

Developing Border Tourism in Sota, Merauke through Tourism Festival

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Studies on border tourism development mostly explore the role of government as an actor in developing border tourism. This study focuses on the government's efforts to promote border areas using festival tourism. Cross Border Tourism in Indonesia is still hindered by problems such as being located in remote areas and minimum public facilities, which impacts on the low number of visits. In order to attract more tourists, the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Tourism held Cross Border Festivals in a number of border areas in Indonesia, one of which is Merauke, the border area between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The current study analyzes the implication of Cross Border Festival for the economic development of the border area and the local communities in general. To do so, data was gathered from documentation study, field observation, and interviews with key persons and local communities in Sota, Merauke. The result of this study indicates that tourism festivals increase the number of tourist visits in border areas and the popularity of border areas, especially among domestic visitors.

Keywords: *Cross Border Tourism, Community Awareness, Economic Impact, Merauke, Tourism Festival.*

Introduction

Cross Border Tourism as a part of *Special Interest Tourism* (SIT), has been facing a classic problem: the location that is very far from the city center and the limited facilities, such as poor roadways and telecommunication. This has impacted on the tourists' visits. SIT alone started to develop in the early 1980s. SIT attracts a limited number of visitors. The consumers are those who travel not only because they want to have a good time, but also to fulfill their needs for experience, knowledge, or other spiritual needs. To attract more SIT visitors, the border areas need better facilities that could make it more appealing.

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The border tourism that starts to grow in Indonesia has some similar problems. The distance from the city center and poor facilities hinder the development. Even local people do not visit the borders. There are not many domestic tourists who are interested to visit border tourism. Many people believe that border areas are left behind and do not offer special things except the label of being a border. Borders such as between Indonesia and Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, and Indonesia or Timor Leste, have minimum public facilities. The recent construction of roadways, communications, and posts in the border area has given a positive impact on the Indonesian border area in recent years.

The Ministry of Tourism of Indonesia tried to boost border tourism by conducting a festival in 2016. The festival played an important role in the tourism industry both as an asset and a product of tourism (Cudny 2013). The main motivation for people to take a cultural trip is not only to have a good time but to get a new understanding and to experience something new. Holding festivals in the border area is expected to attract tourists who like cultural trips and SIT in general, cross border tourism in particular.

Cross Border Festival in Indonesia, managed by the Ministry of Tourism, offers music concerts, bazaar, cuisine and a number of sports events such as horse race and motocross. A huge number of tourists both domestic tourists and visitors from the neighboring country come to enjoy Cross Border Festivals. Cross Border Festivals in Atambua, East Nusa Tenggara, for example, could attract around 37,000 visitors in 2016. The visitors came from the domestic area and Timor Leste. Cross Border Festivals in Indonesia's border area to attract tourists is also conducted in West Kalimantan, Sanggau and Aruk, by importing artists from Jakarta. Besides that, they also showcase local culture in the form of dances, music, and cuisine. Cross Border Festival has been held since 2016 in Jayapura and Merauke. Just like other Cross Border Festivals, the one in Jayapura and Merauke are also aimed at increasing the tourists' visits.

This paper analyzes the impact of festival tourism on the local economy in border areas. Geographically, Indonesia's border areas are located in a remote area and they often lack infrastructure facilities. Whether or not the Cross Border Festival is able to boost economy and not just a fad is discussed in this paper.

Literature Review

Most studies on border tourism development emphasize the role of government as an actor in developing border tourism, both as the main actor or actor collaborating with other parties, including the private sector, communities, another state, or multinational corporations (Sotiriadis and Shen 2017). This study focuses on the government's efforts to promote border areas using festival tourism.

Getz (2008) locates festival tourism as a part of event tourism. According to Lord Cultural Resources Planning and Management, the festival is one form of event tourism that becomes a subpart of cultural tourism. Janiskee (1980) defines 'event' as a series of attractive and interesting activities that are held in a short

period of time in a certain area to commemorate a specific happening. A study about special events as part of tourism management was started in 1970. The definition expands so an event is not only an important motivator or image creator of a certain area but also serves as the people's economic booster.

Event tourism could be classified into three groups, namely, events that refer to a cultural celebration, political activities, and art activities. The second group refers to all activities related to commercial, education, and science. The third group refers to sports, recreation, and other special activities. In other words, a festival is a part of cultural events tourism. Festival itself is an event that performs local culture from the non-material side (intangible product) like dances, music, customs, or local folktales. Holding events such as this could become a strategy to attract visitors and investors, become the main propeller for the tourism sector, and the main contributor in increasing the competitive advantage of a tourism resort (Getz 2008).

