo, Wakatobi, Mandalika, Labuan Bajo, and Morotai. Through the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, which will subsequently referred as (MoTCE) throughout this article, Joko Widodo expects this program aids the realization of 20 million international tourist visits to Indonesia by 2019, almost double the 11.25 million arrivals in 2016 (Ratman, 2016). As Indonesia eventually only received 16.11 million international tourist arrivals in 2019 (Julita, 2020), to accelerate the development and subsequently the desired impacts, before the end of 2019, the president refocused the development plans of 10 New Bali, officially known as '10 Priority Destinations', to only five, which then rebranded as '5 Super Priority Destinations'. Of these five destinations, four were part of the list of ten: Lake Toba, Borobudur, Mandalika and Labuan Bajo, while the fifth is the newly destination of Likupang (Kemenparekraf, n.d.)

Tourism growth continued before the COVID-19 pandemic, with a substantial 5.85% increase in international tourist arrivals in January 2020 compared to January 2019 (Kemenparekraf, 2021d). However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic had a disastrous impact on Indonesia's economy, and the tourism sector was hit the hardest. Official statistics showed a more than 80% drop in international visitor numbers. In 2020, Indonesia only received 4.05 million international tourists (BPS, 2021), causing 409,000 Indonesians losing their jobs in the tourism industry in 2020 (Kemenparekraf, 2021c)

The government early responses have been chastised at home and abroad for being relatively slow in closing the country's borders when the pandemic began in early 2020. The then-Indonesian Minister of Health, Terawan Agus Putranto, vehemently denied a study published in February 2020 by Harvard scientists suggested that Indo-

nesia had undetected COVID-19 cases {Formatting Citation}, and saw this result as an insult to Indonesian virus testing capability (McVeigh & Graham-Harrison, 2020). Paradoxically, in response to the looming pandemic, the Indonesian government allocated 7.2 billion rupiah (USD 5.2 million) to fund online influencer marketing program to stimulate the international market, which was increasingly affected by the outbreak (Gorbiano, 2020).

The marketing plan was abandoned after Indonesia's first official case of COVID-19 announced on March 2, 2020 (Zaking, 2020). However, travel ban for international tourists was still not implemented until April 2, 2020 (Khoiri, 2020). These actions indicate protecting the tourism economy was a priority for the Indonesian government at the beginning of the pandemic. However, when it became clear that the pandemic posed an enormous threat to population health, and the country's economy, the government finally implemented restrictions on international and domestic travel and mobility.

The government continuously adjusted the restrictions in response to the virus's spread. The first lockdown was implemented in Jakarta and its surrounding area (Greater Jakarta) on April 10, 2020. By June 5, 2020, the Indonesian government implemented a 'transitional' lockdown in which restrictions were partially lifted to allow the economy to recover despite the ongoing pandemic. The transition to the 'New Normal' was used to describe the new situation, where although the end of the pandemic is not yet clear, society must gradually move away from an 'emergency' state of response and reopen the economy by 'living with the pandemic' as the new reality (Subandi et al., 2022).

As part of the transition to a 'New Normal,' on the one hand, the MoTCE mandated a set of strict COVID-19 health protocols known as *Cleanliness, Health, Safety, and Environmental Sustainability (CHSE)* for tourism businesses and destinations (Kemenparekraf, 2020b), which allows complying tourism businesses to operate at a reduced capacity during the pandemic. On the other hand, along with lifting some mobility restrictions, tourism development plans focusing on the five super-priority destinations were resumed, particularly regarding physical infrastructure projects, capitalizing on the absence of tourists (Kementrian PUPR, 2020).

The objective of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, to examine the central government intervention to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on Indonesian tourism and their short-term impact on the Indonesian tourism Industry. Secondly, to investigate to what extent the pandemic and its related mitigation policies impacted the long-term

agenda and trajectory of Indonesian tourism development, specifically related to the 10 New Bali and, subsequently, the five super priority destinations.

The following section will start by situating the Indonesian case in a broader context of how the pandemic has affected tourism development internationally. Then, it will continue with an account of the research methods, followed by the findings. In the findings, this research will elaborate on a) the key government mitigation and intervention during the pandemic and their impact on the tourism sector and b) what happened with the long-term tourism development plans throughout the pandemic. The findings show that long-term development goals have barely changed in Indonesia and that the pandemic, in some cases, even enabled infrastructural development to accelerate. The discussion also compares Indonesian mitigation strategies for tourism with other countries, followed by considering the consequences of a continued growth trajectory for the development of post-covid tourism in Indonesia and elsewhere.

### 3.1.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Future tourism development agendas

The COVID-19 pandemic has required governments to quickly develop mitigation interventions to address its impacts, including those on the tourism sector. Despite severely impacted by the pandemic, tourism, especially international tourism, also potentially exacerbated the outbreak by directly enabling the virus to spread globally through the movement of tourists (Qiu et al., 2020)

Travel ban was one of the primary and first measures many governments implemented to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. According to UNWTO, as early as January 2020, many tourism destinations worldwide started introducing travel restrictions. As of April 6, 96% of tourism destinations globally had implemented travel restrictions, with ninety destinations entirely or partially banning tourists from entering their borders (UNWTO, 2020a). The USA, for example, decided to temporarily ban inbound travel from 26 European countries, collectively known as the Schengen countries (B. Cole, 2020). The European Union also introduced a ban on non-EU arrivals (BBC, 2020a)

As an international governing body of the tourism industry, UNWTO issued several strategies and guidelines (UNWTO, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e) to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector. These documents have been the main reference points for governments and other tourism stakeholders worldwide to formulate their COVID-19 mitigation and recovery strategies. Also, in Indonesia, the government's pandemic-related mitigation were largely in line with UNWTO directives on recovering and restarting the sector (UNWTO, 2020c, 2020b,



2020d). These policies mainly consisted of a combination of mobility restrictions (Seyfi et al., 2020) to regulate (mostly hindering) tourist access to tourism destinations, economic stimulus packages to sustain the industry in the absence of tourists (Nhamo et al., 2020) and preparing for a better post-pandemic tourism industry. Governments also gradually put in place measures for the industry to resume its operation despite the ongoing pandemic, mostly under the 'New Normal' heading. In Indonesia, this was introduced through the 'transitional lockdown' implementation on June 10 2020, meaning the tourism industry could gradually reopen its operation under strict COVID-19 protocols (Cheer, 2020; Lew et al., 2020b; Subandi et al., 2022). However, Collins-Kreiner and Ram (2021) show that countries responded to UNWTO guidelines differently, contingent on their own political and social context. The recovery efforts mostly prioritized short-term gain, thus overshadowing any real focus on a long-term industry shift in a more sustainable direction. (Collins-Kreiner & Ram, 2021)

Alongside major challenges it has brought for the sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has also presented an opportunity for re-thinking tourism development as we advance (Gössling, Scott, Hall, et al., 2020; C. M. Hall, Scott, Gössling, et al., 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). The unprecedented circumstances sparked a debate on capitalizing on the pandemic to direct tourism development towards a more sustainable or 'regenerative' path. For example, tourism scholars argued for more investment in nature-based tourism and ecotourism, building on the renewed interest in and appreciation for nature (Carr, 2020a). Furthermore, the restrictions on international travel during the early stage of the pandemic also presented an opportunity for local and domestic tourism to step up and fill the void left by international tourism (Huijbens, 2020; Romagosa, 2020), which may decrease the dependence on international tourism in the long run, something that is seen as a positive step toward more sustainable tourism practices.

Many tourism scholars have urged shifting to a more sustainable tourism policy. (Brouder et al., 2020; Cheer, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020) Although some have expressed doubt about the likelihood that we will see this happening, considering the pervasiveness of the growth paradigm on which tourism is built, and the need to immediately recuperate the loss of economic accumulation opportunities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (C. M. Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020)

### 3.2. METHODS

For this chapter, a qualitative approach centered around content analysis was utilized. Content analysis is a well-established technique in public policy research, involving a systematic examination of textual data that is coded to identify themes, intent, or patterns. (Hall, DM & Steiner, 2020; Wattanacharoensil & Schuckert, 2016; Wijesinghe, 2022)

Policy documents and official communications from the Indonesian central government on current Indonesian tourism development plans and COVID-19 mitigation strategies for the tourism sector accessible to the researcher were used as data sources complemented with newspaper articles on Indonesian tourist development and mitigation strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Government policy documents and official communications were collected and analyzed from the (MoTCE) and the National COVID-19 Taskforce official webpages, namely [Kemenparekraf.go.id](http://Kemenparekraf.go.id) and [Covid19.go.id](http://Covid19.go.id), respectively.

The newspaper articles were gathered from March 1, 2020, to March 31, 2022, through Google search using the keywords of tourism or pariwisata in Bahasa Indonesia from the online edition of prominent Indonesian news media outlets targeting national and international audiences, Kompas and detik.com published in Indonesian, and The Jakarta Post in English. Based on a content check of its relevance to Indonesian tourism COVID-19 mitigation and tourism development during the COVID-19 pandemic, 74 articles were selected for further analysis. The information gathered from policy documents and newspaper articles was then manually coded and analysed to identify the central themes and debates on the forms and consequences of the government's COVID-19 interventions for the tourism industry and the national tourism development plan, primarily related to the 10 New Bali development project.

In the initial content analysis of the official government communication channels and the three major national newspapers, we identified two major government COVID-19 interventions that significantly impacted the Indonesian tourism industry: Mobility restrictions (lockdown) and CHSE standardization & certification. Furthermore, regarding 10 New Bali development during the pandemic, we chose Labuan Bajo as an example as it was the one which stirred more debate in our dataset. However, in the end, we also decided to include local and regional newspapers for more 'insights' and to gain a deeper and more nuanced comprehension of the major government interventions in COVID-19 mitigations throughout the studied pandemic period, especially on the opinions of tourism stakeholders which were being underrepresented

in our initial data set. 8 articles from local and regional newspapers were then selected for further analysis based on how much it can add depth and nuance to the initial findings gathered from the earlier sources.

### 3.3. RESULTS

The Indonesian government's approach has, in many ways, followed UNWTO directives. Aside from implementing social mobility restrictions, the government has also financially supported tourism businesses as part of the Rp 126.2 trillion (USD 8.4 billion) budget for National Economic Recovery (PEN) program (Djalante et al., 2020). The government also supports the tourism industry adapting to the 'New Normal' by introducing a COVID-19 standardization and certification program (CHSE). The following section will outline the key government COVID-19 mitigations and interventions for the tourism sector and the tourism stakeholders' responses toward them. Then, the section will analyze how the pandemic has impacted Indonesia's short and long-term tourism development policy.

#### 3.3.I. Major government mitigation intervention and their impacts

##### Lockdown (Social Mobility Restrictions)

To curb the spread of the virus after the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Indonesia on March 2, 2020, mobility restrictions was imposed. However, despite recognizing the COVID-19 pandemic as a national public health emergency on March 31 2020, the Indonesian president, fearing the economic consequences, refused to put Indonesia in a full-scale lockdown comparable to the Italian national lockdown policy (Colombo, 2021). Instead, on April 10 2020, the central government introduced Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) in Jakarta (Umasugi, 2020), later followed by many other areas in Indonesia with an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases. The first cases of COVID-19 in Indonesia caused 16 of 34 Indonesia's provinces to temporarily close their tourism destinations as early as mid-March 2020, ahead of the official lockdown (Kemenparekraf, 2020).

Before implementing the PSBB, Indonesia issued, on April 2 2020, an entry ban for international tourists (Cahya, 2020b). Since then, the Indonesian government has been gradually increase access for international tourists to visit Indonesia, and by October 14 2021, international tourists from 19 countries were allowed to enter Indonesia, given they were vaccinated, able to show a negative COVID-19 test result, willing to undergo of mandatory centralized quarantine (hotel) and in possession of health insurance which also covers COVID-19 treatment (Nuryanti, 2021). As

the Indonesian government was struggling to prepare more international ports with adequate COVID-19 related facilities, international tourists were only allowed to enter Indonesia through Bali and Riau islands.

In 2021 The Indonesian government changed the restriction scheme to Community Activities Restriction Enforcement (PPKM) which aimed to control the pandemic spread at a micro-scale level (area), which implied that more destinations could be opened with increased capacity, under strict COVID-19 protocols, hence averting large-scale lockdowns, which have considerable economic repercussions. The government also pledged to open its door to more international tourists in March 2022, where they were aiming to lift the mandatory quarantine requirement for vaccinated international tourists and increase the number of entry points (Karunia, 2022), which later materialized on March 23 2022 (Kemlu, 2022).

The constant change in mobility restrictions which included the closure of tourism destinations has significantly impacted the Indonesian tourism. Therefore, the gradual reopening of the tourist destinations which mainly stimulated the revival of domestic tourism, proved vital for most of the tourism destinations in Indonesia such as Yogyakarta (Pramana et al., 2022). However, other destinations, such as Bali, which depend primarily on international tourists, still suffered from the ongoing travel ban for international tourists. The longstanding international tourist ban entering Indonesia, including Bali, stalled the Bali tourism recovery. The Secretary General of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI) expressed his concern.

*“In Bali, the contribution of international tourists to the hotel occupancy rate is much higher than the domestic tourist, which can only add 25% to the occupancy rate, and the supply is far greater than the demand. (Sandi, 2020)*

He emphasized that eventually, Bali needs international tourists to return to the island if Bali fully expects to recover its tourism industry to the pre-COVID-19 scale.

The Vice chairman of the Association of Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies (ASITA) also expressed concern over the prolonged ban on international tourists to Indonesia, especially Bali.

*“Travel agencies in Bali are all restless. There was a glimmer of hope that starting September 11, 2020, Bali would be reopened to foreign tourists. However, yesterday’s announcement that the reopening was postponed disappointed them.” (Ardianto, 2020)*

In addition to the prolonged ban on international tourists, a more rigorous measure was implemented to keep COVID-19 cases under control and prepare Bali to reopen to international visitors. However, this measure was not without cost. In the 2020 Christmas and New Year holidays, a 'harsher' measure was introduced for domestic tourists visiting Bali. Tourists flying to Bali were required to have a mandatory (and more expensive) polymerase chain reaction (PCR) COVID-19 test (Tamtomo, 2020) in contrast with other areas, which mostly only required a more affordable rapid COVID-19 test. A representative of the Tourism Driver Association in Bali (UBD) expressed his disappointment with the stricter entry requirement to Bali:

"We are disappointed because it was so sudden, and I am sure 80 per cent of guests are cancelling their trip and moving to another area, such as Lombok" (Roshidin, 2020)

As per December 2022, almost all restrictions were lifted, and international tourists have been gradually travelling back to Bali and other parts of the country.

#### **CHSE Standardization and Certification**

Since the second semester of 2020, Indonesia's tourism industry has seen the accentuation of the narrative of the so-called 'New Normal' through the implementation and certification of businesses and destinations with *Cleanliness, Health, Safety, Environment Sustainability (CHSE)* standards. CHSE, launched by the Ministry of Tourism in September 2020, consists of a set of hygiene, and sanitation protocols to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus from preparing Indonesia's tourism destinations and businesses for reopening despite the ongoing pandemic.

