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DOMINATION AMONG TOUR OPERATORS IN KARST CONSERVATION AREA OF *GOA PINDUL*, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The karst area of Goa Pindul has been ‘commercially promoted’ and exploited to meet the tourism demand. Goa Pindul becomes a space contested by tour operators. Domination among tour operators has created inequality in the community. Therefore, the objective of this study was to analyse domination structure causes conflicts in the area of Goa Pindul and the conflicts be solved to ensure the sustainability of tourism development. This ethnographic research was conducted to investigate how competition and dominance occur among tour operators in tourism market. The results of this study indicate that the government should create the rules of the game in accordance with the ideal vision of the sustainable development of karst areas of Goa Pindul.

Keywords: competition; domination; tourism market; rules of the game; Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Gunungkidul, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia is commonly known as poor area. It has the highest number of poverty. The government has put efforts to overcome the poverty by optimizing existing resources; one of which is tourism development. Tourism becomes a mainstay for Gunungkidul District due to its natural tourist attractions.

The increasing number of tourists visiting Gunungkidul has encouraged the government and residents of Bejiharjo to develop their village into a tourist attraction. Karst Area of Goa Pindul has become a new tourist attraction in Yogyakarta. The attractiveness of the Karst Area of *Goa Pindul* has implications for the management of the rural tourism, leading to competition among tour operators.

Previous studies explore herding behavior, including Papatheodorou (2003) analysed that competition issues in Tourism might emerge from the special relation between the accommodation sector and the building/construction industries. These are dominated by global conglomerates often referred to competition authorities for restrictive practices in their main business. However, such studies focused on competition are dominated by global conglomerates rather than tour operators. As well as the research of Rääkkönen (2014) related to the Role of tour operators and tour leaders in creating and managing package tourism experiences. the result is the role of the service providers in the creation of experiences appears to be quite limited. Even

though tangible elements (e.g. products and services) are essential prerequisites for tourism experiences, especially peak experiences are more often associated with abstract and emotional factors.

This research is different from previous studies by taking the topic domination among tour operators. Conflict between tour operators emerge in the previously harmonious environment. This condition raises some questions: (1) What domination structure causes conflicts in the area of Goa Pindul ? (2) How can the conflicts be solved to ensure the sustainability of tourism development ?

Competition and domination in the development of rural tourism are interesting to explore as such issues also appear in other developing countries. This research is expected to contribute to the understandings of competition and domination in tourism areas as these aspects are still underexplored.

1. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Rural tourism transforms nature and culture into products which are traded in tourism market. Erislan (2016 ; 251) states that in order to produce good performance in tourism, it is necessary to integrate the unique resources and attractiveness of tourist destinations.

According to Krippner (2001: 782), sociologists grasp “market” as “fully social institutions, reflecting a complex alchemy of politics, culture, and ideology”. Beckert (2009; 251) adds that the sociology of market analysis is associated with the order of markets. The order of markets is formed by the structural, institutional and cultural embeddedness of market exchange. According to Hazakis (2010; 385) market and institutions interact efficiently, targeting general economic and social welfare. This point of view is different from the economic approach, in which “institutions are understood not from a contractarian perspective as the efficient result of an agreement of socially unbound individuals, but rather as situated within a specific political, social and cultural context that constitutes the actors’ goals, strategies, and cognitive orientations”. Some authors, especially Fligstein and Dauter (2007: 105) state that sociologists begin realizing that market actors are involved in day-to-day social relationships with one another, the relationships are based on trust, friendship, power, and dependence. In the market, there are problems of cooperation and competition.

Bourdieu's theory of field is used to support the analysis of this study. Field is a sort of competition market where various types of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) are used and disseminated (Ritzer and Goodman, 2003: 524). In one arena, there are stakes, forces, and people who have big capital and people who have no capital. Capital is a concentration of forces operating within the arena (Harker et al., 2009; 46). The more types of capital and the more amount of capital they have, they will get the best (dominant) position in the arena.

