

# Slum Tourism: Representing and Interpreting Reality in City

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# ABSTRACT

Slum areas are often seen in urban spatial policy gaps. The slum area becomes a dilemma, it portrays the unsuccessful management of a city area, on the other hand the reality of the city has the potential to become slum area tourism as an alternative attraction for tourism in urban areas. Efforts made by stakeholders in terms of city management tend to ignore slum areas as a city reality that has never touched a solution to the problem. Slum areas with social problems require real solutions. Through tourism in slum areas, residents innovate to represent and interpret their territory to find solutions for themselves. So far, studies on slum area tourism regarding how local residents represent and interpret their territory are still rare. Therefore, this study tries to look at the initiative to practice representation and interpretation of local residents in their area, and how stakeholders represent slum areas in their area through a qualitative study using a city tourism approach. Based on the results of data collection, a description of the situation of slum areas and their communities can practically represent themselve as the reality of the city and present themselve as part of the development of city tourism. By imaging the slum area, local people earn income from interacting with tourists who hope to get a complete experience of the city's tourist destinations they visit. On the other hand, local communities who are involved in the practice of representing slum area tourism indirectly criticize city management by displaying the contrast between slum area residents and tourists through digital media within the framework of local initiatives as a form of development participation.

Keywords: Slum Tourism; City Interpretation; City Representation; Local Initiatives; Citizen Participation.

## 1. Introduction

Slum area is likely to be a problem in urban area as slum dwellers build illegal settlements with poor conditions in the unsafe residential area. Even the slums in Indonesia in various regions have occurred from the colonial era (Prayitno, 2016). The settlements are associated with

poverty, crime, and unhealthy conditions. During certain governance, the local government decided to release the illegal settlements in the slum areas into legal housing with the residents having identity cards and improper public services. Given that, legal issues in slum areas had been tackled, however, other problems such as poverty, malnutrition, crime, and improper accessibility have become complext that seriously require to be considered.

The existence of slums in the urban area is often seen as the negative impact on the rapid development, overpopulation, poor urban planning, and inappropriate policy among the stakeholders. The rapid development and overpopulation have impacted on the neglected social and physical condition in urban development. As a result, slums have become a characteristic of dynamic and heterogeneous urban residents in terms of space, cultures, and financial activities (Bolay, 2006; Hasanawi, 2019). The neglected condition among stakeholders with improper infrastructure and services, slum has been commodified by certain communities by utilizing their poverty into economic value to attract sympathy. Then it is popularly called slum tourism. Slum tourism is one of the fastest-growing niche tourism segments in the world, but it is also one of the most controversial. The United Nations defines a slum as, "a run-down area of a city characterized by substandard housing and squalor and lacking in tenure security" (UN, 2007). Slum tourism is the organization of tours in these areas. As a niche segment, slum tourism is distinguished from developmental tourism, which is a broader term that includes tourism in any region that is undergoing development (Ma, 2010).

Slum tourism has become a phenomenon globally, not only in the developing countries but also in the developed countries. There are several terms of slum tourism, an activity visiting the slum area, such as hidden place tourism, poorism, ghetto tourism, and shanty tourism. It can be said slum tourism has business value considering the demand of tourist visitors. It was supported by the data released by Frenzel that the slum tourist arrival had relatively increased in 2012 (Frenzel, 2012).

In the contemporary era, the settlement or housing in the urban area has become a complex problem particularly illegal settlement that portrays the unsuccessful management of the city and urban planning caused by overpopulation and limited area for housing. Instead of poverty, low income and the inability for mortgage payment hampered them to afford proper housing. Not only poor society living in the illegal settlements, but also society with high income resided in the illegal housing since it offers housing outside the formal market. It showed that the limited housing market and bad policy obstructed the society to afford proper housing (Acioly, 2010).