Meanwhile, Congcong (2014: 53) describes a festival in a more specific way. *"It (festival) is a kind of social activity according to the needs of people living custom for a long time gradually established and passed from generation to generation"*. Therefore, festival tourism is an effort to construct tourism by utilizing the culture of local people.

"... is to promote the tourism development of the city and driving the economic development of relative industries, through the system planning, development and utilization of local unique cultural traditions, ethnic customs and characteristic industry, regularly or irregularly held in a particular area has a specific theme, set tourism, culture, economy, life as a whole, with extensive people to participate in the festival celebrations."

Congcong defines festival tourism through some preconditions. First, festival tourism offers local culture and customs and refers to a certain geographical area. Therefore, every festival in every region has its own uniqueness. Second, every tourist could participate and experience the event first hand. Third, culture, besides becoming the main commodity to attract visitors, also serves as a bridge for cultural communication among the citizens of the countries. Fourth, festival tourism is a very vast activity that includes local culture, local cuisine, lodgings, transportation, security, and political matters that are related to the policy and the administration of festival tourism. Last, festival tourism is a new form of tourism product that gives a different sensation to the tourists because they do not only experience different culture but they could also see it from a new perspective. Overall, a new product of cultural tourism industry ought to give not only a larger economic but also social impact.

Therefore, festival administration must have the element of culture in the form of tangible products as well as intangible products like dances and music. Although in reality, the administration of festivals as a part of tourism could not be defined merely as a local cultural product. As a product, in order to attract visitors, a festival is held in line with other local activities like sports events and contemporary music and arts. Festivals should not reduce the identity of the area. In fact, it should be

able to create a brand that lasts. Cudny (2013) argues that the loss of local authenticity due to the intention to fulfill the tourists' demands could be the cause failure in a festival.

Some academics believe that as a festival is held by the locals using local cultures and wisdom, then a festival could form the community bond itself. For Dunstan, as cited by Derret (2003), a festival could build a community. Organizing a big festival needs a great number of individuals and collective efforts. In order to prepare a festival, personal time allocation and kindness are also needed. With the joint activity, a festival could serve as a bridge to unite a community. In addition to this, a festival also creates a mutual social relation through the shared culture such as myths, folk stories, dances, and other traditional products that could spark pride in the local culture that motivates people to preserve it. In other words, festival functions as a medium of social cohesion strengthen local values and become an important token of difference (uniqueness) of place and community (Derret 2003).

Apart from how festival tourism is administered, Arcodia and Robb (2000) state that event tourism plays a big role in giving a significant contribution to the tourism industry because it could create various tourism demands like tours, lodging, and others so it gives socio-economic advantages for the surrounding community. A study by Stanskova and Vassenska (2015) reveals that local cultural festival shows a positive impact on the development of tourism because three-fourths of the respondents of the study shows their specific interest to the local tradition and culture. The local tradition attracts local and foreign visitors. The study also claims that local festivals lead to economic advantage that has a direct impact on the economy such as increasing employment, business profits, and lodgings. Similarly, O'Sullivan and Jackson (2002) through their study believe that the impact of the festival does not only increase local people's income, but it is also able to strengthen the local community and raise life quality. In addition to this, the exploration history and local culture will also consolidate the local identity.

Scholars also believe that festivals bring positive impacts on the economy. Festival and event could significantly improve economic development and revitalization by rebranding tourism objects, increasing investments and promoting other economic activities of the area. A study by Gotham (2005) argues that Mardi Grass commoditization increases the level of consumption in New Orleans. Research by Prentice and Andersen (2003) shows that Edinburgh Festival returns the consumption level in Scotland. Research by Nagi and Nagi (2013) found that Sziget Festival and Budapest Parade are able to contribute to economic improvement in Hungary.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach. The data was collected from field observation and interviews with authorities and local government staff, namely the Areal Secretary of Merauke Regency, The Head of Cultural Bureau, the Head of Tourism Bureau, and the staff of Industry Bureau of Merauke Regency. The

interview also involved local people in the border area of Sota Merauke, especially with the souvenir makers and sellers.

The collected data was analyzed by using analytic descriptive approach. The data is categorized based on specific issues, analyzed and interpreted. The findings were narrated and then concluded.