Competitions are often expressed as physical and non-physical conflicts. It is quite often that the conflicts involve the role of the state. The state plays an important role in regulating the competitions. This function of the state maintains the sustainable development. Coyle and LeMaster (2011: 243) propose that sustainable development is closely related to three constructs, which are societal survivability, business capability, and economic sustainability.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research is a qualitative research procedure for describing, analyzing, and interpreting elements of a cultural group such as patterns of behavior, beliefs, and languages that evolve over time (Creswell, 2012: 462). During six months of fieldwork (June to December 2017), the researchers observed and investigated the daily

lives of actors working in tour operators in the Karst Area of *Goa Pindul*. The researchers conducted in-depth observations and interviews involving the tour operators (10 research subject), local government of Bejiharjo Village (1 informant), local government of Gunungkidul District (2 informant), and other actors involved in the competition (2 research subject).

Further, data obtain from the observations and interviews were analyzed. In the data analysis, the researcher firstly grasped the overall data obtained, after that, the data reduction process was conducted by summarizing the data. Last, the data were arranged according to the questions to determine the coding and category.

3. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1. Competition among Tour Operators

The development of *Goa Pindul* as a tourist destination was firstly initiated by Dewa Bejo tour operator. Dewa Bejo managed to get government funding that is the National Program of Community Empowerment (PNPM) Independent Tourism for 2 years (2012 and 2013). Dewa Bejo tour operator received in award as the best tourist village both locally and nationally in 2012¹. Dewa Bejo obtained trophies, award certificate, and cash prize from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. The group of Dewa Bejo managed to empower the community through the creative economic movement of villagers so as to be able to overcome poverty through increased employment.

The high number of tourist visits and residents' high income encourages more people to participate in creating and managing tour operators. The establishment of new tour operators is also due to the condition in which Dewa Bejo Tour Operator couldn't accept more workers. The rejection of new workers as tour guides, ticket officers, float carriers for cave tubing, and so on, as well as their sense of belonging as native inhabitants are some of reasons underlaying the establishment of new tours. The number of tour operators has increased to 10 tour operators and all of them compete to "sell" *Goa Pindul* as a main destination.

The number of tour operator raises the competitiveness among them for gaining more tourists. *Goa Pindul* becomes a contested space among tour operators as it is one of favorite destinations in Yogyakarta. Some *Joki*² help tour operators find more guests by standing along the road from Yogyakarta to *Goa Pindul*. They put up banners, distracting the tourists who get confused about how to reach *Goa Pindul*. These *joki* usually offer their services to show the location of *Goa Pindul* without any charge. However, they surely ask the fare to tour operators. *Joki*, therefore, have the power to bring these confused tourists to tour operators who offer higher fare to them. Some tour operators provide high fare for *joki* due to tight competition in getting the tourists.

In addition to *joki*, tour operators also get their guests from tourist marketing such as tour leader, travel agency, event organizers, and so on. Marketers also play the price by offering guests who will go to *Goa Pindul* to several tour operators. Marketers will take the profit from the cheapest ticket from certain tour operators. This ticket price game complicates the bargaining position of many tour operators. As a result, conflict often comes up among tour operators in getting the tourists. As Jens stated, actors on both sides of the market have similar and partly conflicting interests. While they must be interested in the exchange of goods, they have conflicting interests regarding the price and other specifications of the contract from which a

¹ The data source was taken from Dewa Bejo Tour Operator, year 2016

² *Joki* is the local term used for residents whose work is to assist tourists to *Goa Pindul*. They usually stand along the road from Yogyakarta to Wonosari, Gading, and Grogol as well to *Goa Pindul*.

“price struggle” between them emerges that results, if the exchange is to take place in a compromise between the exchange partners (Jens, 2009; 248).

Every year, the tourist operators are capable of gaining 24,000 tourists. Fierce competition is increasingly noticeable on long holidays such as Eid Fitri, Christmas, and school holiday because tourist operators put efforts to gain as many tourists as possible. Consequently, the number of visitors can reach more than 2,000 per day. This number includes local and international tourists. Some newspapers such as Kompas (national newspapers), Harian Jogja (local newspapers), Sorot Gunungkidul (local newspaper) report the news on a sharp increase of the numbers of visitors in *Goa Pindul*. Tour operators are not aware that the high number of tourists enjoying cave tubing in *Goa Pindul* will potentially damage the ecosystem of Karst Area of *Goa Pindul*. Therefore, the government should put efforts to preserve the environment and the welfare of the communities by creating rules obeyed by all.