Previously, the urban policy government displaced slum areas from the city. While in the current condition, the policy has changed by motivating slum dwellers to have initiative to solve their poverty by utilizing their existing resources. Therefore, regarding the perspective of urbanization, it implied the success of sustainable urban development is by encouraging creativity and involving all stakeholders, particularly the slum dwellers in making decisions. Informal communities - whether known as favelas, slums, or by some other designation - have in many people's minds changed their social status as it has become recognised that they are not only sites of problems (crime, poverty and the usual suspects), but also sites of enormous creative energy(LSE, n.d.).

The realist approach stressed the acceptance of slum conditions to portray urban development. The slum issues and their complexities are the center of a story that attracts responses from certain communities. The awareness that poverty has unique attractiveness has been raised after the media and culture exposed the reality of urban conditions (Booyens & Rogerson, 2019). The initiative The to commodify slums in the urban area as an attraction for tourists has become a breakthrough. Slum tourism is one of the fastest-growing niche tourism segments in the world, but it is also one of the most controversial. The United Nations defines a slum as, "a run-down area of a city characterized by substandard housing and squalor and lacking in tenure security" (UN, 2007). Slum tourism is the organization of tours in these areas.

As a niche segment, slum tourism is distinguished from developmental tourism, which is a broader term that includes tourism in any region that is undergoing development (Ma, 2010).

The idea of slum tourism in the urban area has become controversial among the society (Frenzel, 2012). It affects the representative of slum tourism to become satirical pasquinade in their views and motivations. Furthermore, slum tourism raises human resistance to their poor condition with the purpose to gain benefits by commodifying their poverty. For example, dark tourism, disaster tourism and slum tourism offer an opportunity for a country to make decisions in providing zoning intervention for infrastructure (Holst, 2015).

Generally, only several studies conducted on the representation and interpretation of tourism stakeholders in Jakarta slum tourism. Munggaran et. al (Munggaran et al., 2020) stated that slum tourism in Jakarta as a practice of cosmopolitanism considering the inclusivity in their interactions between slum dweller and foreign tourist, while slum tourism demonstrates the commercialization of their poverty and disability. Utami in (Utami, 2019) highlights the slum tourism challenges could be solved by local community participations. Another perspective, Darmawan (Darmawan & Nurhalin, 2016) claimed that slum tourism management can benefit to gain economy which has become a controversy among society, however, it is accepted by local community as it has direct impact on improving their economy.

Therefore, this study focuses on the perspective of local community or slum dwellers in the practice of slum tourism. The aim is to understand to what extent slum dwellers represent and interpret their conditions and areas as slum tourism activities. As a result, this study can be considered as a representation of successful urban planning and management. Considering the new public perspective on slum areas that has been regarded as a negative image of a city, it is more likely as a new solution to poverty alleviation by looking at a participatory effort of the local community that is aligned with city policies.

#### 2. Slums and Representation of Poverty

The urbanization with illegal housing in the urban area is a complex issue with higher load capacity to be tackled by the government. Demographic variables and the increase of demand on the land and housing have become unsolvable urban issues that are happening continuously over time. Slum area and illegal settlement portrayed the unsuccessful housing sector with the higher ratio rate against the low income and limited area. Based on researchers, that deteriorated condition defined unsuccessful urban government to anticipate, articulate, and carry out the policy in the urban area and housing (Acioly, 2010). As a result, slum areas are more likely to be hidden from the public related to the reproduction of poverty.

There are existing solutions that have been implemented to tackle poverty such as charity, free education, and job provision, however, those practicals are required to be improved. Regarding Habitat for Humanity in Acioly (Acioly, 2010), slum areas had been projected to increase about one quarter of the global urban population or about 1.6 million people. In 2030, the dwellers in slum areas will go up to around 2 million people (Mahayni & Medlej, 2018). Based on the local observation, slums have become a complex issue that has a negative image to be taken down considering its existence in urban areas. It seems not to be a good solution for them, slum dwellers have been living in the area for decades that has grown strong social, cultural, economic, and psychological values (Wardhani, 2017). Due to the negative image of illegal settlements, developing countries tend to despise slum areas and promote the urban city to attract tourists with a positive image.