The MoTCE claimed these CHSE protocols were formulated in line with UNWTO tourism recovery advice (UNWTO, 2020b) and also following the previous 2 Indonesian Health Ministry decrees on (1) Corona Virus disease prevention and control in the office and industry workplace in supporting business sustainability in a pandemic situation and (2) Community health protocol in public places and facilities for prevention and coronavirus disease control. Central to the implementation and certification of CHSE protocols is the employment of "Health & Hygiene Protocols" to minimize the spread of COVID-19, which essentially consisted of using a face mask, providing hand washing facilities and maintaining social distancing in various tourism businesses and activities instances and the additional element of environmental sustainability, which revolve around the sustainable waste and water management, and the use of renewable energy in the business operation (Kemenparekraf, 2020b). On the government emphasis toward this program, one senior official of the MoTCE said:

“The key to the successful recovery of the tourism sector and the creative economy is the application of standard health protocols” (Cahya, 2020a)

He further expressed:

*“CHSE certification serves as a guarantee to tourists and the public that the products and services provided have complied with the hygiene, health, safety, and environmental sustainability protocols” (Cahya, 2020a)*

This narrative stems from government concern that Indonesia as a tourism destination received a disadvantageous view from the potential international market due to its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indonesia’s then Minister of Tourism Wisnutama conceded in an interview on October 16, 2020, that international media coverage of Indonesia’s tourism especially Australia is unfavourable. (Ramadhian, 2020b).

Hitherto, specific CHSE certification schemes have been given to several tourism businesses, including Tourist attractions, Tourism Villages, Homestays, Hotels, Restaurants, MICE venues, Rafting, Golf, and Diving Centers. As of November 27 2022, 11,716 businesses across 34 provinces and 403 cities are certified (Kemenparekraf, 2022), and according to the The MoTCE, certification will be continuously extended to other tourism businesses/facilities and activities.

This government narrative of the importance of institutionalizing the New Normal through CHSE certification programs has garnered positive responses from the tourism business sector. The Secretary General of the Indonesian Travel Agency Association (ASTINDO) voiced her support.

*“Tourist destinations must prepare themselves to convince visitors. How? With the CHSE health protocol really being implemented, not only for the sake of making an advertisement but really (implemented)” (Ramadhian, 2020a)*

Similar support was also voiced by the chairman of the Indonesia Hotel General Manager Association (IHGMA):

*“Those hotels which are not yet CHSE certified should register immediately. This (certification) should be done to generate trust from tourists” (Ramadhian, 2021)*

### Chapter 3

Despite the support of tourism businesses as shown above, this certification also received criticism from several tourism businesses, regarding the cost of the certification, its effectiveness in bringing more tourists and the uncertainty of the frequent 'lockdown' measures, which forced the tourism destinations and businesses to stop its operations despite already been certified.

One representative of the Indonesian Hotel General Manager Association (IHGMA) lamented:

*"When the Emergency PPKM Level 4 was implemented (lockdown), the MICE venue could not operate even though the hotel had already received a CHSE certificate. (...) Why are facilities that have been certified not left open so that the industry can breathe too? (Intan, 2021)*

Similarly, The Indonesian Hotel & Restaurant Association (PHRI) regional chairman also voiced his view on the CHSE's impact on their business; he said:

*"Since the emergence and implementation of the CHSE has not had a significant impact on the hotel and restaurant business, so far it appears only as a marketing gimmick " (Fadli, 2021)*

While another representative of the Indonesian Hotel & Restaurant Association (PHRI) criticized the cost of the certification:

*"We understand that the CHSE certification is a form of concern for consumers, but if it is mandatory, (the cost) will be very burdensome for us, especially for smaller businesses" (Prakoso, 2021)*

In response to these critics, the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy assured the tourism businesses that CHSE certification is not mandatory. He said:

*"CHSE was a hotly discussed topic. However, (...) it seems that there was a misunderstanding, finally we can convince tourism businesses that there is no directive for mandatory CHSE certification, CHSE is voluntary. " (Widodo, 2021)*

However, in a further statement, he warned that tourism businesses not complying with the CHSE protocols will be warned and even forcefully closed, which seemingly contradicts his earlier statement:

*“We provide clear directions to tourist destinations to be prepared. We are coordinating with the local government and COVID-19 Task Force, to act decisively. We will be forced to limit and even close down non-compliant tourism destinations if the first persuasive measures are not successful” (Kemenparekraf, 2021b)*

The confusion is on the CHSE standardization and certification program. While the certification is claimed to be voluntary by the government, the adoption of CHSE protocols is mandatory. Related to the issue of the allegedly high cost involved for tourism business to have their businesses certified, the central government through the Ministry of Tourism has so far indirectly subsidized the process through financial handouts for local governments with the condition that it should prioritize the funding of local CHSE certification programs. (Kemenparekraf, 2021a). The Minister also added that the government has directly subsidized the CHSE certification for tourism SMEs. Still, he also mentioned that larger businesses should not expect the government to finance their certification process:

*“So far, CHSE has been borne by the government, but in the future, all business actors will slowly be able to adopt it at a much more affordable cost” (Widodo, 2021)*

He also added that the government in the future would only subsidize the CHSE certification for Tourism SMEs (Widyanti, 2021)

### 3.3.2. The development of the 10 New Bali project during the time of COVID-19 pandemic

The development of ten new priority destinations, dubbed the 10 New Bali, has been the focus of the government’s tourism development planning since 2016. In 2019, the government refocused the project by first only developing five destinations instead of ten destinations simultaneously. Other priority destinations will be developed after the first five ‘super priority destinations’ projects have been completed in 2024. However, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has raised questions about the continuity of this project. Furthermore, the government’s focus on the tourism industry’s survival since the start of the pandemic has cast doubts on the viability and appropriateness of continuously pouring massive resources and attention into this mega project. Nonetheless, by the end of 2020, the newly appointed Minister of Tourism, Sandiaga Uno, reiterated the central government’s promise and ensured that this project is ‘still on track’ and should even be accelerated, despite the ongoing pandemic. He said, shortly after being appointed as the Minister of Tourism:



*“President Jokowi’s directive is to ensure that the five super priority destinations, previously designated by the government, are fast-tracked to prepare themselves during this pandemic, so that these destinations can be leading destinations after the pandemic is over” (Prodjo, 2020)*

In 2021, the central government through The Ministry of Public Work & Housing allocated 4.01 trillion rupiah (USD 286 million) to fund the infrastructure development in these 5 Super priority destinations (Bahfein, 2021). The Minister said:

*“For tourism, the infrastructure must first be improved, then amenities and events, then a massive promotion” (Bahfein, 2021)*

To date, these five Super Priority Destinations have seen a significant development and have prepared themselves as the New Bali, and apparently, the pandemic did not halt their development.

The contentious side of the accelerated ‘progress’ of the 5 Super Priority Destinations is well illustrated by the specific case of Labuan Bajo (Komodo National Park), which received more attention from the media due to the heated debate on the way this destination is being developed. Labuan Bajo, where the Komodo National Park is situated, became the focus of headlines in August 2020 due to plans to build it into a ‘Super Premium Destination’. Around the Komodo National Park, premium tourist facilities are built to cater for more affluent tourists, so-called ‘Quality tourists’; a development dubbed by some as the ‘Jurassic Park’ project, reflecting the Komodo Dragon as the charismatic prehistoric species endemic to the area.

Seemingly as a preparation to boost the ‘prestige’ and exclusivity of the National Park, in January 2019, the Governor of East Nusa Tenggara talked about closing the Komodo National Park for tourists to give space for the ‘rejuvenation’ of local species (Farhan, 2019). However, instead of closing the park, by October 2019, the central government came up with a plan to increase the entrance fee to the National Park from around USD 18 to USD 1000 to limit the number of tourists while at the same time improving the ‘quality’. Senior Minister of Coordinating Ministry of Maritime & Investment, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, said:

*“If we make it exclusive, it will be expensive. Like Safari’s in Kenya, people (still) come for US\$ 3,500 one night” (Al Hikam, 2019)*

This plan to increase the entrance fee to the national park was later ‘formalized’ in 2022, when the provincial government of East Nusa Tenggara decided to charge

tourists 3.75 million rupiah (roughly USD 235) starting from August 1 2022 (Simangunsong, 2022), a move that later was heavily criticized by local tourism stakeholders. As a result, the government postponed and eventually cancelled the plan by December 2022 and maintained the current fee structure (Ardin, 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, in October 2020, a controversial photo of a Komodo facing a truck circulated in social media and several prominent news media headlines, home and abroad (BBC, 2020b) (see Figure 2 below).



Figure 2. Worker's truck facing a Komodo, source (BBC,2020b)

This photo stirred much debate among the public on the suitability of massive constructions in a conservation area and the real intent behind the development. Exploiting the absence of tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic and to prevent a further polemic following the circulation of the controversial photo (see figure 2), the government decided to close Loh Buaya in Rinca Island, one of the Komodo inhabited islands, for construction work from October 26, 2020, until June 30 2021 (Khairally, 2020)

Various stakeholders, especially local communities, and environmental activists are against this development which they believed to be a 'capitalistic move' to invade the protected area further. local community member of Komodo Islands voiced his concern about not being involved:

*"We only know from local online media" (Souisa, 2020a)*

He further said:

*“We define conservation not as a matter of income [revenue] or benefit, but what we believe about conservation is an ancestral will that teaches us the Komodo dragon and its ecosystems are our brothers” (Souisa, 2020a)*

Furthermore, as a World Heritage site, UNESCO also demanded the Indonesian government stop the construction project inside the national park, believed to negatively impact the Komodo wellbeing (Rizal, 2021). Responding to this allegation, the Indonesian government insisted that the project is undertaken with utmost consideration of the local environment and that all necessary Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) requirements have been taken into consideration.

A senior officer of The Ministry of Environment and Forestry in charge of the development said:

*“This project will continue... it has been agreed (by the government) that it will not have any (environmental) impact” (Sicca, 2021)*

### 3.4. DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastating consequences for the global tourism industry (Gössling, Scott, Hall, et al., 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). It impacted the industry's current conditions and its development trajectories (Cheer, 2020; Gössling, Scott, Hall, et al., 2020). Globally, various policies have been implemented, and governments have taken measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic with different results and repercussions. This chapter specifically focused on the situation in Indonesia.

The following part of this chapter will shed some light on what lessons can be learned from the Indonesian government's mitigation and recovery interventions and their effect on Indonesian long-term development plans, especially its 10 New Bali project. Although further research, which includes more 'on the ground' information gathered from observations and in-depth interviews with Indonesian tourism stakeholders, including government officials, could nuance some of our findings, three main lessons can be drawn from our results.

These lessons are discussed in three sections., The first section compares Indonesian mitigation strategies for tourism with other countries, the second focuses on the

development of post-Covid tourism, and the third and final section discusses the problematic pairing of nature conservation and luxury tourism, as seen in the example of Komodo National Park.

### 3.4.I. Indonesian government COVID-19 mitigation strategies for tourism compared to other governments

In response to the looming threat of the COVID-19 pandemic at the start of 2020, Indonesia initially allocated a substantial budget for international promotion, intended to capitalize on the growing number of destinations closing its borders for tourists. However, the delayed closing of its borders for international tourists in the early stage of the pandemic has cost Indonesia tourism profoundly. Understandably no government had predicted, let alone was prepared for, the unprecedented impact of this pandemic, including those affecting the tourism sector. However, some governments fared better than others, typically acting swiftly by imposing restrictions and conducting massive tracing, testing and quarantine in the early stages of the pandemic. (Aspinwall, 2020; Farr, 2020). Vietnam and Taiwan have been prime examples of this successes. As a result, Vietnam recorded only 412 cases and zero deaths by July 2020 (Farr, 2020) and Taiwan only 388 cases by 12 April 2020 (Aspinwall, 2020). In comparison, Indonesia's reported 108,376 cases by July 31 2020 (Mashabi, 2020). As a result, by keeping the pandemic relatively 'under control', Vietnam and Taiwan have allowed domestic tourism to flourish, which Indonesia might have achieved sooner if suitable measures had been implemented earlier.

As explained above, to support the survival of its tourism industry, the Indonesian government implemented from April 10, 2020, onwards various forms and levels of mobility restrictions (PSBB & PPKM), distributed financial handouts for tourism businesses and introducing a COVID-19 standardization and certification scheme labelled as the *Cleanliness, Health, Safety and Environmental Sustainability* (CHSE) standardization and certification program for tourism businesses and destinations, which also exist in several other countries, such as Turkey (Cetin & Coskuner, 2021), the Dutch Caribbean (Good Travel Guide, 2021) and Jamaica (Salmon, 2020).

However, the Indonesian scheme differs by incorporating environmental sustainability as an integral part of the COVID-19 standardization and certification scheme. This inclusion of a sustainability element was a way to simultaneously address the pandemic-related issues and the poor performance of Indonesia's tourism on *Environmental Sustainability* (rank 135<sup>th</sup>) and *Health and Hygiene* (rank 102<sup>nd</sup>) in the 2019 *TTCI Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index*, (World Economic Forum, 2019) which serves as a benchmark for the Indonesian government for measuring its tourism performance. However, although the implementation of CHSE to some extent

supported the recovery of domestic tourism during the pandemic, its *Environmental Sustainability* element has not helped Indonesia's performance in the 2021 *Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index*, which has been changed and was modified into TTDI *Travel and Tourism Development Index* in 2021 by the World Economic Forum (WEF). Within this latest report, Indonesia's ranking has dropped in terms of *Health & Hygiene* from 81 in 2019 to 82 in 2021 and *Environmental Sustainability* from 61 in 2019 to 69 in the 2021 TTDI (World Economic Forum, 2022).

### 3.4.2. Post-Covid Tourism: Business as usual?

The COVID-19 pandemic has given governments and other tourism stakeholders an opportunity to redirect their tourism development trajectory towards a more sustainable and equitable direction (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). However, others predicted that tourism would be 'business as usual' after the pandemic, and 'revenge' tourism will flourish due to the urge to recover the lost opportunity to travel and experience the world due to all mobility restrictions during the pandemic (Vogler, 2022).

In the Indonesian case, the 'revenge' tourism scenario was seemingly more anticipated and 'welcomed' by the government. President Joko Widodo stated in 2020:

*"I believe this pandemic is only until the end of the year. Next year, tourism will be booming!" (Sugianto, 2020)*

He then continued:

*"Everyone wants to go out; everyone wants to enjoy the beauty of tourism again, so that optimism must continue to be raised" (Sugianto, 2020)*

Already in the early stage of the pandemic, Indonesian tourism stakeholders, including the central government, were anticipating reopening the tourism destinations. In doing so, they formulated a strategy of 'living with the threat of the virus' aligning with what became globally known as the 'New Normal'. On the one hand, the strategy of the New Normal started with the relaxation of the mobility restrictions in June 2020 and, on the other hand, the internalization of new COVID-19 health and hygiene protocols through the CHSE standardization and certification programs. However, at the same time, the Indonesian tourism development policies were and are still characterized by the accentuation of 'continuous growth' or, in this case, back to the growth track' paradigm. This persistent growth agenda resonates with trends identified by (Bianchi & de Man, 2020) in UNWTO SDG programs, which inherently revolve around promoting and sustaining 'growth' as part of the final 'goals'. As a result, even in times of the pandemic, the government focuses on developing 5 Super

Priority Destinations as part of the 10 New Bali project is unwavering despite the controversies and local resistance surrounding them. Therefore, it is likely that Indonesia will favour a return to a 'business as usual' type of tourism development rather than any meaningful shift. Of course, like many other destinations and governments, the recovery of the local economy is the primary consideration of all their policies and actions. A more "sustainable" shift may not be prioritized if it is seen as an impediment to a more pressing economic recovery (C. M. Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020).

### 3.4.3. The luxury and ecotourism development pair: A new guise of accumulation by conservation in tourism?

Tourism has long and by many been considered part of the global capitalist machinery (Bianchi, 2021; Büscher & Fletcher, 2017; Fletcher, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018), but it also claimed to be a valuable tool for conservation (Karanth & Karanth, 2012; Ryan & Stewart, 2009). However, while much of the so-called tourism projects for conservation and development are carried out under the 'ecotourism' banner, the increasing tendency for destinations to cater for 'quality tourists', essentially translated as a 'high-spending tourist', demands a new marketing approach to combine the unspoiled nature with luxurious and exclusive tourism amenities.