4.2. The Rule of the Game in Competition among Tour Operators

The signing of an agreement by three districts in order to contribute to the conservation and prosperity of people in Gunung Sewu was done by the heads of districts of Gunungkidul, Pacitan, and Wonogiri on May 24th, 2017. Gunungkidul Government should be prepared to preserve Geopark Gunung Sewu in which *Goa Pindul* is part of it.

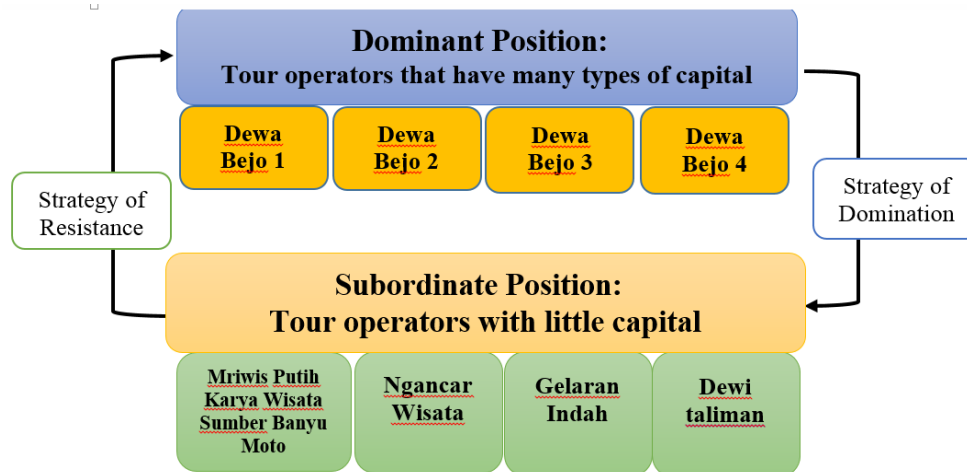
The government has issued Local Regulation to preserve Geopark Gunung Sewu by limiting the number of tour operators and reducing competitiveness among tour operators. To overcome the increased number of tour operators, the government has issued Government Regulation of Gunungkidul District No. 5 year 2013 in which one tour operator should cover one tourist destination. Tour operators should obey this rule and therefore they were merged from four tour operators (Dewa Bejo, Wira Wisata, Panca Wisata, and Tunas Wisata) into one Tour Operator of Dewa Bejo. This merger should be performed as the location of *Goa Pindul* is the domain area of the four tour operators. Moreover, these four tour operators were created in the early years of development of Karst Area of *Goa Pindul*. Other tour operators (Mriwis Putih, Karya Wisata, Dewitaliman, Gelaran Indah, Sumber Banyu Moto, and Ngancar Wisata) should determine their tourist destinations in order to obtain a license from the local government for their establishment and operation.

Governments and tour operators create rules to deal with unhealthy competition among tourist operators. They agreed on and signed Memorandum of Understanding. It includes the obligation for tourist operators to pay "entrance fee" of Rp. 10.000,- for *Goa Pindul* destination per tourist to one of Tour Operators of Dewa Bejo. Tour operators are obliged to cooperate with one of the Tour Operators of Dewa Bejo by fulfilling the above conditions. Based on the agreement, other tour operators should cooperate with the sub operators of Dewa Bejo.