Initiating a slum area as a tourist attraction is more likely to be a controversial solution to poverty. Conversely, it has a potential to be adopted regarding the growth of the tourism industry and demand. Given the shifting of tourist demand to have meaningful experience and gaining knowledge. The tourists' interest in slum tourism has a specific motive that differs from regular tourists. This term is defined as Special Interest Tourism (SIT).

Their interest in slum tourism has emerged as an alternative travel depicting life values that is derived from the exploration and findings principle. For tourists, travelling is not only for relaxation and recovery, but also for understanding new landscapes and culture. To meet their needs, slum tourism offers the inaccessible landscape, understanding the way of daily life and resiliency in facing their poverty. Their motivation for slum tourism may differ, but their motivations are generally similar like "travelling across the world is also a movement within ourselves" (Hutnyk, 1997).

On the other hand, slum tourism sparks considerable debate around an uncomfortable dilemma between feasibility and protection. Slum tourism has a potential beauty of their authenticity and nostalgic values. On the other hand, it provides an intense maze of urbanity spectacle by exploiting activities through showing poor conditions such as poverty, the loss of family members, limited access, and marginalized areas. Such conditions arise compassion triggering them to give donations in the form of money or gifts. There are two dominant motivations, for tourists, they tend to explore new areas, while tourist providers encourage slum dwellers to involve themselves in tourism activities to increase their standard of living.

This controversial topic on slum tourism is likely to attract many interests such as (1) slum dwellers; (2) tourism agent; (3) tourist; (4) urban government. In this case, the government set boundaries between urban areas and slum areas to obtain a positive image of their city. Consequently, it hampered slum dwellers to increase their wellbeing. Those two opposite circumstances depicted the gap regarding life necessities (Holst, 2015).

In addition, the existence of slum tourism represents outspoken criticism of governments due to their unsuccessful effort to eradicate poverty and unfair treatment for slum dwellers in urban areas (Frenzel, 2012). Given the tourist perspective, slum tourism offers unique and personal experiences that can be a travel option for tourists, particularly foreign tourists from developed countries.

Prior study undertook slum tourism in two perspectives, first, Aciocly (Acioly, 2010) and Holst (Holst, 2015) discussed slum tourism from the perspective of the government in urban planning. They found that top-down governance caused illegal settlement/housing issues that affected the house prices increase in the market. Given that perspective, it requires a second perspective derived by Hutnyk (Hutnyk, 1997), Frenzel (Frenzel, 2012), and Wardhani (Wardhani, 2017) focusing on humanity and social ethic approach. This second perspective emphasizes community needs and their initiative to manage their area. Moreover, slum tourism was interpreted as an effort of slum dwellers to raise the empathy and responsibility of the government and other stakeholders to overcome their poverty in the aspect of economy and psychology. Therefore, this study conducted on slum tourism in the context of slum dwellers/residents in terms of how they represent and interpret their poverty as tourist attraction.

## 3. Method

The methodology of this study uses a qualitative approach focusing on social phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). The collected data and information were undertaken through semi-structured interviews with the approach human-centered design (HCD) derived from Tim Brown (Brown, 2008) as the fundamental framework. He stated that HCD is a creative approach to solve the problem focusing on humans by understanding what the human needs then providing the solution that suits them. There are three stages of HCD adoption including inspiration, ideation, and implementation (IDEO.org, 2015). These three stages start from building empathy to the people and better understanding people. By using the three instruments, this study carried out the interview and observation as well as derived human perspective on the varied platforms to capture context and make sense of slum tourism. Intervieuw were conducted with managers/providers of the Jakarta Hidden Tour tourism service which offers slum tour packages on the TripAdvisor platform. This study was undertaken for about 4 months by direct observing

of several slum areas offering slum tour packages, namely Kota Tua, Tanah Abang, Kampung Melayu, Bantar Gebang, and the Senen area.