The development of 'Super Premium Destinations' previously discussed with the example of Labuan Bajo (Komodo National Park) resonates with this development. Here, a national park with charismatic endemic species and pristine nature, which was previously an emerging destination for ecotourism (Lasso & Dahles, 2021), is now a new and upcoming playground for capitalism.

The government's narrative of developing luxury tourism facilities in the name of conservation is debatable, especially when the Komodo dragon population increased before this program's implementation (Rosana, 2020). This move by the government is akin to the notion of 'Accumulation by Conservation' (Büscher & Fletcher, 2015), where 'business as usual capitalism' is disguised as a nature conservation effort. Instead of commodifying nature through 'extraction', it commodifies nature *in situ* through tourism activities and charges extra fees to conserve the very nature they commodify. The astronomical increase of the proposed entrance fee, sold as a 'conservation' membership fee derived from the Payment for Environmental Services (PES) concept (Wunder, 2015), is a common practice for tourism in protected areas (Pagiola, 2008) and has been previously implemented to some degree in other destinations in Indonesia, including Raja Ampat, (Atmodjo et al., 2017), a leading ecotourism destination in Indonesia. This practice is, to some extent, unjustifiable. It resembles a government effort to shift the playfield and re-arrange the composition of the 'players' of Labuan Bajo tourism, where the locals who are already deprived of their traditional livelihoods

of fishing and now depend on tourism (Lasso & Dahles, 2021) will likely be further marginalized as a result of the massive development and restructuring of access to the premium locations of the National park. As such, this super premium development program is at risk of producing more inequalities rather than alleviating them (Büscher & Fletcher, 2017).

### 3.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter examined how the Indonesian government's central COVID-19 pandemic mitigation and interventions for the tourism industry unfolded and how it impacted Indonesia's short- and long-term tourism development. To conclude, it seems that the considerable and prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Indonesian and global tourism industry did not prevent the Indonesian government from its pre-COVID-19 tourism development plan, especially with the 10 New Bali project, where despite the slight setback in the initial period of the pandemic, this project is still ongoing and even 'accelerated', capitalizing on the absence of tourism activities in much of these destinations during the pandemic.

In other words, the Indonesian government showed a Janus head during the pandemic. On the one hand, they initiated the CHSE standardization and certification program, received favorable acceptance from the Indonesian tourism stakeholders in general and was seen as a concrete move by the government to re-ignite the tourism industry in Indonesia. On the other hand, however, in moving forward with CHSE standardization and certification programs, the Indonesian government needs to communicate the program better to the stakeholders, especially in terms of its cost, effectiveness (under persistent mobility restrictions), and nature of its status (voluntary or mandatory) and how will it still benefit the tourism business in the post-pandemic world which is likely to come to an end soon.

In terms of tourism development, Indonesia, despite actively using the word "sustainability" in their narratives, including environmental sustainability in the CHSE, is returning to a "business-as-usual" path. This return to business as usual is instigated by the inherited 'growth paradigm' of its tourism development which is fundamentally organized around an infinite growth agenda (Bianchi & de Man, 2020; Büscher & Fletcher, 2017; Fletcher, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018); which in the long term is irreconcilable with the idea of sustainability itself (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). It is substantially exacerbated by the pressing need to recover from and compensate for economic losses caused by the pandemic, overshadows the concern for a shift to a more sustainable path for tourism development.

The situation in Indonesia clearly illustrates that we need to include ‘politics’ in the equation since no matter how environmentally benevolent, socially embraced or profitable a tourism initiative is, sustainability cannot be fully materialized if it is not politically fully supported (Bramwell, 2011; McCool et al., 2013).



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The image features a large, white, stylized number '4' centered on a dark blue, textured background. The background has a painterly, watercolor-like quality with various shades of blue and some darker, almost black, spots and splatters. The number '4' is rendered in a clean, modern, sans-serif font. The overall composition is abstract and artistic.

# Chapter 4

## <sup>3</sup>The Co-creation of a Pandemic Tourist Experience: The Case of Belitung, Indonesia

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## 4.I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses how the notion of a ‘New Normal’ for tourism – a dominant discourse on the national level – manifested and influenced host-guest interactions as part of experience co-creation in a cultural tourism village on the Indonesian island destination of Belitung. We focused on the way the tourists and hosts constantly negotiated the boundaries of what was acceptable, and what was not, hence contributes to the literature by elucidating how power operates around and through interactions in the experience co-creation, particularly in the time of COVID-19 pandemic.

Indonesian tourism is no stranger to crises. In the past decades, SARS, Volcanic eruptions, a tsunami and terrorist bombings have disrupted Indonesia’s tourism development (Rindrasih et al., 2019). The current ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has, however, inflicted an unprecedented blow to Indonesian tourism. Its emergence in late 2019 halted the Indonesian tourism industry (Olivia et al., 2020), and with the seemingly elusive end of the pandemic, it will continue to negatively impact the industry for some time to come. The UNWTO reported a 74% drop in global international arrivals by the end of 2020 (Matsuura & Saito, 2022), and a similar decline has been noted in Indonesia, with a mere 4.052.923 international tourist arrivals in 2020, 75% less than the 16.1 million recorded the previous year (Kemenparekraf, 2021). After the lockdown was gradually lifted in June 2020, Indonesian tourism slowly started to recover, however this was mostly due to the gradual revival of domestic tourism (Pramana et al., 2021).

The Indonesian government’s initial response to the pandemic was criticized at home and abroad for being slow, or even denying the looming pandemic (Lindsey & Mann, 2020). However, as the pandemic progressed, the government began to impose several stricter public health interventions and mobility restrictions to try to curb the spreading of the virus, starting with the Indonesian capital Jakarta on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 (Wahid, 2020). These restrictions included the closure of tourism destinations in Indonesia, which further stalled the industry (Cahyadi & Newsome, 2021), which was already suffering from the lack of tourists’ willingness to travel in the middle of a pandemic. Recognizing the increasing toll of these measures on the Indonesian tourism, as early as May 2020, the Indonesian president proposed the ‘reopening’ of the tourism sector (Ihsanuddin, 2020), which then incited intense discussions between proponents and opponents of ‘opening up’ tourism activities. These discourses converged around the notion of a ‘New Normal’ (Pratiwi & Mahmudatussa’adah, 2021) that the tourism industry had to adapt to in order to transition out of the phase of ‘emergency’ into some level of recovery. This involved adapting to changing

governmental restrictions on public life and mobility, including mask-wearing and social distancing, and embracing new hygiene protocols.

While the pandemic has greatly affected the tourism industry as a whole, the notion of a 'New Normal' has particularly impacted the characteristics and possibilities of human interactions as part of tourism activities (Cavagnaro et al., 2021; Huijbens, 2020). The set of new norms or even 'lifestyles' that have emerged alongside governmental restrictions during the pandemic have the potential to alter how people behave and interact in tourism settings, which is of vital consequence for the co-creation of tourism experiences (Campos et al., 2018; Leclercq et al., 2016). The concept of co-creation is particularly relevant in a tourism context, where the creation of unique and memorable experiences involves active participation by the customer, and a sense of connection to the experience (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Leclercq et al., 2016). The idea that tourists are the designers of their own experiences, in interaction with providers, has been discussed in tourism literatures over the last couple of decades (Campos et al., 2018). This is seen as indicative of a 'second generation' experience economy where 'the personal meaning derived from a co-creation experience is what determines the value to the individual' (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 14). However, the co-creation of experiences in tourism should ideally benefit both tourists and hosts (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

The impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on interactions between tourists and hosts has the potential to create, or exacerbate, unequal power dynamics. As both hosts and tourists have limited 'options' under pandemic circumstances, they are compelled to compromise and make concessions to still be able to co-create tourism experiences while at the same time staying safe from the virus. As a result, new facets of the power dynamics between tourists and hosts are produced by the unique social, political, and material circumstances of the pandemic. Some of these dynamics become visible in the development of new gazes of both host and tourist, where they both try to exert control and authority to discipline and normalize their counterparts (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Lin & Fu, 2021). These gazes, albeit subjective and flawed (Larsen & Urry, 2011; Urry, 1992), function as a foundation for how they will interact with each other.

We chose Terong tourism village on the island of Belitung as a case study for several reasons. Firstly, it is part of Indonesia's 10 top priority destinations (Pratama, 2019) and was recently acknowledged as one of UNESCO's Global Geoparks in Indonesia (Cahyadi & Newsome, 2021). Secondly, it has been growing in popularity with domestic tourists, and due to its relatively low rate of infections it offered both an

attractive, relatively safe, and convenient tourism destination for residents in Jakarta, the epicenter of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia.

## 4.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 4.2.I. Experience co-creation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Co-creation as a concept encourages a more active role for consumers (tourists) in collaborating with companies or individual hosts in creating their own experiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). While the concept of co-creation originated in the field of marketing, it has received growing attention from tourism scholars (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014, p. 644) define co-creation as “... the joint, collaborative, concurrent, peer-like process of producing new value, both materially and symbolically”. In addition, these values that emerge from the process should be mutually beneficial for all parties involved (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Hence, co-creating experiences and values will be in the interest of not only tourists but also the hosts.

In the co-creation process hosts and tourists are actively participate in an engagement platform or service system (online and offline) which can be described as a specific activity, place, and time where the co-creation processes take place (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). These processes can occur in *pre-travel*, *on-site* and *post-travel phases* (Neuhofer et al., 2012). In a nutshell, the host (producer) can only offer a value proposition, in which active tourist involvement is required to turn the value proposition into actual value, which the tourist derives from the meaning making of their experiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). In this study we focused only on *on-site* experience co-creation to examine and observe the negotiation of the circumstances of the pandemic ‘New Normal’ in a cultural tourism setting, where meaningful interactions between tourists and hosts are central to tourism offerings.

Previous studies on co-creation have identified *interaction* at the core of co-creation (Campos et al., 2018; Leclercq et al., 2016). This means that tourists are no longer assumed to be passive spectators gazing from the sidelines but acknowledged as active performers and co-producers of tourism encounters (Edensor, 2000, 2001). Moreover, the (re)positioning of tourists to the forefront of their own tourism experience creation has invited some scholars to point to the power inequalities potentially present in the experience co-creation process, where tourists are seen as susceptible to the domination of the hosts and as a consequence tourists should be ‘emancipated’ to create their own tourism experiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Prahalad & Ramas-

wamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Other studies have argued that power asymmetry in co-creation potentially give rise to opportunistic actions which may put one of the involved parties at a disadvantage (Edvardsson et al., 2011).

The evolving conceptualization of the tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011) offers a lens through which to examine power dynamics in interactions between tourists and hosts in the process of co-creating touristic experiences. The concept of the tourist gaze encompasses the way that tourists view the people and places they visit (Stone & Nyaupane, 2019), and how locals and tourism providers in turn view the tourists they receive (Gillespie, 2006; Maoz, 2006). The concept was originally developed to illustrate the tourist experience as one of primarily visual consumption, and that tourism, institutionally, produces a particular way of seeing the world, organizing sites into sights, and constructing and capitalizing on the consumption of the visually different and the extraordinary (Urry 1990; Larsen & Urry, 2011). It has been argued that through this process “some things/ideas are powerfully and/or commercially made dominant, while others are subjugated, silenced or ignored” (Hollinshead, 1999, p. 9) if they do not conform to a favoured destination image. As such, the concept of the gaze has been used to frame power relations in tourism, both in terms of the asymmetry of power between those who gaze and the objects of their gaze, and in terms of the considerable social forces that shape and authorize such gazes (Stone & Nyaupane, 2019; Chan, 2006). The early conceptualization of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990) may have described patterns of consumption characteristic of the early days of mass tourism well but received a great deal of criticism for the way it rendered the objects of the gaze (most often residents of the Global South) passive and voiceless (Caton & Santos, 2009). Responding to this critique, new theorizations emerged that emphasized that the gaze is mutual, contested, and negotiated (Chhabra, 2010; Maoz, 2006), and that both tourists and locals may variously be the target or agent of power (Cheong & Miller, 2000). Another avenue of critique was concerned with the view of the tourist as a passive spectator, and the failing of the tourist gaze to capture changing patterns of tourism behaviour (Campos et al. 2018) resulting in its bracketing out of more active, embodied and multisensory engagements with touristic environments (Edensor, 2001; Crouch, 2002). The so-called performance turn in tourism scholarship in the early 2000s re-conceptualized tourism as “a form of *performance* imbedded in social praxis [...] in contrast to a traditional view of tourism informed by the paradigm of *the gaze*” (Campos et al. 2018, p.387, italics in original). The emphasis of the performance turns on the tourist’s active involvement in the *doing* of tourism places and experiences, as opposed to just *seeing* them, resonates with the notion of co-creation. However, more recent theorizations of the touristic gaze have drawn on the performance turn in its understanding of the gaze as an example of ritualized performance in tourism, illustrated for instance by practices of photography embedded

in social media (James et al., 2019) Whereas promotional artefacts and place-myths (and their reproduction by tourists) may shape the tourist gaze and thus interactions with the destination, tourists 'also enact and inscribe places with their own stories and follow their own paths' (Larsen, 2010, p.322).

In the context of the present COVID-19 pandemic, the construction of a 'New Normal', involves the establishment, negotiation, and contestation of new and evolving behavioral norms designed to diminish the risk of contracting the virus. In this sense, the 'New Normal' was not only repressive through the enforcement of lockdowns and other mobility restrictions, but also productive (Cheong & Miller, 2000) in that it engendered a new set of norms for social interaction and thus gave rise to alternate gazes for host and tourist. The New Normal as a set of social and material circumstances shaped by risk and anxiety may lead to a fear and avoidance of travelling altogether (Zheng, Luo & Richie, 2021), or a display of more 'conservative' holiday behavior (Li et al., 2020). Some studies have identified increased animosity of hosts towards tourists (Kour et al., 2020; Tse et al., 2021; Wing et al., 2022), or argued that the pandemic has caused mistrust between hosts and guests, and hampered tourists' willingness to interact with hosts (Kour et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). (Korstanje, 2020) even suggested that this pandemic could be the end of hospitality as we know it.

However, our research paints a more nuanced and hopeful picture. Below, we discuss how power shapes the experience co-creation dynamics in the time of COVID-19 pandemic through examination of the mutual pandemic gaze enactment between tourists and hosts in the setting of a tourism village in Indonesia.

### 4.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study followed a small group of youth tourists engaging in volunteering activities alongside experiencing cultural & natural attractions in Belitung. The group visited Belitung from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2021. They stayed and conducted most of their activities in Terong, one of the pioneering tourism villages in Belitung, offering cultural and rural based tourism and volunteering experiences.

The empirical data discussed in this article is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of the host community and members of the tourist group, in addition to participant observation of their tourism and volunteering activities. Five members of the host community were invited to participate based on their availability for an interview and level of direct involvement in hosting the tourist group. Three of the participants were male and acted as local guides for the tourist group, the other

2 were female and were homestay hosts. Eight tourists participated in the interview, 4 females and 4 males, all residing in Java and Bali, two of the most populous and heavily impacted islands by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, and later was translated to English. The interviews covered 2 main questions: how they perceived their overall experiences of interacting and engaging with their counterparts and how the pandemic's 'New Normal' had altered their tourism experiences, especially in their mutual interactions. The interview data was thematically coded and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti).

Through the interviews and observations, we identified 5 scheduled group activities that can be considered platforms for experience co-creation. For the purposes of this study, an engagement platform is understood to be a specific activity or setting that offers potential for meaningful interactions and engagements leading to experience co-creation (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). These activities were *becoming local for a day*, *education games*, *village beach activities*, *island hopping*, and *morning hiking*.

