

THE IMPACT OF THE EXISTENCE OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM ON THE ECONOMY OF THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY STUDY ON THREE RELIGIOUS TOURISM OBJECTS IN TUBAN

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of religious tourism on the local communities' economy surrounding three key religious tourism sites in Tuban, East Java: the Sunan Bonang Tomb, Asmoro Qondi Tomb, and Kwan Sing Bio Temple. The main issue addressed is the underutilization of religious tourism's economic potential in these areas, where micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) still struggle to innovate and grow. The research evaluates how religious tourism contributes to local economic development through increased income, job creation, business innovation, and infrastructure improvements. Employing a qualitative method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, documentation, and focus group discussions, and were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model alongside SPSS-assisted regression analysis. The findings indicate that religious tourism significantly boosts the local economy, especially by encouraging entrepreneurship and improving the performance of MSMEs. However, challenges such as unequal benefit distribution and environmental management persist. The implications of this research emphasize the need for stakeholders to engage in strategic planning to enhance community participation, infrastructure, and innovation, thereby ensuring that religious tourism not only preserves cultural heritage but also becomes a sustainable driver of inclusive economic growth in the region.

KEYWORDS *Impact, Religious Tourism, Community Economy, Study, and Three Religious Tourism Objects*



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INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism is a form of tourism with spiritual and economic value for the community (Rysbekova et al., 2014). In contrast to conventional tourism, religious tourism attracts visitors who come to relax and carry out worship or religious activities (Mukhirto et al., 2022). In Indonesia, where most of the population embraces religion with a strong pilgrimage tradition, religious tourism has great potential to support the community's economy around tourist areas (Putri et al., 2024). Sacred sites such as guardian tombs, historic mosques, and other religious sites often attract visitors from various regions, ultimately creating economic opportunities for the local community (Sunaria et al., 2020).

The existence of religious tourism has a direct and indirect economic impact on the surrounding community. The direct impact can be seen from the increase in economic activity, such as the increase in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the trade, services, and hospitality sectors. The local community often takes advantage of the flow of visitors by opening food stalls, souvenir shops, lodging, and offering transportation services (Suryani & Kumala, 2021). In addition, the presence of tourists creates demand for local products, which provides opportunities for business actors to develop their businesses. Thus, religious tourism can be one of the driving forces of the local economy (Aulia & Rahmini, 2020).

In addition to direct economic impacts, religious tourism also indirectly affects the community's economy through infrastructure development and improvement of public facilities. The government often pays more attention to religious tourism areas by building roads, bridges, and other supporting facilities to facilitate tourist access (Bahits et al., 2020). This infrastructure upgrade is beneficial not only for visitors but also for the surrounding community, which can enjoy better access to transportation and facilities. This impact encourages local economic growth more broadly because adequate infrastructure supports other economic activities (Juju & Emilda, 2021).

Although it has a significant positive impact, religious tourism also requires proper management so that its economic benefits can be felt sustainably. Without good management, the development of religious tourism can cause problems such as congestion, deterioration of environmental quality, and economic inequality between large and small business actors (Habib & Mahyuddin, 2021). Therefore, synergy is needed between the government, the community, and tourism managers to create an environment conducive to local economic growth. This research is important to examine in depth how religious tourism can have a positive impact on the economy of the surrounding community, as well as the challenges that need to be overcome, so that the benefits can be maximized and sustainable (Waluyo et al., 2022).

Religious tourism has emerged as one of the significant drivers of local economic activity in various regions, including Tuban Regency, which is known for its religious destinations such as the Sunan Bonang Tomb, Asmoro Qondi Tomb, and Kwan Sing Bio Temple. Despite the increasing number of visitors to these sites, the economic potential of religious tourism in Tuban has not been maximally harnessed. The surrounding communities, particularly MSMEs, are

often still limited in their ability to innovate and scale their businesses to meet the rising tourist demand. There is also insufficient data on how much economic value is generated from tourism-related activities, such as increased income, job creation, and infrastructure improvements.