In addition, this study conducted on the sentiment analysis through reviews and comments on digital tourism marketplace. There are 204 reviews from 2018 to 2022 with varying responses to be analyzed using HIT (Human Intelligence Task). The data had been collected from journals, articles, and reviews on the tourism marketplaces. Through this approach, it could provide solutions to the complex problems particularly poverty that are strongly related to well-being.

#### 4. Results

Historically, slum tourism has begun in the past 19 century in the city of Shoreditch and Whitechapel, London (Ratho, 2019). It has grown in the 20-century started by Favela tour and Face to Face Tours offering unique experiences through interacting and living poor in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was followed by Reality Tours and Travels from Mumbai, India providing travel packages to observing communities living in their poverty. One of them is the Dharavi slum area. The fact of slums as tales of misery abounds when it comes to poverty in Dharavi India, as described by V. S. Naipau. Dharavi, as the name suggests, is a notorious slum. Dharavi's officially evaluated land area is 216.5 hectares, but the population varies from 600,000 to 1 million inhabitants according to different surveys (Matias & Rahu, 2014; Saglio-Yatzimirsky, 2013).

Tour providers in Mumbai, India offer poor conditions in industrial and residential areas as a unique tourist attraction. This idea was initiated by an NGO (Non-Government Organization) highlighting social responsibility value to attract foreign tourists. Things that are considered in line with the development paradigm used in slum settlement planning with three keywords, namely innovative, accelerative, and right on target. As tourists, they obtain unique experiences by understanding the reality of slum life, interacting with them, and understanding humanity's resilience. They stated that experience added values to their life such as empathy, tolerance, and awareness affecting them in the changing perspective of poverty (www.tripadvisor.co.id, 2019).

Throughout time, slum tourism has evolved not just in India and Brazil, but also in the Asian countries. In Indonesia the slums of various regions have occurred from the colonial era. Factors of urbanization, poverty, governance, and political will, both from the government and the regions, the absence of guarantees of right to live, land tenure and the presence of very strong power by the private sector which cannot be utilized by the public sector in the form of partnership schemes, the absence of community development and the absence of innovations in handling slum areas that can be applied nationally are some of the reasons why the complexity of the slum problem cannot be completely resolved. Even though several programs have been carried out, the problem of slums still cannot be stopped, in fact the number of slum areas is increasing from year to year. Innovation in handling slum areas is not just a win-win solution at this time, it needs to be handled in a comprehensive, sustainable manner, and involves several main actors or holders of full authority over the innovation scheme or only involves the community which limits their movement space so that the program implementation does not work. in accordance with the rules of empowerment as appropriate (Prayitno, 2016). The history behind Jakarta Hidden Tours establishment was due to the increase of population settlements in Jakarta. Based on data from the DKI Jakarta Province Central Statistics Agency (BPS), there were fluctuations in the number of poor people from March 2016 to September 2020. During that period, the most significant increase occurred in September 2019 to March 2020 of 32.72% or as many as 118,560 residents poor. The increase in the number of poor people from September 2019 to March 2020 was due to a decrease in people's purchasing power which was affected by rising prices of goods and services (BPS, 2021).

Loss of income sources due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is also another factor causing an increase in the number of poor people in 2020. In September 2020, the economic

situation of the population in DKI Jakarta had not improved. This can be seen from the number of poor people which increased by 3.32% or as many as 15,980 poor people (BPS DKI, 2022). From 2016 to 2020, the poverty line, food poverty line and non-food poverty line have increased. The most significant increases occurred from March 2017 to September 2017each of IDR 41,701/capita/month for the poverty line, IDR 35,809/capita/month for the food poverty line, and IDR 5,891/capita/month for the non-food poverty line. Given that, it showed unsuccessful management by the government to manage slum areas in Jakarta. Therefore, Jakarta Hidden Tour provides a tour package of slum tourism in Kampung Luar Batang, Jakarta (Munggaran et al., 2020). Based on the fact that now there is a "city without citizens", the right to the city represents the struggle of the invisible city dwellers who have limited space where they can develop and live in dignity. The right to the city is a subset of human rights which makes it more challenging to claim and implement that right (A. C. M. (ed) Sugranyes, 2010). Realizing the right to the city is therefore a struggle that social movements can fight.