In the following part of the article, we begin by discussing experience co-creation between tourists and hosts in Terong village by focusing on the engagement platforms, followed by a discussion of the negotiation of the pandemic gaze within these activities.

### 4.4. FINDINGS

We found that the engagement platforms – discussed in detail below - gave rise to experience co-creation between hosts and tourists, as well as among the tourists as a group. We found that in general the interactions were hardly affected by COVID-19 health protocols, in the sense that both hosts and tourists showed willingness to adapt and (re)adjust their stance towards pandemic guidelines, such as social distancing and wearing a face mask, if it benefited their interactions to do so, and if the practical circumstances made it difficult. We begin by discussing the experience co-creation process in the activities, highlighting what both tourists and hosts found most valuable about these experiences. Following that, we will discuss the role of the pandemic gaze within tourist-host interactions and outline the social and environmental factors that shaped the enactment of the pandemic gaze amongst the participants.

#### 4.4.I. Co-creating the experience on-site

Tourists and hosts shared slightly different opinions about which activities were more meaningful for them. The immersive experience offering and the volunteering nature of some of the activities led to significant ‘learning’ experiences from both sides, where they mutually benefited from their counterpart’s resources and actions. While the tourists mostly valued ‘becoming local for a day’ as a meaningful interaction with their hosts, ‘education games’ were mentioned by the hosts as their most meaningful interaction with the tourists. Below we describe these activities and the experiences that hosts and tourists gained from them.

The first activity that was frequently highlighted by our interview participants was ‘*Becoming local for a day*’; this activity is potentially the *hallmark* of the traditional and immersive cultural experiences that the Terong village has to offer. This activity gave tourists opportunities to delve into their homestay host’s daily lives by participating in their daily activities. As different hosts have different occupational backgrounds, the tourists experienced different activities depending on who their homestay host was. Two tourists stayed with a host who owns a catfish farm. In the morning the tourist went together with the host to their fish farm and experienced fish farming activities first-hand. As one tourist remarked.

*“I’ve never handled live fish, let alone prepared it to be cooked, I’ve never really cooked it.” (Tourist01)*

The tourist felt that she learned a lot from this activity.

*“It’s a new skill (to safely handle catfish) and to learn how to clean the fish correctly. It was the most valuable experience for me” (Tourist01)*

Other tourists stayed with a crop farmer. Although they were not able to be fully engaged with the farming activities because they were preoccupied with other activities, they still valued that their host was welcoming them to their farm. One of the tourists said:

*“When I came back (late), they were grilling food, very fun, there was a hut, and we were eating while sitting in a circle. The point is it really feels like a family, even dining was done together, while at home I never eat together, always by myself.” (Tourist 03)*

These becoming local for a day activity naturally offered the tourists an opportunity to learn more from their hosts about their work and daily activities, but also about their



culture and values. These activities also potentially offered a learning opportunity for the hosts. For example, the tourists who stayed with the catfish farmer showed them how to make fish nuggets, a new way to serve their product:

*“When they showed us how to make a catfish nugget, I was very happy that I can make it [...] we can have a new product to sell [...] and it taste so good!” (Host02)*

The second activity that was frequently highlighted by our participants was education games. This activity is a part of the tourist volunteering activity, focused on re-introducing local customs to the local children using educational games such as riddles and role-play. This activity certainly has left lasting impressions on the hosts, as all of them highlighted this activity. One of the hosts expressed their appreciation by stating,

*‘What impressed me a lot is that they managed to (re)educate our children on our traditional games in a modern way! It can be beneficial for our community but also has potential as a new tourist activity, as now (in the time of pandemic) we are more focused on hosting private (small) family guests.’ (Host03)*

Conversely, even though the program was intended for the local host community, the tourists also gained a valuable experience from executing the activity, as expressed by one tourist.

*‘The children here, they ask for it (participating in the activities), I want to run a race! I want this competition or that competition, that’s it. It’s like I can do this, I can do that, they want to show off their potential or talent indirectly. So that’s different (from where I come from), I rarely find this kind of children’s (enthusiastic) responses.’ (Tourist01).*

The third activity that potentially led to a meaningful interaction between hosts and tourists was exploring the village’s beach before sunset when the tide was low. The activities including planting mangrove, clam hunting and enjoying the sunset. The local guide showed the tourists where and how to look for clams and where to plant mangrove trees. Both the hosts and tourists considered this activity one of their more meaningful interactions they had with each other, albeit for different reasons. One tourist summarized his experience learning the ‘local way’ of clam hunting as follows:

*'It's just fun when you're looking for the clams. I (was told) to look for the clams by rubbing my feet into the sand, after rubbing them, if I found them, I was lucky, if not, I looked for them again. It's a game of luck!' (Tourist08)*

While the tourist appreciated the 'learning' aspect of the interaction, the hosts felt a sense of community pride:

*'Our interaction include introducing the types of clams, because the clams here are quite different, then we start planting mangroves, but what makes us even more excited is when they see our beach, (we felt) it's pretty good even if we, local people here are used to it, but when they (tourist) said 'Wow', ....it means our beach has a value, it's not inferior to Tanjung Tinggi beach (main beach in Belitung), right?, so there's a sense of pride when we were there!' (Host03)*

Another activity was island hopping. This involved the tourists leaving the village to go on a boat trip to explore the nearby beaches and small islands that dotted the northwestern part of Belitung. Island-hopping is regarded as one of the 'must do' activities for tourists who visit Belitung. One tourist described that his interaction with fellow tourists during this activity evoked a sense of 'communitas' amongst the group members.

*'It's the island hopping, because apart from the fact that we snorkeled, traveled to the islands, I really felt the sense of togetherness and intimacy among us (Tourists08)'*

The last activity that served as an engagement platform was morning hiking. This activity involved tourists exploring the village's hill at the crack of dawn, where they enjoyed the sunrise and viewed some of Belitung's most picturesque views from its peak. While the 'planned' activities were expected to give rise to meaningful experiences, some 'unintended' deviations from the activity plan also appeared to lead to meaningful interactions between the tourists themselves. One tourist recalled the sense of 'adventure' that he experienced unexpectedly when he and a few other members of the group were late for the morning hiking meet-up and had to catch up with the rest of the group.

*'It was fun! Because we missed it (the departure time), as a result, we kept looking for (the other tourists) in places we had never been to before. But using our instinct to follow the trails, we finally found them. At that time*

*there was no phone (reception) there, hence no one could share their location. I just counted on my instinct!’ (Tourist08)*

### 4.4.2. Negotiating the pandemic gaze

Both tourists and hosts are gazing at each other, to guarantee their needs and objectives are met in their touristic interactions through ‘disciplining’ their counterparts. While social-economic and cultural differences construct broader tourist gazes (Urry & Larsen, 2011), personal expectations and motivations also shape individual performances of alternate gazes (Samarathunga & Cheng, 2020), which also influences the construction of the tourist gaze, more generally. What we term a pandemic gaze is shaped by the motivation and expectations of both hosts and tourists to attain a valuable tourism experience and to avoid a COVID-19 infection at the same time. Our findings show that the actor’s internalization and interpretation of ‘New Normal’ are central to the construction of the pandemic gaze. We found that there were at least two prominent factors that contributed to shape the pandemic gaze prior to the encounters between host and tourist in Belitung. Firstly, a sense of ‘pandemic fatigue’, which resulted from both the prolonged pandemic and the government’s inconsistent restrictions. Secondly, the perception that Belitung constituted a ‘safe zone’ away from the virus, which was informed by the relatively low infection rate locally. During the interactions on-site, two additional factors also shaped the ongoing negotiation of the pandemic gaze between hosts and tourists. These factors included site-related impracticalities as well as the convivial nature of the relations between tourists and host families and community members.

#### Pandemic fatigue

At least in the beginning of the pandemic both tourists and hosts showed a general willingness to observe the health protocols and measures put in place by the government. However, for some of the participants, both the prolonged period of the pandemic and the inconsistent government policies impacted their adherence to the health protocols and measures over time. In the following quote, a tourist explicitly expressed his weariness of the ongoing pandemic:

*‘(Me) and all (people) from where I come from are fed up with this (pandemic); now they even considered it (new normal) as something that is abnormal!’ (Tourist05)*

In the same vein, a homestay host also expressed her frustration with the pandemic restrictions.

*'No, honestly, I don't want to, I don't want to follow (government lockdown) again, even though I'm just tired, I don't want to follow it, I'm bored, I'm bored, frankly I'm bored (Host05)*

Half of the tourists that we interviewed explicitly expressed their concerns about the inconsistent government policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic. An example of the seemingly 'irrational' and inconsistent policies was the initial government plan on 25 February 2020, just after the outbreak of the pandemic, to pay 72 billion rupiah (USD 5.2 million) for tourism influencers to promote the country (The Jakarta Post & Gorbiano, 2020); a decision that was soon withdrawn (Zaking, 2020). Another concern was with the apparent COVID-19 protocol violations from government officials themselves:

*'Seeing the news on Instagram and television, people started to leave (their homes), furthermore the officials, the government, who should lead by example are breaking their own rules instead, so that's it. That's where the peak of my frustration is, I don't care! The government is not consistent in implementing health protocols and their regulations are confusing and unclear.'* (Tourist08)

*'In my opinion, the most difficult thing to do is to follow government policies that are unstable, irrational, wishy-washy (Tourist06)*

Resonating with their tourist counterparts, nearly all hosts found it difficult to follow government policies because they found them confusing, inconsistent, or simply argued that they didn't make sense:

*'At the beginning the government conducted strict tracking to identify infected people but nowadays I rarely heard of it anymore' (Host03)*

*'All these Health protocols are too much, sometimes it doesn't make sense to me, right? Including the use of 2-3 layers of masks, for me it is very uncomfortable!' (Host01)*

The combination of both a prolonged pandemic period and the inconsistent government policies resulted in 'conditional' compliance to the new norms and measures put in place by the government, in the form of subjective and partial observance of what they considered as more 'rational' parts of the measures and norms.

### The safe zone

Both tourists and hosts felt that Belitung was a 'safe' zone, a feeling that was confirmed by the first author's personal experience of traveling to Belitung on the same day as the tourists from the capital Jakarta. A stark difference in compliance to the health protocols was immediately noticed. While in Jakarta, especially in its airport a strict implementation of the 'New Normal' was apparent and resulted in a clear sense that we were indeed still in a health crisis, the researcher's experience after arriving in Belitung was almost entirely the opposite. Strict measures were still visible in Belitung airport, but once the first author reached the city and particularly the rural areas, the sense of being in a COVID-19 pandemic receded. Only a handful of locals were wearing facemask, the town and coffee shops were still quite busy, and people went about their daily activities almost as if there was no pandemic. Our observations of the rather relaxed implementation of COVID-19 new norms and protocols in Belitung was further confirmed by both hosts and the tourists. As one host narrated.

*'Sometimes, we, the villagers, kind of forget that we are still in a pandemic! We only realize (again) that we were still in pandemic when we watch news on television.'* (Host01)

One tourist also expressed her take on the health protocols implementation in Belitung:

*'It's more relaxed, even when I took a photo with the Regent, I was told it's okay to open the mask and when you get together (with locals), you're told to just open the mask, it's okay'* (Tourist03)

This 'relaxed' implementation of COVID-19 protocols in Belitung and Terong tourism village in general resulted from the relatively low COVID-19 infection rate in the whole island and especially in the rural parts of the island such as the Terong village. This condition significantly affected the construction of the hosts' pandemic gaze, and the tourists', prior to and during their on-site tourism encounters.

A majority of the hosts we interviewed explicitly mentioned the low COVID-19 cases in their village as a 'leeway' of practicing a more relaxed adherence to the health protocols, especially when interacting with tourists:

*'Seeing the safe condition of Belitung and Eastern Belitung (neighboring district), I think it is okay for not adhering to protocols occasionally during interaction with tourists.'* (Host04)

Another host who is also the local community leader expressed his ‘conviction’ that there were no COVID-19 infections in his village.

*‘When interacting with fellow villagers, we are not implementing health protocols, because we are confident that we are safe, very safe!’ (Host01)*

He further admitted that this sense of ‘local safety’ also affected how they interact with incoming tourists.

*‘Because we are not practicing (health protocols) in our daily lives, but suddenly with outsiders (tourists) coming in we sometimes forgot (to implement health protocols when interacting with tourists)!’ (Host01)*

While these feelings of being in a ‘safe zone’ were dominant among the hosts, tourists had more nuanced reactions, especially related to the health protocols’ implementations in the destination. Three of 8 tourists expressed that - given the low COVID-19 cases in Belitung - the relaxed protocols were to some extent ‘acceptable’ and ‘justified’:

*‘I sometimes decide my level of protocols adherence based on what zones this destination belongs to... if they belong to a green zone with low covid cases then I can tolerate relaxed health protocols implementation’ (Tourist01)*

However, other tourists explicitly expressed that being in the ‘green zone’ is not an excuse for not implementing the health protocols and thus expected a stricter implementation of the health protocols from the hosts:

*‘In my opinion, the green zone area should not be used as a benchmark, because we can still be infected in a green zone and not infected even if we are in the black zone, so there is no certainty about that, zoning should not be used as benchmark!’ (Tourist07)*

One tourist even expressed her initial concern of these relaxed health protocols prior to her trip:

*‘At the beginning, I was really paranoid, I said to my parents, “should I cancel the trip?” because the group leader already said in a meeting (before the trip) the situation here, like wearing masks here is still lacking, and so on’ (Tourist03)*

## Chapter 4

Besides agreeing with a stricter implementation of the health protocols, 3 out of 8 tourists also further pointed out the necessity of a strict health protocols to not only protect themselves but also to protect the local community from the potential infection from the tourists that mostly come from areas with much higher covid infection cases:

*'Yes, I am worried because we don't know, it could be the closest person that spread the virus. Especially, it is like us (outsiders), oh they're not afraid, even though we're from various regions (with much higher covid cases), we come to them and then they just enjoy it (interacting with us as if there is no covid). I'm afraid that we will be the ones that infect them even though it's actually a green zone here.'* (Tourist01)

### Impracticalities of the setting and convivial relations

Clearly, during touristic and volunteering activities of hosts and tourists the implementation of COVID-19 health protocols was inconsistent and, in some instances, non-existent. While both the 'pandemic fatigue' and the notion of a 'safe zone' shaped both hosts' and tourists' pandemic gazes - even prior to their actual encounter - also other on-site conditions played a role. What we denote as 'setting impracticality' and a 'convivial relations' also forced both hosts and tourists to negotiate their pandemic gazes even further.

For example, in the *becoming local for a day* activity, the implementation of the health protocols was almost nonexistent as it was impractical or even impossible. For some tourists, this activity started with 'fish-farming' activities (outdoor) and finished by cooking and having lunch together with the host in their home. During this activity there was no social distancing and facemasks were not used. One of the hosts expressed her dilemma in trying to implement the protocols when interacting with the tourists.

*'It's hard (to keep distance). They're always close by when I cook in the kitchen, asking "what are you cooking?", and "Is there anything that I can help with". They help me cook hence have to be close by.'* (Host02)

The size of the family kitchen made social distancing impossible. Gradually tourists also stopped wearing face masks:

*'They wear facemask on the first day, but not anymore in the following days'* (Host02)

Consequently, she wore a

*'Mask on the first day, but on the second and third day not anymore'. (Host02)*

This host also explained that she wanted to create a 'family' experience for tourists staying in her homestay:

*'Actually, I want it to be implemented (health protocols), but because of the situation at home, it seems a bit difficult if you wear a mask (...) I'm afraid wearing facemask will make the situation awkward and creates a distance, so it does not feels like a family anymore.' (Host02)*

Although she wanted to implement rigorous health protocols, in the end the way she interacted and hosted the tourists before and during the pandemic did not differ much.