Moreover, there is a lack of integration between tourism planning and local economic development strategies. Many stakeholders, including local governments and community business actors, lack a clear understanding of how to translate tourism traffic into long-term economic benefits. Without comprehensive research that maps both the opportunities and constraints of religious tourism development, Tuban risks missing out on the broader economic transformation that tourism could provide. Understanding the dynamics between religious tourism and local economic performance is critical for designing effective, inclusive, and sustainable policies.

The urgency of this research lies in the increasing reliance on tourism as a catalyst for regional economic growth, especially in post-pandemic recovery efforts. With Tuban experiencing a steady influx of religious tourists, there is an immediate need to evaluate how this sector can be optimized to support local economic resilience. Without a strategic approach, tourism growth may lead to missed opportunities for local businesses, uneven income distribution, and inadequate infrastructure development. This study provides timely insights that can help local governments and stakeholders formulate data-driven strategies to leverage religious tourism as a sustainable and inclusive economic engine.

Previous research by Hasanah (2020) explained that the relationship between religious tourism and the welfare of business actors is positive, meaning that the more religious tourism develops, the more the welfare of the people involved in the related business sectors will also increase. The growth of religious tourism attracts more visitors, which contributes to increased demand for goods and services, such as accommodation, food, souvenirs, and transportation. This opens up new business opportunities and expands the scale of existing businesses, increasing local business actors' income. With the increase in visitors, many business actors can improve their economic conditions through increased sales, job creation, and investment in business development.

Although numerous studies have explored the economic potential of tourism, there remains a lack of focused analysis on the specific impact of religious tourism on the local economy in small urban areas such as Tuban. Most existing research emphasizes natural or cultural tourism, overlooking how religious tourism contributes to microeconomic development, particularly for local communities and MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises). Moreover, limited research integrates qualitative insights and empirical economic indicators to assess religious tourism's full benefits and challenges. This study addresses that gap by evaluating economic variables such as income growth, employment, infrastructure development, and business innovation directly related to religious tourism sites in Tuban.

This study presents a novel approach by examining the economic impact of religious tourism through a combined qualitative method supported by empirical

data from three major religious tourism sites in Tuban—Sunan Bonang Tomb, Asmoro Qondi Tomb, and Kwan Sing Bio Temple. It moves beyond general economic assessments by incorporating performance and innovation factors of surrounding MSMEs, providing an integrated perspective on how religious tourism affects local economies in terms of income and business development, infrastructure changes, and community empowerment. This comprehensive framework has not been widely explored in previous studies.

This study aims to analyze the impact of religious tourism in Tuban on the surrounding community's economy, focusing on three existing religious tourism objects. The novelty of this study lies in the lack of studies on the specific influence of religious tourism on the local economy, considering that most previous research focused more on natural and cultural tourism. Through an empirical approach, this study will evaluate changes in income, employment, and micro-business development due to religious tourism, as well as examine the perception of local communities towards the existence of tourism and its impact on social and cultural relations. In addition, this research is expected to provide strategic recommendations to the government and tourism managers to maximize economic benefits for local communities.

The findings of this research offer significant value for policymakers, tourism managers, and local business communities. By understanding the tangible economic contributions of religious tourism, stakeholders can develop strategies to enhance tourism's positive effects, such as providing training for local entrepreneurs, improving infrastructure, and promoting cultural heritage sustainably. The study's insights also support local governments in formulating inclusive policies that maximize tourism-driven economic benefits while addressing challenges such as congestion, price inflation, and environmental degradation. Ultimately, the research fosters a more resilient and inclusive local economy through optimized religious tourism management.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative method to explore the economic impact of religious tourism on communities surrounding the religious sites of Sunan Bonang Tomb, Asmoro Qondi Tomb, and Kwan Sing Bio Temple in Tuban Regency, East Java. The study aims to understand how religious tourism influences residents' economic development, particularly MSME actors operating near these religious destinations. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, documentation, observation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), allowing researchers to gain comprehensive insights into the experiences of visitors and the perspectives of local traders and tourism managers.