In 2010, Indonesia had a tour operator operated in Jakarta providing a travel package tour of slum tourism called "Jakarta Hidden Tour". It is a pioneer slum tourism tour operator established since 2008 and initiated by Yayasan Intercultural Foundation with the mission to raise awareness of social humanity, media, media, and environment. According to the results of an interview with the initiator of the Jakarta Hiden Tour, Ronny Poluan (62), the main attraction of slum tourism is the antithesis of traditional cultural tourism. Instead of showing tourists valuable cultural artefacts, slum tourism shows poverty, an ugly phenomenon. Even though this focus is not exploitative. Because post-modern tourism is the main component of moral tourism, because post-modern theory explains the psychological and philosophical aspects of self-enlightenment in moral tourism (Butcher, 2005). Slum Tourism is still heavily criticized for its relation to morality, which offers "differences and inequality"

The mission of Jakarta Hidden Tour of slum tourism is encouraging tourists to join the tour and involve them in the development project. They persuade slum dwellers to be involved in the slum tourism activity surrounding Ciliwung, Tanah Abang, Galur and Luar Batang. Jakarta Hidden Tour and slum dwellers together they value 3E (Emergency, Education and Empowerment) to improve their standard of living. As a form of activities, they also provide informal school, English courses, charity, public health, and microfinance for women empowerment. Slum tourism attracts not only local tourists, but also foreign tourists. Behind the portrait of Jakarta megapolitan city, there is a hidden face of slum tourism. As we can see, there were several reviews on the tourism marketplace written by tourists describing the high social gap in Jakarta portraying the higher buildings, modern transportation, wide roads with the purpose to cover poverty in the slum area. In the government perspective, Indonesian Ministry of Tourism, Jero Wacik condemned slum tourism as an activity depicting poverty as tourist attraction. He emphasized slum areas should be displaced, not to be shown to the world (Saputra, 2022).

#### 5. Discussion

In several responses submitted on a tourism website, tourism to slum areas in Jakarta received mixed responses from tourists. In general, foreign tourists who visit the slum area in Jakarta feel that they have a new experience interacting with local residents. Their empathy grows and their concern for the issues surrounding the slum area also increases. The following are some of the responses from tour participants:

#### the other side of Jakarta's life

"I got information about this tour from friends who are abroad, because it seems it is not popular with local residents. Like other Jakarta residents, I am used to seeing slums, even if only from afar, but there are so many of them and it feels very disturbing to see. On the recommendation of a foreign friend, I finally joined this tour. is a different experience when actually entering the slum. We are invited to interact with residents who open our eyes that they are the same as us only less fortunate than us. I took this tour several times to different

villages, and every time I took part, my tears always felt like falling, especially when I saw the children who were still cheerful even though their lives were not very decent. Mr. Ronny and Mrs. Anneke are the two figures behind this tour who never tire of helping those who invite their guests to dive right in and see the reality behind the splendor of Jakarta. may they always be given health and happiness". Experience date: October 2014

Picture 1. Positive reviews from participants of the Jakarta Hidden Tour



Source: (www.tripadvisor.co.id, 2019)

The arrival of tourists to the area is also considered as an effort to strengthen local residents to be able to live life with all its limitations which can be a life lesson for visiting tourists. The opposite response was also posted by other tourists--mainly from local Indonesian tourists, who felt that what was shown in the slum area tour package was an unnatural form of commodification of poverty, because there were some artificial activities, made as if local residents in conditions of limited access and difficulties. Followed by comments from tourists who think there are still many areas outside Jakarta whose conditions are much worse.