*'No, just like there is no pandemic, apart from the room, which is always cleaned, sprayed (with disinfectant), every time they leave, that is the only difference, the rest is the same. Just like before, nothing (much) has changed'. (Host02)*

Based on our observation and the interview shown above, hosts have deeply internalized the tourist gaze, one that portrays the host as a 'friendly local' that treats every tourist as part of their family. Hence hosts were even willing to compromise COVID-19 protocols, and thus their safety, for the sake of living up to the 'supposed' tourist expectations. At the same time tourists played along with this 'family script', evident from how they 'dropped' their masks just after one day staying with the host. In the education games, just like the other activities that we observed, rigorous implementation of basic health protocols was also absent. Although almost every participant eventually wore a facemask, for much of the activity all of them sat shoulder to shoulder without any distance. One tourist recalled her experience in trying to get local children to wear a facemask when interacting with them.

*'When I was trying to get the children to participate in our activities, I said: "if you want to join us you have to use a facemask"; the children then replied "do we really have to wear a facemask? Why is it that we must wear a facemask if we want to join the game"?' (Tourist03)*

On the one hand the local children initial reluctance to wear a mask was met by the tourist's 'insistence' of practicing a stricter health protocol where in the end the children conceded because they wanted to participate in the game. On the other hand, tourists also had to compromise if they still wanted their planned volunteering



activities to go ahead. Most of these activities were conducted in a type of ‘communal hut’ which is traditionally used by the locals as a lounge to have conversations with fellow villagers, in this setting ‘social distancing’ is impossible:

*‘There’s no way one hundred percent I can keep my distance. As a practical example, yesterday when we went to agrotourism (farm), we made a promotional video for Terong Village. During the making of the video, we always got close, when we wanted to eat, we sat close together, small things like that are actually not allowed ...but there will always be a compromise.’*  
(Tourist04)

Apart from the physical impracticalities, both hosts and tourists also pointed out their restraint of being ‘assertive’ in voicing their stance. They did not want to be viewed as ‘offensive’ by others, which could potentially ruin the ‘intimate’ relationship that they were trying to build. Hence both hosts and tourists were considerate:

*‘No, I never say like ‘hey keep your distance!’ never, it’s just not in our custom to be like that (aggressive/outspoken)’* (Host03)

We are guest here, I don’t want to be considered as impolite, especially where the area is still conservative!’ (Tourist03)

In the end both hosts and tourists chose to continuously (re)negotiate their pandemic gazes and show ‘self-discipline’ when confronted with situations where their counterparts implement a different version of health protocols than expected:

*‘So, it’s more about avoiding conflicts through self-discipline, instead of making people uncomfortable (by being assertive). Let’s just keep quiet, the important thing is that we take care of ourselves first!’* (Host03)

*‘If (the other person) doesn’t wear a mask, it is fine with me, as long as I am wearing a mask!’* (Tourist02)

However, as this negotiation process continuously occurred throughout their interactions, their ‘self-discipline’ attempts were not always successful, in the sense that they at times still ended up exposed to their counterpart’s gaze and acted accordingly.

## 4.5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 4.5.I. Discussion

The sheer impact of COVID-19 is predicted to be potentially transformative for the tourism industry (Gössling et al., 2020). However, how the pandemic will change the industry, especially in the long run, is still up for debate, as the pandemic is still ongoing, and we still must adapt to the various constraints that the pandemic imposes on our everyday lives.

Various studies have been conducted on how this pandemic has altered host-guest interactions (Kour et al., 2020; Wing et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Some of these studies highlighted how the ‘fear’ of getting infected has increased hostility between tourist and host (Tse et al., 2021) and give rise to more limited contact between them (Kour et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021) which potentially will constitute a setback for the ‘inclusive tourism’ agenda which is built upon developing meaningful interactions between them. However, in our study, this trend of limited and sometimes even hostile interactions between host and guest in this time of COVID-19 pandemic was absent. For multiple reasons that we elaborated above, both the hosts and tourists were keen to keeping their interactions meaningful and pleasant, although they sometimes had to compromise and adhere to the health protocols that were meant to protect them from COVID-19 infections.

Our findings also revealed the dynamic power-relations that shaped the interaction and thus experience co-creation in our case. The ‘New Normal’, which emerged as the dominant discourse surrounded COVID-19 and tourism, is using subject’s wellbeing to rationalize the various restrictions and introduction of new norms, akin to Foucault’s conceptualization of biopolitics/biopower, a form of power that can be thought as “guarantees itself their subjection by taking the subject’s wellbeing into account” (Adorno, 2014, p. 104). The exercise of this ‘power over life’ has had an effect on the population level, but in our case failed to dominate hosts and tourists’ interactions, when confronted with the settings’ limitations and the existing local paradigm and practices that were in contrast with the new norms. In our case, it was clear that deeply rooted cultural traits of Indonesian tourists such as family and group orientation, lack of physical distance and the value placed on consensus (Reisinger et al., 1997) played a significant part in how they negotiated and thus co-created their tourism experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Our examination of the negotiation of the ‘pandemic gazes’ by host and tourist, especially through their veiled resistance disguised as self-discipline, has displayed how both

tourists, being domestic, and their hosts have shared a similar value on conviviality, have mutually tried to avoid direct conflict with each other, which is deeply embedded in their shared culture. This finding resonates with earlier studies (Moufakkir, 2011; Stone & Nyaupane, 2019) that highlighted the crucial role of culture in the construction of touristic gazes. This finding is also to some extent in line with the notion of a broader 'Asian Paradigm' (Chon et al., 2020) where collectivism, harmony and conflict-avoidance are highly regarded in the Asian culture in general, but also in the tourism realm, influencing tourism interactions. Our findings also confirm the notion that the host is not always 'dominated' by the tourists (Cheong & Miller, 2000) where in many instances both host and tourist are susceptible to influences from each other's gazes in any given time, and thus both tourists and host gazes also shaped each other's adherence to the 'New Normal' as the overarching dominant discourse in tourism during this pandemic time.

### 4.5.2. Conclusion

In this chapter we investigated how the COVID-19 pandemic, in engendering a discourse of the 'New Normal' for tourism, impacted tourism experience co-creation in a cultural tourism village on the Indonesian island of Belitung. Our main findings revealed how power operated, was resisted and eventually negotiated in the way that while the pandemic so far has been devastating for tourism in general, the adherence to pandemic restrictions lessened over the course of the tourists' stay and eventually had little effect on the experience co-creation on the ground. This was due to a combination of factors, including the wish of both tourists and hosts for convivial and meaningful encounters based on mutual cultural norms of conviviality and hospitality. Encounters were also informed by a sense of pandemic fatigue, the sense of being in a safe zone, and the physical impracticalities of social distancing and mask wearing.

Despite the rapidly growing COVID-19 literature, there is still a lot that we need to learn to fully grasp the current and possible future impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the experience co-creation of hosts and tourists. It is imperative to understand how the pandemic may impact how hosts and tourists interact with each other and how they engage in the co-creation of tourism experiences, which may involve the negotiation or resistance of post-pandemic social and touristic relations. Such an understanding is a necessary puzzle piece in future visions of more inclusive and sustainable tourism.

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5

# Chapter 5

## Conclusion and Discussion





Tourism in Indonesia experienced remarkable growth prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a sizeable 16.11 million international tourists visiting the country in 2019 (Julita, 2020). Recognizing the potential of tourism as a catalyst for economic expansion, the Indonesian government has placed significant emphasis on this sector, evident in its tourism policy and investment initiatives. Consequently, Indonesia's tourism development has witnessed rapid progress, marked by substantial investments in infrastructure, destination enhancement, and the expansion of the hospitality industry.

To replicate the success of Bali's tourism, the government introduced in 2016 the 10 New Bali tourism development program (Salna, 2017). This program aimed to foster the growth of ten new prospective tourist destinations throughout the country, with the objective of establishing world-class tourism sites that would attract a larger number of international visitors to Indonesia and diversify tourism revenue beyond Bali. However, in 2019, the president undertook a strategic shift in the development plans of the 10 New Bali program, subsequently rebranded as the "10 Priority Destinations," focusing resources on only five locations, now known as the "Five Super Priority Destinations" alongside five other Priority Destinations.

Despite its growth, the Indonesian tourism industry has been confronted with various crises. The country has grappled with both man-made and natural disasters, which have not come without substantial human and economic losses (Rindrasih & Witte, 2020). However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a crisis of an unprecedented scale for Indonesian tourism. The substantial decline of nearly 80% in international tourist arrivals resulted in the loss of over 400,000 jobs in the tourism sector in 2020 alone (Kemenparekraf, 2021).

This thesis has critically examined the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism development discourses and policies in Indonesia. Additionally, it explored the impact of social restrictions during the pandemic on host-guest relationships in Belitung, one of the original priority destinations. The chapters illustrate the impact of the pandemic in the form of short-term mitigation initiatives, but also explore its longer-term influence (or lack thereof) on the vision and implementation of what was originally the 10 New Bali project.

The thesis contributes to the ongoing debates about tourism development in Indonesia, while also aligning with the broader international literature on sustainable tourism. The findings of this study, which will be elaborated upon in this chapter, hold relevance for both the Indonesian context and the wider debate about the future of the tourism industry.

The thesis posed the question:

“How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced tourism policies and development in Indonesia?”

Three sub questions were formulated to address the main research question:

RQ1: What tourism discourses emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia?

RQ2: How and to what extent did these discourses influence tourism policymaking in Indonesia?

RQ3: To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic influence host-guest relationships in Belitung?

These three sub-research questions were addressed in three empirical chapters. In Chapter 2, I first examined the discursive processes which resulted in the emergence of certain dominant discourses and narratives about the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for Indonesian tourism. In Chapter 3, I studied how these discourses influenced tourism policymaking, both in terms of mitigation strategies and the broader tourism development trajectory. Chapter 4, finally, focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced host-tourist relationships and the co-creation of experiences in Belitung.

### 5.1. ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In what follows I will outline the findings and conclusions of each of the three empirical chapters to answer the three sub questions. Following that, I will elaborate on how the findings discussed in the previous three empirical chapters collectively provide an answer to the central research question.

#### 1. *Re-negotiating the future for Indonesian Tourism after COVID-19: Sustainability as the New Normal?*

The first empirical chapter focused on analyzing the debate about tourism during the initial six months of the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining discussions across various platforms, such as webinars and media texts, involving key stakeholders from government, businesses, and academia, the dominant discourses that emerged in

response to the crisis were identified. The concept of the ‘New Normal’ emerged as a prominent discourse, framing the entire debate during this period, with the notion of sustainable tourism gradually gaining importance as 2020 progressed.

Under the umbrella of the ‘New Normal’, three key issues took precedence: social distancing, health and hygiene protocols, and the concept of ‘quality tourism.’ Essentially, the ‘New Normal’ narrative revolved around finding ways to coexist with the virus, allowing for a semblance of normalcy to be restored in various aspects of life, including tourism, within the parameters of this new reality.

To some extent, the idea of the ‘New Normal’ revitalized pre-existing calls for a shift towards a more sustainable tourism industry. The implementation of social distancing measures, often associated with a ‘return to nature,’ was expected to foster a renewed appreciation for the environment and promote conservation efforts. The increased focus on hygiene and sanitation protocols reflected a growing emphasis on cleanliness and a shift towards prioritizing quality experiences over quantity. These developments suggested positive changes in the pursuit of sustainability.

However, these apparent sustainability trends were often viewed as marketing opportunities, rather than substantive changes to business models and operations. As a result, despite the promising emergence of sustainability discourses, the extent to which these narratives will translate into meaningful practical changes remains uncertain.

## 2. *COVID-19 Pandemic and Tourism Development in Indonesia: A Key Government Mitigation and Intervention analysis*

In the second empirical chapter, I examined how the Indonesian government’s main COVID-19 pandemic mitigation policies for the tourism industry unfolded and how they impacted Indonesia’s short- and long-term tourism development. The considerable and prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry in Indonesia (and globally) did not deter the Indonesian government from its pre-COVID-19 tourism development plan, focused on the 10 New Bali project. Despite the slight setback in the initial period of the pandemic, this project is still ongoing and there is evidence that its implementation has been accelerated, capitalizing on the absence of tourism activities in many of the priority destinations during the pandemic due to closed borders and mobility restrictions. These actions indicate a prioritization of recovery and growth in Indonesian tourism, overshadowing the opportunity to implement policy measures aimed at enhancing sustainability within the sector.

The empirical findings presented in this chapter indicate that, despite initial controversy, the primary mitigation policies implemented by the government, such as lockdown measures and the introduction of hygiene and sanitation standardization (CHSE), have had a partial effectiveness in rejuvenating the Indonesian tourism sector during the pandemic. The CHSE standardization and certification program garnered favorable acceptance among Indonesian tourism stakeholders, as it was perceived as a tangible government initiative to reignite the tourism industry in the country. However, the Indonesian government faced challenges in effectively communicating key aspects of the CHSE standardization and certification programs to stakeholders. Specifically, there were inadequate disclosures regarding program costs, effectiveness under persistent mobility restrictions, the nature of its status (voluntary or mandatory), and how it would continue to benefit the tourism business in the post-pandemic world. Moving forward, it is crucial for the government to address these communication gaps to ensure the program's successful implementation and continued support from the tourism industry.

### 3. *The Co-creation of Pandemic Tourist Experiences: The Case of Belitung, Indonesia*

In the third empirical chapter, I examined how emerging discourses about tourism sparked by the COVID-19 crisis, and the mitigation policies identified in the previous two chapters, influenced relations between hosts and tourists in one of the original priority destinations. The chapter explored experience co-creation in a community tourism setting. I found that the hosts and tourists were continuously negotiating what I termed a 'Pandemic Gaze' in their effort to navigate pandemic constraints in the context of homestays and group activities in a tourism village. This 'Pandemic Gaze' was conceptualized as being constituted through an internalization of discourses around the 'New Normal', and within negotiations of its new social norms and regulations. However, in practice, these new norms ultimately had little effect on the experience co-creation itself as the existing paradigms of local conviviality and hospitality - which are deeply rooted in their shared cultural traits which emphasis on collectivism, social harmony, and direct conflict avoidance - encouraged both host and tourist to compromise their stands on the new norms. The sense of being in a 'safe zone' due to relatively low COVID-19 cases in Belitung and the physical impracticality of the settings and the prolonged period of the pandemic, which resulted in pandemic 'fatigue', had also further compelled both hosts and tourists to continuously reframe and negotiate their gazes to realize their aspired individual and shared experience values.

## 5.2. HOW DID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC INFLUENCE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE AND POLICY IN INDONESIA?

In answer to the main research question, the tourism development discourse during the pandemic was characterized by the emergence of the notion of sustainability as part of the conditions of what became known as the 'New Normal'. Policies to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on tourism have focused largely on minimizing the negative economic impact of the pandemic. This involved outright denials of the potential severity of the looming pandemic in the early days, which shifted to a focus on containing the spread of the virus and later the devastating impact that mobility restrictions and lockdowns had on the Indonesian economy. However, the impact on long-term policy goals was negligible, as the Indonesian government insisted on resuming their 10 New Bali and the subsequent Five Super Priority Destinations project. On the ground in Belitung the dominant discourse of 'New Normal' and its ensuing regulations in the national levels were met with situational complexity and the 'shared' experience value aspiration from both hosts and tourists, resulting in negotiated and conditional adherence towards the COVID-19 protocols. In conclusion, the consequences of the pandemic for the tourism development discourse were insignificant in terms of the national policy trajectory, the influence of the pandemic merely 'halted' the process but not in any ways substantially altered the goals.