Sota as Cross Border Tourism Destination

Sota is a village that is located in Merauke district, Merauke Regency that has a direct border with Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the southern part of Papua Island, Indonesia. The village is located 80 km from Merauke. The roadway from Merauke regency to Sota is a good-asphalted road that passes through the forest and savanna of Wasur National Park. Sota itself is one of the tourism area owned by Merauke, other than Lampu Satu beach, Onggaya beach, Payum beach, Okaba beach, and Lotus Garden in Semangga.

Sota has one distinction as a unique tourism destination because it is a state's border area. It is located in the east end of Indonesia in the southern part of Papua Island. It has twin landmarks or the 0 km landmark like the one in Sabang, Aceh (the furthest west part of Indonesia, in the northern part of Sumatera Island). The other uniqueness of this area is the fact that traditional trades between Sota citizens, Weam, and Wereaber villages from Papua New Guinea (PNG) still exist. The traditional trade that depends on personal relations is done intensively on a regular basis. There were around 200-300 visitors from PNG and on average 100 people from Indonesia make visits to PNG every month¹. The citizens of PNG who come to Sota usually shop daily needs like a noodle, sugar, coffee, clothes, and so on. On the other hand, they come to Sota with some items like venison, cassowary, and some simple farming tools. In recent years, the cross border traders from PNG start to sell lances, bags and other handicrafts as souvenirs that are managed by local citizens.

Besides having an advantage as an area that has a direct border with other countries and a traditional trade system, it is also located in the area of Wasur National Park that is so rich in flora and fauna. Sota also provides a unique phenomenon, that is, ants' nests or *Musamus*, something can only be found in Indonesia and a number of countries in Africa. In the border area between Indonesia and PNG, there is a park where tourists come to see the view or to spend their time on weekends. The number of visits to the border park is only high on weekends. Merauke regency does not have much modern entertainment such as cinema, theatre, or children's playground. People in Merauke go to natural places, like the border parks and beaches in the southern part of Merauke.

As a cross border tourism area, Sota is visited more by local tourists that come from Merauke or other regions like Jayapura. Visitors from outside of Papua or abroad come because they want to see Wasur National Park or because they have

¹Pos Imigrasi Perbatasan Sota (2013) *Merauke*.

another business in Merauke. In other words, the border area of Sota has not been the main tourist resort in Merauke. The motivation to visit is merely to see the country's borderlines that cannot be found anywhere else in Indonesia.

A number of attempts have been done to increase the attraction of Sota as a tourism destination. Besides the border park, which was constructed by a local citizen, a project of ecotourism has been tried in the area for the first time. In 2013, Sota received aid for developing ecotourism in a 3-year project. Unfortunately, the 3-year project was not successful due to the lack of awareness and participation of the community. From a number of interviews with local government officials, it is concluded that the main obstacle is from the community. The low awareness of the economic prospect of tourism makes the project sustainable for no more than 3 years, with central government's support. Lodgings that were newly constructed stalled and the fruits gardens for tourism destinations were not cultivated anymore. Out of three types of equipment of cajuput oil distillation, there was only one machine that was functional (Dewi and Rachmawati 2018).

The idea of ecotourism was started from the Merauke government's project to make Sota not only a cross border tourism object with its zero kilometer tower, but also to give the visitors a different experience in enjoying the natural attraction. Because the area is fertile land, they wish to make Sota an area that looks like Mekarsari Fruit Garden in West Java. Besides enjoying the view and fruits, the visitors could bring the fruits home (interview 18th April 2017). Sota is a village that could produce up to 500 tons of fruits per year². The main fruits are mangoes, oranges, pineapples, and bananas.

This failure is a lesson to learn for the government about what the community still needs. They need a bigger stimulus to be able to see the positive impact of the tourism industry to increase the local community's wellbeing. Generally, the local people do not have sufficient education and most of them work as farmers. Most people still rely on gathering from the surrounding forests. Therefore, to improve the economy through tourism, there should be an event that can invite more visitors to the border area through certain events; for example, based on the celebration of Indonesian Independence Day on August 17 that could attract hundreds of visitors either from Merauke or PNG, the ministry of Tourism of Republik Indonesia held Cross Border Festival. They expect that the cultural event could attract more tourists to the border area.