The primary data sources in this study were obtained through direct interviews with MSME association leaders, tourism managers at each site, and local business traders. Secondary data were collected from community archives and official records related to each religious tourism site. The research instruments included the researcher's direct involvement, interview guides, audio recorders, and notebooks for field notes. The chosen qualitative approach provided a rich,

contextual understanding of how religious tourism contributes to or challenges local economic conditions.

The study adopted the Miles and Huberman interactive model for data analysis, involving stages of data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Additionally, coding techniques such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were employed, and some data were processed using SPSS for enhanced analysis. To ensure validity, the research emphasized credibility and transferability through continuous cross-checking during the data collection. This approach ensured that the findings reflect the real economic dynamics experienced by the local communities around these religious tourist destinations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The tradition of pilgrimage has been inherited from generation to generation from our ancestors by its supporters with various motivations and goals that cannot be separated from society's general view. In the view of people who often make pilgrimages to the grave, one of the reasons is whether the spirits of saints have the power to protect nature (Putri et al., 2024). Religious tourism is a tourist visit to cultural, religious, and ritual tourist attractions carried out by tourists for cultural, ideological, and recreational tourism purposes. One of the characteristics of religious tourism is that it is grouped (the number of passengers is large) and is not tied to a certain time, so religious tourism is increasingly developing and generally does not end at one time (Wicaksono & Idajati, 2019). Religious tourists can be divided into two groups: first, those whose purpose of travel is to carry out religious activities based on religious beliefs, and the time and length of stay are not tied to the era or historical figures. Second, those who, in addition to religious visits, also visit other recreational places and fill their free time, in other words, the purpose of their trip is multipurpose, with religious priorities (Maghfur, 2024).

The existence of religious tourism creates business opportunities and increases income for the surrounding community. When religious tourism objects are open to the public, such as guardian tombs or religious sites, the number of visitors tends to increase, especially during certain moments such as religious holidays or pilgrimages. This causes the demand for various local products and services to be high (Faridz, 2023). People who live around tourist sites often take advantage of this opportunity by opening businesses, such as food stalls, souvenir shops, lodging, and transportation services. Through these activities, they can increase their income and improve the economic condition of their families, which overall contributes to local economic growth (Cahya et al., 2020).

In addition to creating jobs and increasing income, religious tourism also plays a role in encouraging better infrastructure development in the surrounding area. Local governments usually try to improve accessibility to tourist attractions by building roads, parking facilities, and public toilets (Rohaeni & Emilda, 2021). This infrastructure development is not only beneficial for visitors but also provides long-term benefits for the local community by improving access to transportation and public services (Sukamto et al., 2023). With better infrastructure, other economic activities can also flourish, allowing people to access a wider market and

take advantage of more business opportunities. This creates a positive domino effect on the local economy (Suswita et al., 2020).

Although religious tourism brings many economic benefits, management challenges must be faced to ensure sustainable positive impacts. Economic dependence on the tourism sector can make people vulnerable to fluctuations in the number of visitors, which can be influenced by various factors such as weather conditions, safety, or travel trends. In addition, poor management can cause environmental problems, congestion, and social conflicts between locals and visitors (Pertiwi & Putra, 2023). Therefore, the government and stakeholders need to formulate policies that can regulate the development of religious tourism in a way that considers the welfare of local communities and environmental sustainability. With the right approach, the existence of religious tourism can continue to make a positive contribution to the economy of the surrounding community.