In an international context, the findings reflect the concerns that despite the growing urge to use the pandemic as a turning point toward a more sustainable path of development for tourism, a substantial change is unlikely to happen due to the continuing domination of what has been termed the 'growth paradigm' (Fletcher, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018) within the tourism industry, and also the more pressing needs of the tourism industry to recover from the devastating impacts of the pandemic.

## 5.3. DISCUSSION

The decision made by the World Health Organization (WHO) to lift the global health emergency status of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2023 (WHO & Duff, 2023) has had a positive impact on the recovery of international tourism, including in Indonesia. The country has experienced a notable increase in the number of international visitors. This rapid recovery, coupled with a significant decline in new infections and the implementation of various pandemic-related measures, has led the government to recently abolish the national mobility restrictions. On December 30, 2022, the Indonesian government officially lifted the final major COVID-19 mobility

restriction, known locally as PPKM (Rokom, 2022). As a result, the tourism sector in Indonesia has witnessed substantial growth and is currently on track to return to pre-pandemic levels. In the first three months of 2023, the country welcomed approximately 2.5 million international visitors, marking a 508.87% increase compared to the same period in 2022 (Kemenparekraf, 2023). This positive trend has encouraged the government to set a target of hosting 9 million international visitors by the end of 2023, which is more than half of the 2019 figure of 16.11 million international visitors (Purwowidhu, 2023).

To shed light on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent recovery, my research focused on the period from March 2020, when the outbreak was transitioning into a global pandemic, to March 2022, when signs of the pandemic's conclusion began to emerge. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the findings of my study, examining both the retrospective and prospective aspects, in terms of: *Neoliberalism and Indonesian tourism development during the COVID-19 pandemic*, *Indonesia Tourism Beyond COVID-19 Pandemic: Sustainable Tourism or Business as Usual*, and *Co-creating a more Sustainable Tourism Future*

### 5.3.I. Neoliberalism and Indonesian tourism development during the COVID-19 pandemic

Post-Suharto's era of development in Indonesia can be characterized by an unlikely collaboration of neoliberalism and clientelism (Aspinall, 2013; Hadiz & Robison, 2005). The dominant authoritarian politics and clientelist practices, which did not disappear after the fall of Suharto in 1998, have been adapted to a more 'democratic' world and even embrace to some extent a neoliberal paradigm, particularly to gain access to global market and capital to accelerate Indonesia's development (Aspinall, 2013; Chandra, 2011). The ascendance of neoliberalism in Indonesia has presented a paradoxical challenge to the fundamental tenets of the country's economic ideology as enshrined in its constitution. Article 33.1 of the constitution explicitly emphasizes the principle of mutual assistance as the foundation of the Indonesian economy, which aligns more closely with socialist principles. Furthermore, Article 33.2 also stipulates that "production branches which are important for the state, and which affect the livelihood of the public shall be controlled by the state, (Chandra, 2011). This includes tourism development. This juxtaposition can be explained by the fact that neoliberalism in Indonesia can be seen as introduction of pragmatic economic calculation as fundamental rationale of human life organization and government practices and not the fundamental overhaul of the country's ideology basis. The embrace of neoliberal principles in government policy therefore results in a contradiction between explicit national ideology and what the government actually does (Aspinall, 2013).

Neoliberalism can be characterized by the ‘economization’ of all aspects of human activity, expanding market rationalities to other political and societal realms, including, of course, tourism (Fletcher, 2010, 2011; Bianchi 2018; Bianchi & de Man, 2020). This has led to the commodification and market-driven transformation of the Indonesian tourism sector, prioritizing profit, competitiveness, and individual choice over social and environmental considerations. The stable and ‘unchallenged’ power of government under the Suharto era is long gone. Following the Indonesian reformation in 1998, the democratization of Indonesian politics has led to each administrative regime being preoccupied with securing their continued power by leaving a legacy. As a result, most development projects, and policies, including tourism, are structured within five-year programs with successful implementation viewed as a tangible and crucial means of gaining electoral support in the presidential and legislative elections held every five years.

A notable example of how this five years ‘cycle’ influenced the strategic policymaking of Indonesian tourism can be seen in how the Indonesian Tourism Masterplan 2010-2025, drawn by the administration of the former president of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, in 2011, which mandated 20 million international tourists as the visitation target of 2025. This was brought forward and ‘accelerated’ by the current president Joko Widodo to 2019, 6 years ahead of the original plan, which eventually failed to materialize, as Indonesia only received 16.11 million international visitors in 2019. This influence is further exemplified by the initial establishment of the ‘10 New Bali’ project, based on 50 National Tourism Destinations and 88 National Strategic Tourism areas listed in the Indonesian Tourism Masterplan 2010-2025. The selection of 10 New Priority Destinations out of 50 National Tourism Destinations and the further reordering of the 10 New Bali into Five Super Priority Destinations and Five other Priority Destinations is likely to be also encouraged by the need to achieve a ‘tangible’ result by the end of current president Joko Widodo’s term in 2024 and serve as part of his legacy.

Considering that tourism policies are often formulated as a subset of broader national policies that set the framework and direction for tourism development as one of the country’s leading economic sectors (Lemy et al., 2020), the industry and its stakeholders have limited influence to formulate their own goals, strategies, and regulations (Becken, 2017; Cheong & Miller, 2000). One example can be seen in Surakarta, a cultural city destination in Java, where tourism focuses on moving away from cultural preservation to merely generating more tourism income through massive infrastructure development (Nusantara et al., 2021). I discussed another example in Chapter 4, the development of Labuan Bajo as a ‘super premium destination’, which involved considerable tourism infrastructure development that met with significant local resis-



tance. However, the increasing importance of tourism as a leading economic sector for Indonesia has given tourism leverage over other sectors, particularly regarding a more significant share of government resources allocation by prioritizing funds of different ministries and state institutions to support tourism-related programs, under the coordination of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MoTCE).

Despite the Indonesian government's policy objectives to foster sustainability in the tourism sector, there has been a concurrent emphasis on capital-intensive tourism practices, contradicting the principles outlined in the UNWTO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for tourism (Lemy et al., 2020). This discrepancy is exemplified by the Joko Widodo administration's exclusive focus on infrastructure development and deregulation (Warburton, 2016), as evidenced by their persistent pursuit of the ambitious 10 New Bali project. This endeavor entails substantial infrastructure expansion and the establishment of Special Economic Zones, offering financial incentives such as tax holidays and import duty waivers to attract investors, which as exemplified in the empirical chapters have triggered conflict with local stakeholders regarding its environmental considerations and social impact of these project toward the local community's tourism related livelihood. In short, sustainability today serves as a prominent catchphrase widely used as the face of Indonesian tourism development policies. However, in practice, sustainability imperatives have not yet become the main consideration of Indonesian tourism policy-making processes.

The empirical evidence indicates that Indonesia's efforts to develop 10 New Bali's, subsequently transformed into Five Super Priority Destinations and other Five Priority Destinations, aim to position the country as a proponent of sustainable development. This approach is manifested through infrastructure development that promoted as facilitates nature conservation and appeals to a select group of tourists often referred to as "Quality" tourists, a term that often implies individuals with greater financial resources. The COVID-19 pandemic was seen as unwanted disruption of Joko Widodo's second-term development goals, as evidenced by his slow initial responses toward the impending pandemic, including closing the border where he thought (or hoped) that Indonesia would somehow be spared from the pandemic without having to make significant adjustments to his development plans and trajectory (Mietzner, 2021). Another example of his unwillingness to compromise his 'legacy' is the persistence of the Five Super Priority Destination development projects, where not even the COVID-19 pandemic could significantly halt the project's continuation. Further, the government continued to turn a blind eye to the potential negative impacts of their tourism development plans on environmental and social sustainability.

It is also quite clear since the beginning of the pandemic that the government was trying to avoid economic drawbacks by promoting ‘business as usual’ despite the looming pandemic. However, this early decision to implement minimum measures in tackling the outbreak while hoping it would somehow ‘spare’ Indonesia was wishful thinking and resulted in significant loss of life and economic losses. Throughout the pandemic, the Indonesian government continuously adapted their responses in handling the pandemic, which - I argue - in essence aimed at sustaining and later recovering the ‘free-market’. This is illustrated by the opportunistic move in the early stage of the global pandemic to create an online promotion fund for the international market and to delay the closing of borders for international travelers, and the following prolonged international tourist ban and national mobility restrictions, which are aimed to curb the pandemic spread and prevent it from further deteriorating the tourism industry. The adaptation of the New Normal also showed the reactive kind of measures by the government which was trying to capitalize on international tourism opportunities in a world that was increasingly inaccessible due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Looking at these findings, I argue that the overarching logic of how the Indonesian government handled the COVID-19 pandemic was influenced by neoliberal principles and imperatives, or what Fletcher (2010) characterizes as neoliberal-biopolitics. Due to the expansion of the market logic to other social realms such as politics and tourism, the priority was not to guarantee the population’s physical health, but instead the population’s ability to continue economic production and consumption processes, which are deemed as a better way to sustain the existence of the population (Fletcher, 2010). Under this logic, compliance of the subjects is not rewarded by direct assurance of one’s physical wellbeing but promise of opportunity to pursue economic gains. Moreover, power in this case is not primarily exerted through coercive and disciplinary techniques, such as internalization of new norms, but also through (economic) incentives. This combination of government techniques is reflected in our empirical findings. To institutionalize the New Normal, the introduction of CHSE standardization and certification was based on potential economic benefits for tourism enterprises willing to comply with its rules. The introduction of CHSE was described as beneficial for tourism enterprises because it would increase market (tourist) confidence, so that more tourists would be willing to come to certified tourism enterprises and destinations compared to non-certified ones.

According to the logic of neoliberal biopolitics some lives are deemed expendable (while others are not) in the name of the wellbeing of the total population (Lorenzini, 2021). This inequal treatment of lives, is particularly evident in our empirical chapters where Bali’s status as Indonesia’s most prominent destination for international tourism has made them suffer more from the prolonged international tourist ban compared to

other destinations in Indonesia. In addition to their high dependence on international tourism, Bali also underwent more stringent COVID-19 testing for domestic tourists compared to other destinations in Indonesia. In the name of preparing Bali for the reopening of international tourism, the government required a PCR Covid test for domestic tourists entering Bali, compared to only a rapid (and cheaper) Covid test required for other destinations during the New Year Holiday period of 2020. During this period Indonesia's domestic tourism started to recover and became the bloodline of the tourism industry during the pandemic. This decision of valuing international tourists higher than others can be regarded as part of a neoliberal-biopolitical logic, where international tourism as a kind of highly profitable 'golden goose' should be protected above others (Fletcher et al., 2019). This different treatment of international and domestic tourists in the short term has contributed to the slower recovery of Bali's tourism industry compared to other prominent tourism destinations in Indonesia (Pramana et al., 2022) which, if not appropriately addressed, will increase Indonesia's dependence on international tourism and subsequently put the country more at risk of international or global tourism disruption and crises in the long term.

### 5.3.2. Indonesia Tourism Beyond COVID-19: Sustainable Tourism or Business as Usual

As discussed in chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis, despite the 'rejuvenation' of the sustainability debates during this COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen so far little effect on the ground. In the following I will further elaborate factors which so far impede the implementation of sustainable tourism in Indonesia.

#### *The Underlying 'Growth' Paradigm of The Tourism Industry*

This section expands on the prevalent "growth paradigm" in tourism, often intertwined with global neoliberal capitalism, building upon the discussion of Indonesia's neoliberal shift in tourism. Understanding the underlying paradigm of tourism development is essential for identifying challenges and devising a way forward, as paradigms establish the rules and boundaries of knowledge creation (Tribe, 2006).

Despite being presented as primarily advocating for "ecological sustainability" (Bramwell & Lane, 2011), sustainable tourism and its alternative forms have not escaped the perpetual growth paradigm, which ultimately constrains their ability to effectively preserve the environment (Bellato et al., 2022; Bianchi & de Man, 2020). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic revived debates on redefining sustainable tourism, such as through concepts like "resilience" or regenerative tourism. However, the deep entrenchment of tourism within global neoliberal capitalism has influenced stakeholders who hold conflicting views on how to practice tourism. While recognizing the necessity of growth for the tourism industry, they also acknowledge the urgent

need for fundamental changes in addressing the cultural, social, and environmental impacts of tourism. These conflicting perspectives often result in inaction or indecisive policymaking (Becken, 2017; Fletcher et al., 2021).

The deeply ingrained growth paradigm is also evident in the empirical findings of this thesis. The research indicates that even the initial discursive processes aimed at mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and facilitating recovery were shaped by neoliberal and capitalistic values and imperatives that define their “condition of existence.” These underlying rules allow certain discursive formations to flourish while limiting opportunities for others (Foucault, 1972). Consequently, more radical narratives advocating for fundamental economic restructuring were suppressed and failed to materialize into tangible alternative approaches for advancing sustainability in tourism during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 3 sheds light on the inclusion of “sustainability” values in Indonesian tourism development, revealing an orchestrated effort to accommodate international demand for sustainable tourism. However, this inclusion also capitalizes on the “loopholes” in international sustainable tourism practices, wherein perpetual growth remains central to international development goals despite the finite environmental and social resources, as observed in the Sustainable Development Goals (Bianchi, 2018). Thus, comprehending the power dynamics at play in sustainable tourism development, particularly in Indonesia, necessitates an understanding of the pragmatic form of neoliberalism embraced by the Indonesian government and the tourism industry as an underlying rationale and imperative. This understanding is crucial for critically evaluating the effectiveness and limitations of sustainable tourism practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

### *The Complexity of Sustainability Concepts*

The concept of sustainable tourism has gained significant attention and integration in tourism discussions and practices since the release of the Brundtland report in 1987. However, the precise definition of sustainable tourism has remained a subject of ongoing debate, particularly regarding the delicate balance between its impacts and benefits (Ruhanen et al., 2015). Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) asserts that the current paradigm of perpetual growth and sustainable tourism are fundamentally incompatible, resulting in a partial and opportunistic adoption of sustainable tourism principles in practice. Hall (2011) even characterizes sustainable tourism as a paradox, as its acceptance among tourism scholars and industry has grown (albeit partially), yet the industry’s impact on environmental degradation continues to escalate. Recognizing the limitations of sustainable tourism, some scholars have proposed the term “regenerative tourism” as part of regenerative development. “Regenerative tourism can be defined as a form of sustainable tourism that positions tourism activities as interventions aimed at

developing the capacities of places, communities, and guests to harmoniously operate within interconnected social-ecological systems” (Bellato et al., 2022, p. 2). This new paradigm is considered more suitable for navigating the challenges posed by climate change and the deeply ingrained perpetual growth paradigm, as it not only seeks to minimize negative impacts but also stimulates regenerative responses from the tourism industry and its stakeholders in addressing the cultural, social, and environmental degradation caused by tourism activities.

In the context of Indonesia, the concept of regenerative tourism has yet to become mainstream in government discourse. Nevertheless, the pursuit of sustainable tourism has been an integral part of the government narrative since at least 2014 (Lemy et al., 2020). However, despite the increasing emphasis on institutionalizing UNWTO principles of sustainable tourism in Indonesian tourism, various unsustainable practices persist. Our findings in chapters 2 and 3 indicate that sustainability trends, such as the potential rise of nature-based tourism or increased focus on cleanliness and hygiene during the pandemic, have been predominantly viewed as marketing opportunities rather than catalysts for substantial changes in how tourism destinations and businesses operate. At the policy-making level, an overreliance on international benchmarks such as UNWTO and the World Economic Forum’s TTCI has led the government to operate in silos, placing excessive emphasis on meeting “international standards” while overlooking local dynamics. Chapter 3 findings further highlight this phenomenon, particularly in the ongoing development of “super-premium tourism” in Labuan Bajo, which aims to attract “quality tourists”. Although this development may seem positive in terms of enhancing destination quality and promoting the so-called quality tourism, the rejection of the project by certain local stakeholders reveals a lack of meaningful involvement in determining the type of sustainable tourism they desire.