Merauke Cross Border Festival

The Ministry of Tourism of Republic Indonesia conducted Cross Border Festival in a number of areas in Indonesia's border area including Sota, Merauke. It is one of the efforts to increase tourism potency in border areas. The number of visitors that is significantly high is expected to increase the community's awareness of their economic potency. It is expected that the local people see the high number

²Biro Pusat Statistik (2015) *Merauke dalam Angka 2014*.

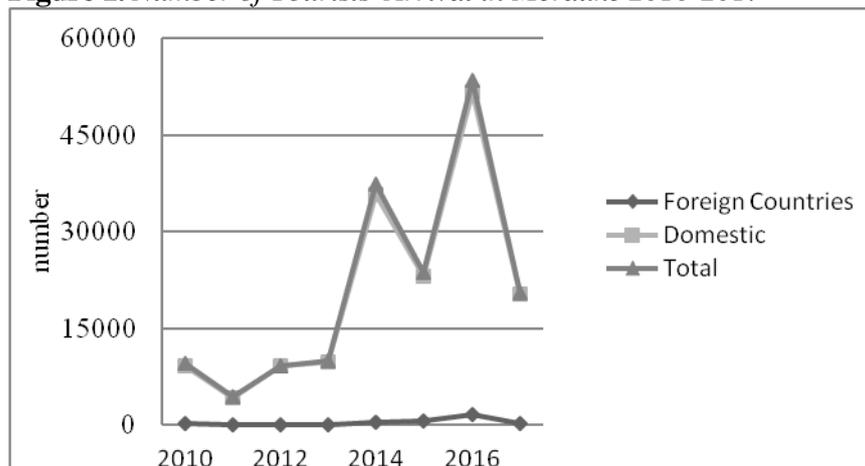
of visits as a way to open an economic opportunity. Vinsensius Jemadu, the Deputy Assistant of Asia Pacific Market Development of the Ministry of Tourism of Indonesia, stated that this activity is a strategy to attract foreign visitors, especially from Papua New Guinea. Besides, it is also expected to increase the economic activities of the community in the border area so that the real sector could be improved.

Cross Border Festival is conducted in Merauke on August 17, 2016, and December 13, 2016, in Sota's field, Merauke, Papua. This event was dominated by band performances with a number of artists from the capital city such as Sandy Bethany and Black sound Dave Solution. They chose Reggae genre because according to the Head of Festival of the Deputy Assistant of Marketing Development of Asia Pacific, Adela Raung, the citizen of PNG likes Reggae music very much. This strategy seems to be successful to attract a big number of visitors from PNG to attend Cross Border Festival. Besides music shows, this activity also showcased local cultures such as dances, music, local cuisine, and local handicraft.

This event did not only improve the community's economic activities but also become media to foster good relations between countries (Gunawan 2019). Besides choosing the right music genre, the festival also shows the performance of a similar culture, cuisine, and it was also Visa-of-Visit-Free or Bebas Visa Kunjungan (Tribun 2016). The General Consulate of Republik Indonesia in PNG, Abraham Lebalauw, states that the local citizens of PNG really appreciate this event. It is very popular and could attract a number of PNG citizens to come.

The Impact of Cross Border Festival

The Ministry of Tourism of Indonesia noted that the festival was a great success with the high visit rate. There were 1,300 foreign tourists who came to Cross Border Festival on August 17th, 2016; and about 850 people came to the festival held on December 3rd, 2016. The data of Statistic Central Bureau "Merauke dalam Angka 2018" indicated the increase of tourists' visits in 2016, both domestic and foreign tourists (Figure 1). It is noted that in 2010 the number of tourists' visits was 303, it decreased to 110 in 2011, and continued to decline to 39 in 2012 and to 55 in 2013. There was an increasing number of 420 people in 2013 to 545 in 2015. A sharp increasing number happened in 2016 (1.720 tourists) but it declined again in 2017 (294 tourists). The same thing happened in 2016 when the Cross Border Festival 2016 was held. In the previous years the rate of domestic tourists' visits was only 9,000 in 2010-2013 and 37,432 in 2014 and 23,670 in 2015, and 53,403 in 2016. Unfortunately, the tourist's arrival declined again in 2017 to 20,395.

Figure 1. Number of Tourists' Arrival in Merauke 2010-2017

Source: Retrieved from the Report of Merauke Regency 2010-2018.