4.3. The Dominant Position, Resistance to Dominance, and the Role of the Government in the Development of Sustainable Tourism

MoU places tour operator Dewa Bejo in the dominant position because other tour operators should be placed under or in the subordinate position and therefore it is termed Dewa Bejo (1, 2, 3, or 4) and these subordinate positions are obliged to pay "entrance contribution" to them. The following figure shows the dominant and subordinate positions of the tour operators:

Figure 1: Dominant and Subordinate Position of Tour Operators in Goa Pindul



Tour Operators of Dewa Bejo have a dominant position as they have higher economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital than other tour operators. **Firstly**, it has economic capital in the form of village cash management for the secretariat of the tour operators; **Secondly**, social capital is shown by the network with the village government of Gunungkidul District due to its legal ownership in the management of Karst Area of *Goa Pindul*. **Thirdly**, cultural capital is obtained from the transfer of knowledge on how to manage of Karst Area of *Goa Pindul* such as trainings from the government and therefore nearly all the tour guides have been certified. The accumulation of economic, social, and cultural capital is expressed through award (Symbolic Capital) gained by tour operator of Dewa Bejo for the legal ownership of *Goa Pindul* management and the recipient of the award as the best tour operator management.

The dominant position requires the tour operators of Dewa Bejo to maintain harmonious relations with other tour operators. If there is any conflict between operators, tour operator of Dewa Bejo is responsible for reporting and discussing solutions to the problem with the district government of Gunungkidul. In addition, this tour operator is mainly in charge of preserving Karst Area of *Goa Pindul* supported by other tour operators and residents. The dominant position of Dewa Bejo was challenged by other tour operators. They objected to the cooperation system by paying "entrance contribution" to the owner of the main tourist destination of *Goa Pindul*. They negotiated for lower price and even no charge at all, but they failed.

Due to the failure on the negotiation of "entrance contribution", the six tour operators of decided to fight against the case or they do a strategy of resistance. The strategy was inviting tourists without paying the entrance contributions to *Goa Pindul*. The refusal was openly expressed because of the imbalanced competition among tour operators. In this competition the tour operators are placed in a dominant position and gain recognition as legal tour operators because they "sell" the same service that is the cave tubing of *Goa Pindul*. This is, therefore, in line with what is stated by Durkheim that the competition between any organisms increases with the degree of similarity between these organisms; competition involves living creatures with the

same resources in any aspect of life (Durkheim 1933: 328).

The research findings indicate that the Goa Pindul, there are stakes, forces, and tour operators who have big capital and tour operators who have no capital. Dewa Bejo 1,2, 3, and 4 have the most capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital). They get the best (dominant) position in the arena. Meanwhile, the other six operators are in the subordinate position. Tour operators which are in the subordinate position will try to take the dominant position, while those in the dominant position will try to maintain the position or strategy of domination.

The conflicts among tour operators will result in an imperfect market of tourism, which could potentially damage the Karst Area of Goa Pindul as the operators are in competition to obtain as many visitors as possible. Tour operators should limit the excessive number of visitors as it can damage ecosystem and cave ornaments. Therefore, it is necessary to make strict rules for tourist operators in terms of the number of visitors per day, visitor's awareness, and tour guide to contribute to the preservation of *Goa Pindul*.

Conservation of the Karst area of *Goa Pindul* is strived by the District Government of Gunungkidul by applying strict policy in which there will be no more buildings or physical construction on the top of *Goa Pindul* which is potential to burden the cave³. The policy aims to maintain sustainability or support karst conservation in the location because Karst Area of *Goa Pindul* is one of the supporting geosets of Gunungsewu. The state plays an important role in regulating the competitions. This function of the state maintains the sustainable tourism development. The government and local community should maintain the sustainable tourism development as it is closely related to societal survivability and economic sustainability.

4. CONCLUSION

Competition among tour operators in gaining more tourists is due to the independency to establish tour operators. There have been 10 tour operators with only one favorite tourist destination, causing the Karst Area of *Goa Pindul* to become a contested space among tourist operators. Manipulating the price of the entrance ticket to the Karst Area of *Goa Pindul* area is performed by motorcycle taxis and tourist marketers, causing unhealthy competition.

The government and tour operators have collaborated in creating rules, resulting in domination among tour operators. Tour operator of Dewa Bejo gains dominant position due to the accumulation of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital) higher than other tour operators. The dominant position of Dewa Bejo tour operator has created resentment and therefore resistance from other tour operators. This situation requires a special attention from local government and tour operators to design new rules which are fair for all and to support the natural preservation of Karst Area of *Goa Pindul* in order to maintain the sustainable development of tourism in the area.

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