In summary, I argue that replacing the concept of sustainable tourism with a new term like regenerative tourism in Indonesian tourism discourses, while the industry is still grappling with the notion of sustainable tourism, would be counterproductive and could result in an empty war of rhetoric. Instead, the key priority at present should be to make significant strides in adopting locally appropriate forms of sustainable tourism development, not just on a discursive level but deeply embedded in day-to-day tourism practices. However, as I will explain in the final part of this chapter, particular manifestations of regenerative tourism could be part of this.

### 5.3.3. Co-creating a more Sustainable Tourism Future

The collaborative nature of sustainable tourism implementation (Bramwell, 2011; Getz & Jamal, 1995; Lemy et al., 2020) forces tourism stakeholders to work together

to achieve the sustainable development goals. This is where the notion of co-creation comes along, where the joint collaboration in peer like processes in producing (sustainability related values) symbolically and materially are relevant (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). However, as in other social relations, this production of values is also prone to opportunistic behavior and power asymmetries which may result in unequal distribution of the benefits (Edvardsson et al., 2011; Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

I argue that to overcome the impeding factors of sustainability adoption as discussed above, we can learn from the notion of co-creation (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Leclercq et al., 2016; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), where tourism as an industry is essentially a collaborative effort from a vast group of stakeholders which can be divided at least as host, brokers, and tourists (Cheong & Miller, 2000) with their activities and interactions are geared to realize meaningful tourism experience values. However, this notion of value co-creation especially in the form of *Creating Shared Values (CSV)* has also been criticized as ‘capitalism as usual’, emphasizing economic values through collaborative actions and neglecting other important social values which are not yet commodified (Phi & Dredge, 2019).

In our empirical chapters 2 and 3 we highlighted how the discursive process on the national level and public governance realm to produce a more sustainable tourism development path in the post COVID-19 era, have dominated the early COVID-19 discourses but so far failed to make significant ripples into practices. Even though businesses claimed to adopt a ‘sustainable approach’ in their development and doing businesses, in practice environmental and social considerations are often taking the backseat, especially when they are believed to potentially compromise their pursuit of growth (Crane et al., 2014).

The internalization of a neoliberal market logic in tourism host-guest relationship is also evident in our empirical findings in chapter 4. Despite fearing the life-threatening nature of the pandemic, the host community of Belitung reacted positively to the ‘re-opening’ of tourism by the government. They openly welcomed a group of tourists from Jakarta, the epicentrum of COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, into their relatively ‘COVID-19 free’ island of Belitung. They saw the economic opportunity from this group of tourists as important for them and worth to compromise their safety for. This potential benefit was not only in the form of direct revenue from the tourists, but also moral support for the continuation of their community-based tourism project which they have been working on for so long, abruptly halted by the pandemic.

However, our findings also showed a different facet of this co-creation process. On the one hand both host and tourist internalized the 'New Normal' norms. On the other hand, they developed a kind of pandemic induced touristic gaze, which I copied as 'Pandemic gaze', inspired by the foundational work of Urry (1990), to continuously negotiate the appropriate implementation of these new norms throughout their interactions to maximize their 'tourism experiences' values while maintaining social conviviality.

The host and tourist pursuit of convivial relations, seems to avert them from opportunistic and self-serving behavior, which are common in neoliberal capitalism practices, and to some extent is also evident in even value co-creation (Edvardsson et al., 2011). Taking others' wellbeing in mind both tourists and hosts negotiated and made compromises, not only to achieve their own pursued tourism experience values, but also to help each other achieve their tourism experiences values. As discussed in chapter 4, the tendency of prioritizing 'communal goals' of Indonesian cultural traits (Reisinger et al., 1997) and Asian culture in general which highlights collectivism, harmony, and conflict avoidance (Chon et al., 2020), foregrounding all other expected values. Therefore, to halt the capitalist tendency to destroy things that are important, the co-creation of 'social-values' instead of only focusing on economic values can be beneficial to repurpose tourism from being primarily a vehicle of capitalism into a vehicle of reproduction and even 'regeneration' of meaningful social relations.

### 5.4. THE CONCLUSION REVISITED

Finally, based on the discussion below, I revisit the main research question of the thesis here. I argue that the Indonesian interventions to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis, despite looking to be inconsistent and reactive, can also be understood as primarily informed by pragmatic-neoliberal principles and imperatives. This was already a prominent logic of Indonesian tourism development prior the COVID-19 pandemic where tourism was touted as a 'leading economic sector'. The pandemic was seen and problematized by the Indonesian government as an impediment to the achievement of previously set economic goals. Despite gaining traction at the level of discourse, and to some extent in tourism policy, a substantial shift towards more sustainable forms of tourism development is in practice still very much limited by the urgency of 'bouncing back' economically. As a result, the tourism sector appears to be returning to 'business as usual'.

## 5.5. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the subsequent section, I will put forth several prospective avenues for future research, building upon the identified aspects of this thesis as well as unexplored areas.

### 5.5.I. Rethinking Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism plays a crucial role in the national tourism industry, particularly in countries like Indonesia with large populations and high susceptibility to disasters and crises. Previous instances of disaster in Indonesia have demonstrated that domestic tourists are often the first to return to affected destinations, providing a vital lifeline for the local tourism industry (Henderson, 2003; Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005; Teguh, 2016). This trend has been further reinforced during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, where domestic tourism has emerged as a significant driver of recovery (Pramana et al., 2021).

Despite its significance, domestic tourism is often perceived as less prestigious by Indonesian tourism policymakers when compared to international tourism. This bias is evident in the initial reluctance to close borders for international tourism and the allocation of promotional funds for international tourism in early 2020, disregarding the looming threat of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This oversight has not only resulted in significant loss of lives but has also hindered Indonesia's ability to capitalize on the potential of a thriving domestic tourism sector.

In line with the growing scholarly discourse on the need for a sustainability shift in post-pandemic tourism, particularly through the concept of “proximity tourism” (Huijbens, 2020; Romagosa, 2020), I propose a research endeavor to further explore the potential and significance of domestic tourism as a more sustainable focus within the Indonesian tourism development agenda.

This proposed research should aim to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of domestic tourism, considering its economic, social, and environmental implications. By examining successful case studies of destinations with thriving domestic markets during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study seeks to identify strategies for promoting and enhancing domestic tourism as a sustainable form of tourism development. It will also investigate the role of domestic tourism in diversifying the tourism product offerings, fostering community engagement and empowerment, and minimizing the environmental footprint of the tourism sector. Another essential aspect of this research is to analyze how a focus on domestic tourism can effectively prevent revenue ‘leakage’, by ensuring that a significant portion of the income generated from tourism remains within the destinations and directly benefits the local host communities. Through



this research, a comprehensive understanding of domestic tourism's potential and its alignment with sustainability objectives can be achieved. The findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers, tourism practitioners, and local communities to recalibrate their focus and prioritize the sustainable development of domestic tourism as a vital component of the Indonesian tourism industry.

### 5.5.2. Exploring New Directions Beyond Sustainable Tourism

As previously argued, the introduction of a novel term such as “Regenerative Tourism” into current discussions on Indonesian tourism development may be counterproductive, considering that the industry is still striving to embrace the sustainable tourism paradigm. However, the growing concerns regarding the entanglement of the current sustainable tourism approach with the dominant growth paradigm (Bellato et al., 2022; Cave & Dredge, 2020) have underscored the urgency for Indonesian tourism to explore the potential adoption of a more regenerative approach, thus embracing the concept of regenerative tourism.

Although regenerative tourism has not yet become commonplace in the Indonesian tourism development discourse, several destinations have already implemented principles aligned with the notion of “regeneration” in their tourism practices. A notable example is Belitung, which served as a case study in this thesis. Belitung has successfully transitioned from a dependency on extractive tin mining to a more “sustainable” economic model, particularly through the development of tourism (Wardhani & Valeriani, 2016). This transition gained momentum when the release of the Indonesian blockbuster movie “Rainbow Troops” in 2008, which was filmed in Belitung, attracted a substantial number of Indonesian tourists to the region. The impact of movie tourism was significant, as the number of visitors to Belitung tripled in 2012 compared to pre-movie release figures (Putri, 2019). Subsequently, Belitung has increasingly gained recognition as a potential new tourism destination, culminating in its inclusion in the Indonesian government's 10 New Bali project in 2016 (Pratama, 2019) and its official designation as part of the UNESCO Global Geopark in 2021 (UNESCO, 2021).

This transition has not only provided the local community of Belitung with new and more sustainable livelihood opportunities but has also, in some cases, facilitated environmental regeneration. A notable example of the growing awareness of nature conservation among the local community and the repurposing of certain ex-mining areas for tourism activities, is Bukit Peramun ([peramun.com](http://peramun.com)), a conservation area showcasing Belitung's endemic biodiversity. Previously plagued by illegal logging, this area has made significant progress in conservation efforts by transforming into an ecotourism destination that actively involves the local community, including indi-

viduals who were formerly engaged in illegal logging activities. Bukit Peramun now stands as one of the prominent designated geosites within the Belitung Geopark. Another noteworthy example is the Terong tourism village ([desawisataterong.com](http://desawisataterong.com)), which represents a pioneering community-based tourism initiative in Belitung. The development of tourism in this village has not only addressed the long-standing issues of illegal logging and small-scale tin mining but has also successfully transformed a former mining site into a flourishing tourism destination as shown in figure 3 below. Given these initial findings, I propose that Belitung can serve as a starting point for further research on how the concepts and practices of regenerative tourism can be interpreted and implemented within the Indonesian context.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the tourism industry in Belitung. Consequently, it is also of interest to investigate the resilience of tourism in Belitung, specifically examining the commitment of local authorities and communities to develop alternative non-extractive economic sources, such as tourism, in the face of a prolonged absence of tourists and subsequent income deprivation caused by the pandemic. This study could commence by identifying changes in tourism-related policies during the post-pandemic period compared to the previous era. The subse-



Figure 3. Ex-mining fishing pond. Source (Desawisataterong, nd)

quent phase of the research could explore how local communities perceive tourism as an alternative livelihood, particularly after firsthand experiences of the vulnerability inherent in tourism brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In examining the perceptions of local communities, it would also be pertinent to understand how they cope with the absence of touristic income and whether the allure of “quick money”

through a return to mining activities or illegal logging factors into their survival strategies.

The findings from this research can be instrumental in informing a more sustainable development policy that moves away from an extractive economic model centered around mining and promotes alternative and ‘regenerative’ economic activities, including tourism, with sufficient economic diversification to avoid overreliance on tourism, which could lead to potentially harmful dependencies.

### 5.5.3. Exploring the Potential of Value Co-Creation in Promoting Sustainable Tourism

This research project has undergone significant adjustments due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally, the research plan aimed to investigate and compare co-creation processes and power dynamics in community-based projects and large-scale tourism projects, specifically within the context of the 10 New Bali’s initiative. However, given the circumstances, I had to adapt the plan. Nevertheless, the findings from the current research demonstrate the continued relevance of this study. It is particularly important to explore whether the development of small-scale, sustainable forms of tourism can serve as a viable alternative to the large-scale tourism developments advocated by the Indonesian government, and how value co-creation can play a role in it. The exploration of the notion of value co-creation in tourism experiences is particularly important to identify a wide range of values which can emerge from the tourism encounters, most notably non-economical values which are instrumental in the efforts to reframe and redefine tourism from being touted as merely “vehicle of global capitalism” to a more inclusive and sustainable (regenerative) social force.

Drawing from the insights gained in Chapter 4, which revealed the influential shared value of “conviviality” in Indonesian culture, I suggest that this concept of conviviality can serve as a suitable starting point of the research, specifically through the examination of how small-scale, community-based tourism distinguishes itself from large-scale, investment-intensive tourism development by fostering the co-creation and proliferation of social values such as “conviviality” throughout the tourism encounters and experiences. Subsequent steps involve exploring diverse forms of sustainable value co-creation initiatives in various tourism destinations and examining their implementation and the resulting benefits for the well-being of all involved actors including local host communities.

This research will contribute significantly to the ongoing endeavor of envisioning tourism in a post-capitalist society or what is referred to as post-capitalist tourism (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Fletcher et al., 2021) by contributing to the broader understanding

of alternative models of tourism that prioritize social inclusivity and sustainability, which is essential for shaping the future of tourism in a post-capitalist society.

#### 5.5.4. Unravelling the power dynamics of IO New Bali tourism development project

Set on the background of growing conflicts between government and tourism developers with local community surrounding the development of IO New Bali Project and building on the discussion chapter of this thesis. Further research seeking to delve deeper into how power dynamics shape the project's trajectory is imperative.

The coexistence of neoliberalism and clientelism, while seemingly incompatible on theoretical grounds, demonstrates a prevalent symbiosis, particularly within the Indonesian context (Aspinall, 2013). This symbiosis may potentially compromise the values and sustainability aspects that this IO New Bali project is said to aspire to. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that as a process of capital accumulation, tourism can provoke systematic and structural violence in its activities (Büscher & Fletcher, 2017), which could undermine tourism as a more sustainable and 'equitable' livelihood for local communities. Hence, a comprehensive investigation is needed to understand how diverse power relationships among tourism developers, governmental bodies, and local communities influence the development of the IO New Bali project. The coexistence of neoliberalism and clientelism, while seemingly incompatible on theoretical grounds, demonstrates a prevalent symbiosis, particularly within the Indonesian context (Aspinall, 2013). This symbiosis may potentially compromise the values and sustainability aspects that this IO New Bali project is said to aspire to

By discerning the key players involved, their interests, and the intricate relationships among them, this research can uncover the underlying causes of the conflicts that surround the project. Moreover, it can offer valuable insights to prevent future conflicts. A nuanced understanding of the power dynamics in this context can guide policymakers and stakeholders towards more equitable and sustainable approaches, fostering cooperation and shared benefits among the involved parties.

By shedding light on the interplay of power within the development of the IO New Bali project, this research has the potential to contribute to the promotion of more inclusive and responsible tourism development practices, ultimately leading to positive impacts on both the local communities and tourism industry in Indonesia.

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# Summary





Tourism is a fragile sector; it is prone to uncertainty. The recent COVID-19 pandemic reaffirmed this vulnerability. The pandemic had an unprecedented impact that brought the global tourism industry to a standstill. In this thesis I examined how the Indonesian government in 2020-2022 has addressed the pandemic. First, I investigated how various Indonesian tourism stakeholders responded to this COVID-19 pandemic discursively and how the impacts of this pandemic and the subsequent mitigation and recovery ideas were discussed and debated, which gave rise to certain dominant narratives overlooking others. Second, I examined to what extent these discourses were translated and manifested in actual mitigation and recovery policies of Indonesian tourism development during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Third, I also looked at how these policies influenced tourism practices on the ground during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the experience value co-creation process between host and tourist in Belitung.

The main research question of this research is:

“How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced tourism policies and development in Indonesia?”

To address this research question a qualitative approach combined discursive analysis techniques and a case study. The discursive analysis involved the examination of tourism webinars, newspaper articles and Indonesian tourism development and mitigation policy documents, which were used in this thesis's first and second chapters. In the third Chapter, I employed a case study which involved in-depth interviews with tourists and hosts and participant observations of a small group of tourists visiting a community-based tourism village on the island of Belitung. The Belitung case study was used to enrich the data and strengthen the findings on the national-level discourse analysis.

In this thesis I employed a critical lens that focuses on power relations to understand and analyze the phenomenon under study. By adopting this critical perspective, I aimed to explore hidden power structures, inequalities, and their implications. By incorporating a critical power analysis, I anticipated to unravel how COVID-19 mitigation strategies and the responses from stakeholders are influenced and determined by the existing structure of power and the competing interests of the parties involved.