Tuban is indeed known as one of Indonesia's regions with a significant wealth of religious tourism. Some famous religious tourism objects in Tuban include the tomb of Sunan Bonang, who is one of the wali songo, and the Great Mosque of Tuban, which has beautiful and historic architecture. In addition, there is also the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Ibrahim, which is a pilgrimage site for many pilgrims from various regions. The existence of these objects not only attracts tourists to visit but also contributes to the economic life of the local community through the increase of small and medium enterprises and the development of infrastructure that supports tourism (Urokhim & Wahyudhi, 2023).

Religious tourism areas in Tuban, such as the tomb of Sunan Bonang, Kwan Sing Bio Temple, and Asmoro Qondi, attract many motivated tourists who want to make pilgrimages and pray. These places serve as spiritual sites and as centers of social and economic activity for the local community. The increase in tourist visits opens up opportunities for the community to innovate and create various businesses that meet visitors' needs. This innovation can be done by collaborating with local communities to promote their products and services and educating tourists about the traditions and values in the region. In addition, training and mentoring for local business actors are also important to improve the quality of products and services offered. With the right approach, religious tourism areas in Tuban can be a driving force for the local economy and maintain and preserve existing spiritual and cultural values.

The community's economic development around the tourism sector in religious tourism objects, such as the Sunan Bonang Tomb, Asmoro Qondi Tomb, and Kwan Sing Bio Temple, has great potential to improve local welfare. Strategically located to the west of the city square and behind the Tuban Grand Mosque, this location is a center of visit for tourists who want to pilgrimage and pray. This development can be carried out through several steps, starting with the development of tourist objects and attractions. One of them is the restoration of the gate, a cultural heritage with high historical value, so that it can attract the attention of tourists and give a deeper impression of the culture and history of the area.

Furthermore, the development of tourism facilities and infrastructure is also very important to improve the comfort of visitors. The construction of the hall as a

multifunctional space can be used for various activities, including religious or cultural events, while the development of a canopy for souvenir vendors will create a comfortable area for visitors to shop. This facility enhances the tourist experience and provides opportunities for local business actors to peddle their products, which can be typical foods, handicrafts, or souvenirs related to the religious tourist attraction.

Promotion and marketing also play an important role in the development of this religious tourism sector. Religious tourism has different characteristics compared to natural or artificial tourism, as visitors usually have a strong spiritual motivation to visit these places. Therefore, the promotion strategy must emphasize the cultural and spiritual values contained in these tourist objects (Hasbi & Lestari, 2024). Human resources in this area are pretty good. The majority of association administrators and managers are indigenous people who have a deep understanding of local culture. They also play an active role in managing tourist attractions with professional operational standards (SOPs). With this support, the development of religious tourism in Tuban is expected to improve the community's economy and sustainably preserve local culture.

Thus, religious tourism has positively contributed to the surrounding community's economy, including creating jobs, selling clothes, accessories, food, drinks, increasing wages, boosting daily sales, and more. Religious tourism has positively contributed to the economy in several ways, resulting in various economic activities and preventing economic stagnation. To be precise, the increase in the price of goods and services among the tourism Muslim community, the increase in land prices, and the increase in the cost of living of the majority of people, results in great profits for small communities in the community and a negative impact on the tourism economy that is given proper attention. Rising prices of goods and services in tourism Muslim communities, rising land prices, and costs for the average person's lifestyle result in significant gains for small-scale community members and negative effects on the tourism economy that require attention. Tourism structure and planning are suitable for religious tourism destinations. However, the positive impact of tourism on the economy is much more significant than the negative effects.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that the impact of the existence of religious tourism on the economy of the surrounding community in Tuban is very significant, with the growth of the local business sector increasing due to the high flow of visitors to religious tourism objects. Religious tourism not only opens opportunities for people to run small and medium businesses, such as stalls, inns, and souvenir shops, but also encourages the improvement of infrastructure and public facilities that benefit the community. Despite the challenges in management and economic dependence, religious tourism can be a sustainable driving force for the economic welfare of the community around the tourist area with the right strategy.

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