Not only that it increased the number of foreign and domestic tourist visits, the festival also increased the number of lodgings/hotels from 14 in 2016 to 18 in 2017. The number of rooms from 391 in 2015 to 495 in 2017. This also increased the rate of employment in hospitality. Referring to the Ministry of Tourism of Indonesia, the increment of employment either direct or indirect in the tourism sector is how tourism contributes to the economy. The direct employment of tourism sector includes employment in accommodation, travel agents, airlines, and other passenger services including restaurants and recreational places that directly serve the tourists. The indirect employment includes in the sectors of promotion, furnishing, vehicle rentals, and transportation manufacturers, food and drink, wholesale, computer utilities, and personal services. An increase of tourism according to Bills Number 10 2009, there are 13 kinds of business field in the sectors of (1) tourism attraction, (2) tourism resort, (3) transportation service, (4) tour travel service, (5) food and drink service, (6) accommodation service, (7) management of entertainment and recreation, (8) gathering, incentive trip, conference, and exhibition organizer, (9) tourism information service; (10) tourism consultant service; (11) tourism guide service; (12) water tourism; and (13) spa. The number of lodgings increases from 194 in 2015 to 223 in 2017. In Merauke, there was an increase in the number of restaurants/cafés although they are not significant from 24 in 2015 to 27 in 2016³.

In the area of the Sota border, the number of economically capable persons because of cross border tourism was also significantly raised. Previously, there was only one person who owned a souvenir shop in the cross border area of Sota. Since the administration of the Cross Border Festival, there are many booths that are located only 10 meters from the zero points of the Indonesia-PNG border. The 20 booths are supported by one of the government's banks for empowering the border-area community. In the booths, local citizens sell cajuput oil, ants' nests, t-shirts, hats, key chains, bracelets, sculptures, and noken bags. All of the items are local

³Biro Pusat Statistik (2018) *Merauke dalam Angka 2017*.

products, though still very simple in nature. The increasing number of sellers in the cross border area is considered as the influence of the Cross Border Festival that successfully attracts the tourists to visit Sota. An interview with a number of 'mama' (ladies) who sell souvenirs indicates that the number of sellers would increase if there is an event in the border.

The increasing number of visitors in the border area also motivates the local people to produce local souvenirs. Women work harder to produce more noken bags (noken is a traditional crochet bag made from wood fiber that is dried, spun, and ornamented with cassowary leathers). They can produce 5-7 noken bags if the raw material is available. The traditional bag production made by the skillful hands of Sota women is one of the promising businesses. They love the job because those bags are immediately sold (interview 26th April 2018).

Similarly, the business of cajuput oil distillation that was activated through an ecotourism project is still maintained by the local people although the distillation machine that still runs well is only one. Surprisingly, from one unit machine, the people could produce cajuput oil that is sold as a unique product from Sota. Although they only reused energy drink bottles, the people's effort to produce cajuput oil as part of souvenirs in the border areas shows that the local people's enthusiasm starts to grow. Other products include wood sculpture and bone craft, key chains, bracelets, and other ornaments. The products that are not produced in Sota but sold in the booths are t-shirts and hats. Overall, the increasing number of booths has developed the tourism industry.

Besides souvenir booths, there are also food courts. Not far from the border park, there are 2 stalls that sell drinks and simple snacks. The food court is located 500 meters from the border milestone. The increase in food and drink booths and food stalls is not significant. However, this change is meaningful because it shows that people start to understand the economic potency of the area.

The positive impact of the event on the economic condition of the locals, referring to O'Sullivan and Jackson (2002), Arcodia and Robb (2000), is shown from the number of visits by tourists, the number of economic activities, or kinds of tourism economic activity bonds. In the case of Merauke, the positive impacts include raised awareness and the positive response of the local people towards cross border tourism. The impact of Cross Border Festival in 2016 is a real description that a border area is a potential area to increase the economy and wealth of the community. In other words, organizing a festival to attract visitors to come to the area has a positive impact on the local people's awareness and is able to motivate them to be more active in the tourism industry. Their pride in traditional products has increased as well.

Unfortunately, the Cross Border Festival did not continue in the following years. In 2017 and 2018, Cross Border Festival was only conducted in Skouw, Jayapura and Keerom Regency. In Keerom, Cross border Festival is held for three days. It was successful with 27,000 visitors (SUARAMERDEKA 2018). Meanwhile, in Skouw there were 5,000 visitors from PNG. Both areas are located on the border of Indonesia and PNG in the northern part that tends to be more populated and has better public facilities compared to the border of Indonesia-PNG

in Sota, Merauke. The Cross border Festival is still organized with the same concept, which is attracting the tourists by inviting artists from the capital city and offering reggae music. Some local culture includes dances and local people's handcrafts.