In Chapter 2 I investigated the early period of the pandemic. Between March and September 2020, the national debate in Indonesia (including the government, tourism businesses and academics) gradually saw the emergence of several competing discourses and narratives focused on short-term recovery of tourism, as well as potential long-term



future developments. The notion of the ‘New Normal’ clearly emerged as an overarching discourse that framed the debate throughout the period, with the notion of sustainable tourism gradually moving to the foreground as we entered the second half of 2020. Under the heading of the ‘New Normal’, three prominent issues prevailed: social distancing, health and hygiene protocols, and ‘quality tourism’. Despite the growing significance of the notion of sustainability in the Indonesian tourism discourse, the interpretations and implementation of the concept itself remained indistinct and limited. As discourses will change as circumstances change, a continued monitoring of the discourse on tourism development and its implementation is needed to assess whether the envisioned sustainability improvements will materialize or remain rhetorical.

Chapter 3 is a continuation of the first empirical chapter by examining the Indonesian COVID-19 tourism mitigation efforts and their short-term and long-term impacts on the Indonesian tourism development, specifically the plans focusing on the 10 New Bali project. In this chapter I used policy documents and official communications from the Indonesian central government pertaining to current Indonesia tourism development plan and COVID-19 mitigation strategy for tourism sector as data sources, complemented with newspaper articles. The findings indicated that despite the contentious early responses, the government’s key mitigation interventions, namely lockdowns and the COVID-19 certification program for tourism destinations and businesses labeled as CHSE, were considered effective to some extent to revive Indonesian tourism during the pandemic. The findings also showed that the pandemic has not affected Indonesian government focus on resuming the 10 New Bali project, and that in general Indonesian tourism is on track to bounce back to ‘business as usual’, neglecting the opportunity to shift into a more sustainable direction, owing to the urgent need to recover the industry swiftly economically after the pandemic.

Chapter 4 examines the influence of the previously identified dominant discourses and narratives surrounding Indonesian tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent manifestation in tourism mitigation and development policies on the host-guest relationships on the ground, especially in the context of tourism experience co-creation. This chapter contributes to the literature by illuminating how power operates around and through interactions in experience co-creation processes, particularly in the time of COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on the way tourism experiences have been co-created and influenced by what has been termed the ‘New Normal’ for the tourism industry since the start of the pandemic. I examined the impact of the pandemic on tourism experience co-creation *on-site* through exploring the construction and negotiation of the ‘pandemic gazes’ of hosts and tourists in a cultural tourism village on the Indonesian island destination of Belitung. Our findings identified 4 factors, namely *Pandemic fatigue*, *Safe zone*, *Setting Impracticality*

and *Convivial relations*, which influenced how hosts and tourists (re)adjusted their pandemic gazes during their interactions in the experience co-creation process.

In conclusion, despite seeming inconsistent and reactive, Indonesian interventions to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis can also be understood as primarily informed by pragmatic-neoliberal principles and imperatives. This was already a prominent logic of Indonesian tourism development before the COVID-19 pandemic, where tourism was touted as a ‘leading economic sector’. The Indonesian government saw and problematized the pandemic as an impediment to achieving previously set economic goals. Despite gaining traction at the level of discourses and to some extent in tourism policies, a substantial shift towards more sustainable forms of tourism development is, in practice, still very much limited by the urgency of ‘bouncing back’ economically. As a result, the tourism sector appears to be returning to ‘business as usual’.

In the final chapter I suggested several avenues for further research building on the results of this study. The first potential research theme focuses on the vulnerability of Indonesian tourism towards local and global disasters and crises, which often hamper international tourists’ visits. Therefore, a study on developing domestic tourism as a viable alternative to more sustainable tourism development for Indonesia is deemed necessary. The second research proposed is to explore the notion of regenerative tourism. I suggest using Belitung as a case study as stakeholders in these destinations have already implemented ‘regenerative’ principles in developing their tourism industry. The third avenue is to revisit the co-creation experience as a concept of producing non-economic values required to re-imagine a post-capitalist form of tourism. I suggest comparing experience co-creation processes and outcomes in small-scale community destinations and large-scale tourism destinations with high investment to see how these contexts differ in terms of co-creation processes and outcomes. The last avenue to explore further is the power dynamics shape the project’s trajectory is imperative. A comprehensive investigation is needed to understand how diverse power relationships among tourism developers, governmental bodies, and local communities influence the development of the 10 New Bali project, to prevent systematic and structural violence caused by the symbiosis of pragmatic neoliberalism and clientelism which could compromise the values and sustainability aspects that this 10 New Bali project is said to aspire to and also undermine tourism as a more sustainable and ‘equitable’ livelihood for local communities.

These research projects may significantly contribute to the ongoing endeavor of envisioning tourism in a post-capitalist society or what is referred to as post-capitalist tourism by contributing to the broader understanding of alternative models of tourism that prioritize social inclusivity and sustainability, which are essential for shaping the future of tourism in a post-capitalist society.



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# Samenvatting



Toerisme is een kwetsbare sector; het is gevoelig voor onzekerheid. De recente COVID-19 pandemie heeft dit opnieuw bevestigd. De pandemie heeft het toerisme wereldwijd tot stilstand gebracht. In dit proefschrift heb ik onderzocht hoe de Indonesische overheid in 2020-2022 op de pandemie heeft gereageerd. Ten eerste ben ik nagegaan hoe verschillende belanghebbenden in het Indonesische toerisme discursief hebben gereageerd op deze COVID-19 pandemie en hoe de gevolgen van deze pandemie en de daaropvolgende ideeën over herstel werden besproken en bediscussieerd. Ten tweede laat ik in dit proefschrift zien hoe en in welke mate deze discoursen werden vertaald in het toeristisch beleid. Ten derde onderzocht ik ook hoe dit beleid het proces van co-creatie van ervaringswaarden tussen gastheer/vrouw en toeristen in Belitung heeft beïnvloed.

De belangrijkste onderzoeksvraag van dit onderzoek is:

Hoe heeft de COVID-19 pandemie het toerismebeleid en de ontwikkeling in Indonesië beïnvloed?

Voor dit onderzoek heb ik een kwalitatieve benadering gecombineerd met discursieve analysetechnieken en een casestudy. De analyse in hoofdstuk 2 en 3 bestond uit het bestuderen van toeristische webinars, krantenartikelen en Indonesische beleidsdocumenten over de ontwikkeling van toerisme. In het vierde hoofdstuk heb ik gebruik gemaakt van een casestudy met diepte-interviews met toeristen en gastheren en -vrouwen en observaties van een kleine groep toeristen die een toeristisch dorp op het eiland Belitung bezochten. In dit proefschrift heb ik me ook gericht op machtsverhoudingen door na te gaan hoe COVID-19 mitigatiestrategieën en de reacties van belanghebbenden worden beïnvloed en bepaald door de bestaande machtsstructuur en de concurrerende belangen van de betrokken partijen.

In hoofdstuk 2 heb ik de beginperiode van de pandemie onderzocht. Tussen maart en september 2020 kwamen in het nationale debat in Indonesië (gevoerd door regering, toeristische bedrijven en academici) geleidelijk verschillende concurrerende discoursen naar voren die gericht waren op het herstel van het toerisme op de korte termijn, maar ook op mogelijke toekomstige ontwikkelingen op de lange termijn. Het begrip 'nieuw normaal' kwam duidelijk naar voren als een overkoepelend discours, waarbij in de tweede helft van 2020 ook het begrip duurzaam toerisme geleidelijk op de voorgrond trad. Onder de noemer 'nieuw normaal' waren er drie prominente thema's: sociale afstand, gezondheids- en hygiëneprotocollen en 'kwaliteitstoerisme'. Ondanks het groeiende belang van het begrip duurzaamheid in het Indonesische toeristische discours, bleven de interpretaties en implementatie van het concept zelf onduidelijk en beperkt. Omdat discoursen zullen veranderen als de omstandigheden





veranderen, is een voortdurende monitoring nodig van het zich ontwikkelende discours over toeristische ontwikkeling en de implementatie ervan om te beoordelen of de beoogde verbeteringen op het gebied van duurzaamheid werkelijkheid zullen worden of retorisch zullen blijven.

Hoofdstuk 3 is een vervolg op het eerste empirische hoofdstuk en onderzoekt de Indonesische inspanningen om het toerisme tijdelijk te beperken en de korte- en langetermijneffecten daarvan op met name de plannen voor het 10 New Bali project. In dit hoofdstuk gebruikte ik als bronnen beleidsdocumenten en officiële mededelingen van de Indonesische centrale overheid, aangevuld met krantenartikelen over de Indonesische toeristische ontwikkeling en mitigatiestrategieën in de COVID-19 pandemische tijd. De onderzoeksbevindingen geven aan dat ondanks de controversiële eerste reacties, de belangrijkste beleidsmaatregelen van de overheid, namelijk lockdowns en het COVID-19 certificeringsprogramma voor toeristische bestemmingen en bedrijven met het label CHSE, tot op zekere hoogte als effectief werden beschouwd om het Indonesische toerisme tijdens de pandemie nieuw leven in te blazen. De bevindingen tonen ook aan dat de pandemie geen invloed heeft gehad op de hervatting van het 10 New Bali project en dat het Indonesische toerisme in het algemeen op weg is om terug te keren naar ‘business as usual’. Daarbij wordt de mogelijkheid om in een duurzamere richting te gaan verwaarloosd.

In hoofdstuk 4 heb ik de impact van de pandemie op de co-creatie van toeristische ervaringen ter onderzocht door de constructie en onderhandeling van de ‘pandemische blikken’ van gastheren/vrouwen en toeristen in een cultureel toeristisch dorp op het Indonesische eiland Belitung. Uit het onderzoek komen 4 factoren naar voren, namelijk ‘pandemische vermoedheid’, veiligheid, onpraktische setting en gezelligheid (*conviviality*), die van invloed waren op de interacties tussen gastheren/vrouwen en toeristen.

Samenvattend kunnen de Indonesische interventies om de gevolgen van de COVID-19-crisis te verzachten worden begrepen als een uitvloeisel van pragmatisch-neoliberales principes en vereisten. Dit was al een prominente logica van de Indonesische toeristische ontwikkeling vóór de COVID-19 pandemie, waar toerisme werd aangeprezen als een ‘toonaangevende economische sector’. De Indonesische regering zag en problematiseerde de pandemie als een belemmering voor het bereiken van eerder gestelde economische doelen. Ondanks het feit dat het duurzaamheidsdiscours tot op zekere hoogte ook in het toerismebeleid aan kracht wint, wordt een substantiële verschuiving naar meer duurzame vormen van toeristische ontwikkeling in de praktijk nog steeds sterk beperkt door de urgentie om economisch ‘terug te veren’. Als gevolg hiervan lijkt de toeristische sector terug te keren naar ‘business as usual’.

In het laatste hoofdstuk doe ik ook voorstellen voor verder onderzoek. Het eerste onderzoeksthema richt zich op de kwetsbaarheid van het Indonesische toerisme voor lokale en mondiale rampen en crises, die het bezoek van internationale toeristen vaak belemmeren. Daarom acht ik onderzoek naar de ontwikkeling van binnenlands toerisme als een levensvatbaar alternatief voor een duurzamere ontwikkeling van het toerisme in Indonesië noodzakelijk. Het tweede voorgestelde onderzoek is het verkennen van het begrip regeneratief toerisme. Ik stel voor om Belitung als casestudy te gebruiken, omdat belanghebbenden in deze bestemmingen al ‘regeneratieve’ principes hebben toegepast bij de ontwikkeling van hun toerisme-industrie. Als derde stel ik onderzoek voor naar co-creatie processen die gericht zijn op het produceren van niet-economische waarden die nodig zijn om een postkapitalistische vorm van toerisme opnieuw vorm te geven. Tenslotte is onderzoek nodig naar de actoren en machtsverhoudingen achter de ontwikkeling van het 10 Nieuw Bali Project.

Deze onderzoeksprojecten moeten bijdragen aan een breder begrip van alternatieve modellen van toerisme die prioriteit geven aan sociale inclusiviteit en duurzaamheid, wat essentieel is voor het vormgeven van de toekomst van toerisme in een postkapitalistische samenleving.



## OVERVIEW OF COMPLETED TRAINING AND SUPERVISION PLAN

**Mohamad Robbith Subandi**  
**Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS)**  
**Completed Training and Supervision Plan**



Name of the learning activity	Department/Institute	Year	ECTS*
<b>A) Project related competences</b>			
<b>A1 Managing a research project</b>			
Writing Research Proposal	WUR	2019	6
WASS Introduction Course	WASS	2019	1
'The 'Pandemic Governmentality' of Indonesia's Tourism COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery'	International Conference on Tourism & Business. HSLU, Switzerland	2022	1
Reviewing Papers	Tourism Planning & Development, International Journal of Tourism Policy	2020/ 2022	2
<b>A2 Integrating research in the corresponding discipline</b>			
Academic Publication & Presentation in Social Science	WASS	2022	4
Concepts & Approaches to Tourism, Society and Environment, GEO30306	WUR	2019	6
Analysing Discourse: Theories, methods, and Techniques, CPT56306	WUR	2020	6
Critical Perspectives on Social Theory	WASS	2022	4
Critical Tourism Studies	WASS	2022	3
<b>B) General research related competences</b>			
<b>B1 Placing research in a broader scientific context</b>			
Advances in Tourism related resources	Mid-Sweden University	2022	7.5
<b>B2 Placing research in a societal context</b>			
Co-organizing international Seminar at WUR	WUR	2023	1
<b>C) Career related competences/personal development</b>			
<b>C1 Employing transferable skills in different domains/careers</b>			
Searching and Organizing Literature	WUR Library	2019	0.60
Research data management	WUR Library	2019	0.45
Working in time Pandemic	PE&RC, WIMEK	2020	0.6
<b>Total</b>			<b>43.15</b>

\*One credit according to ECTS is on average equivalent to 28 hours of study load



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohamad Robbith Subandi was born in Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia, on the 18th of September 1982. He spent his childhood and early education in Probolinggo before moving to Bandung to pursue his BSc in Tourism (Travel Business Management) at Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Bandung, currently known as Politeknik Pariwisata NHI Bandung, in 2000. He graduated in 2004 and subsequently began his professional career in the tourism and hospitality industry, mainly in Bali, Indonesia. In 2011, he decided to join as a faculty member in his alma mater, Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Bandung, before securing a scholarship from his alma mater in 2012 to continue his post-



graduate study at Leeds Metropolitan University, currently known as Leeds Beckett University, in the United Kingdom, majoring in International Tourism & Hospitality Management. After attaining his master's degree in early 2014, he held several positions in Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Bandung, with the last one as the head of the Travel Industry Study Program in 2016-2018. Apart from his work as a faculty member of Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Bandung, he also took part in a number of tourism-related consultancy projects and capacity-building programs for local communities and was also appointed as the destination facilitator of Belitung by The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy in 2016 and 2017, as a part of the Ministry's Tourism Destination Management Assistance program.

He was awarded the Indonesia Endowment Funds for Education (LPDP) scholarship from the Indonesian Ministry of Finance for his PhD program at Wageningen University & Research, starting in 2019. His thesis focuses on tourism development in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. His research interests cover a broader spectrum of tourism studies, particularly related to sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, cultural tourism, and political-economic aspects of tourism. He has published several articles in international journals, book chapters and conference proceedings.

He is currently based in Indonesia as a lecturer and a faculty member of Politeknik Pariwisata NHI Bandung and can be reached via email at [mrt@stp-bandung.ac.id](mailto:mrt@stp-bandung.ac.id) or through his private email address at [robbith.subandi@gmail.com](mailto:robbith.subandi@gmail.com).



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