The discontinuation of the Cross Border Festival decreased the tourists' arrivals as seen in Figure 1. This also influences the souvenir sales in the border area. The souvenir booths are full of sellers if there is an event in the border area but they will be empty if there is no event. The low number of visitors discourages the souvenir sellers in the border area. Some sellers admitted that the booths will be placed if there is an activity in the border area held by the local government of Merauke or a certain institution from Merauke regency (interview 26th April 2018).

The Cross Border festival shows the dependency of the local community on a big cultural event held by the central government. The festival will promote more local products and local culture. A critic by West Kalimantan Forum on the Cross Border Festival mentions that the policy of the central government should be in agreement with the policy of regional government as part of development program starting from education sector, and vocational education and training for local community (Ramadhani 2017). Therefore, festival tourism could be conducted independently by the local community by using their own local culture by utilizing the available resources. The local community's skills and independence in administering an event in a border area still need a lot of external encouragement.

It is also important to conduct a discussion between the government of the Republic of Indonesia and the government of PNG to manage the border area. In the case of German-Czech borderland, Stoffelen et al. (2017) mentioned the importance of structural cross-border destination management with the multi-scalar approach between the two countries in order to develop tourism destinations in the border area. It is a very good practice to be applied in the management of border tourism in Indonesia.

Continue or Discontinue?

The administration of a cultural festival could become a strategy for a tourism resort area to attract visitors. A cultural attraction that reflects the uniqueness would be branding for the region so it could attract more tourists to come. In some tourism destination areas, the festival has become the tourist destination itself like the Jember Fashion Festival in Jember. Every year, Jember Fashion Carnival attracts thousands of visitors and it yields extraordinary incomes for a number of business persons in the tourism industry. Meanwhile, Festival Penyu in Temajuk Kalimantan enjoys a great success by stopping turtles and turtle eggs hunting. Besides giving positive impacts like the increase of lodgings and restaurants, Festival Penyu or Turtle Festival in Temajok, West Kalimantan is able to conserve the nature and decrease the rate of turtle's deaths. The turtle festival is signed by releasing baby turtles to the sea.

The Cross Border Festival has improved the number of visitors in the border areas including Sota, Merauke. The music has become one of the main attractions, besides the performance of the artists from Jakarta and the BVK operation. The increased number of visitors has allowed local people to take advantage of providing food and souvenirs. The positive influence that is truly important from the administration of the Cross border Festival is not the increment in the number of stools and food courts, but in the local people's awareness about the economic potency that they have. This awareness has motivated them to produce a number of souvenirs such as woven bag, key chain, bracelet, necklace, carving, cajuput oil, and ants' nests.

A lesson to learn from the administration of the Cross Border Festival is that the dependency on central government is not good for the sustainability of the festival. Cross Border Festival is only administered twice and there are no other festivals. The people only serve as objects of the festival because they could not administer such an event on their own. This is against the spirit of the festival that should be promoting the identity of local culture and empowering the local people through the management of tourism potency. Besides the awareness of tourism potency, self-sufficiency should be nurtured by increasing the capability of the active people or the subjects of tourism industry.

Conclusion

Festival tourism is proven to be successful in increasing tourist visits in the border area. Developing border tourism through festival tourism in Indonesia has shown a similar trend. In the Papua region, which is known as a remote area and lack of visitors, attractions in festival tourism are magnets that encourage visitors to come. Thus, it is a positive impact on the tourism industry.

However, the participation of people in the border areas is not optimum yet. This is due to top-down planning. The idea of festival tourism comes from the central government. As a result, the packaging and the content of the festival tourism are not encouraging active participation of the border communities. The community becomes spectators, not being the actors in festival activities. The top-down nature also causes people to depend on the central government. The case of Sota, Merauke, shows that festival tourism is not a regular activity. The community is still dependent on the central government and local government initiation.

Thus the success of developing border tourism through festival tourism is largely determined by a good synergy between the government and the community. The government is still expected to be the initiator and provide the budget. To be sustainable, the community should take an active role in festival tourism. It is very important to open a discussion between the government and the community so that the festival of tourism in the border areas is no longer top-down in nature.

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