#### Disappointed

"I felt disappointed joining the tour, after travelling around Indonesia for about three months, I thought this would be a special, however, it turns out I only got the normal circumstances of the neighbourhood. Everyone has access to clean water, toiletsm and most of them have a small shop with varied products. Their cloths and pavement are clean. Outside Jakarta, you will find real slums such as Kalimantan. They still lie on lows, take a bath, and brush their teeth in the rivers. Another example, Papua, it is the poorest island, all people live with their pigs in the same place (mud pigs). The tour is so expensive about IDR 700,000. Their story ..... are good, but nonprofessional or for people who are first time visiting Asia. Do not be offended... good luck from who disagree with your opinion when you blame the government every step of the way"...

*Experience Date: August 2019 Type Of Trip: Traveling Alone* 



Source: (www.tripadvisor.co.id, 2019)

The high impact of urbanism in Jakarta creates land scarcity as a result of an imbalance in urban land between supply and demand. As a developing country, Indonesia is still trying to overcome slum areas and provide decent housing for low-income people. This is something that needs to be appreciated, but the efforts of residents living in slum settlements to present themselves as part of urban society is also their right. The city of Jakarta belongs to everyone, so that slum communities and other low-income groups have the right to the city to enjoy the fruits of development along with its facilities and infrastructure.

Instead of those challenges, slum area has an opportunity for the local community to address their poverty through upgrading accessibility to water, sanitation, health, and education, as well as improving infrastructure quality. Bolay in (Bolay, 2006) highlights that statement should be considered the participation of local community as a critical role to overcome their issues. Local community participation to improve and maintain quality life of slum dwellers. Innovative understanding is based on the phenomenon of confectionary arrangement of slum settlements that does not have to be done in a rigid, normative-regular manner, and not adapted to local conditions. It is important to carry out a trouble shooting-based approach in an innovative, applicative manner in line with social and environmental conditions from the perspective of the local community. It is critical to recognize and capitalize on the diversity of ways of thinking about urban rights and the different ways of action that lead to their implementation. According to Acioly (Acioly, 2010), he pointed out that the emergence of slum settlements is a result of an uncontrolled urbanization process where there is no access to housing and other basic services. As a result, they live in areas that are uninhabitable that could be a challenge. Considering that circumstances, government should initiate the programs by involving local community to address the problems of land tenure and settlement. It touches on articulation and feedback between actors as well as between theory and action. To avoid distorting this perception of rights, it is important to respect the social process through constant self-criticism and through early monitoring of possible encroachment the aim of the right to the city.

#### 6. Conclusion

So far, the problem of slum settlements in urban areas is seen as something that makes the image of a city bad. The government considers that the failure in managing the city is something that is

not feasible to be displayed to the wider public, let alone used as a tourist attraction. On the other hand, this condition makes the problem of urban poverty never get a solution that fits the context of the problem. The emergence of slum tourism with all its controversies can be used as an effort to reinterpret and represent the real conditions of poverty in the corners of the city in the form of slum areas.

By making efforts to reinterpret and represent the slum area, the local community earns income from interacting with tourists who also get an authentic experience of the tourist destinations of the city they visit. On the other hand, local communities who are involved in the practice of representing slum area tourism indirectly criticize city management by displaying the contrast between slum area residents and tourists through digital media within the framework of local initiatives as a form of development participation. The perspective of the local community itself on tourism activities in their area is not an exploitative activity and is not an intrusive thing for them, on the contrary they tend to gladly accept tourist arrivals.

Through slum tourism, local communities build values of togetherness, solidarity, and interaction between the community and tourists, to participate in growing new perspectives and interpretations of poverty and human rights in global discourse. Kampung upgrading and greening is one of the concepts for handling slum areas that looks at the conditions of urban slum settlements to be developed to support urban development. In addition, the thematic villages, by looking at the unique potential of an area as capital for handling slums as well as urban development, such as implementing one village one product (OVOP).

People who are in the slum tourism environment see this practice as an opportunity for them to gain economic benefits, even though this is not the only motive for slum tourism residents to be empowered in the midst of their limitations. At least in one area of slum tourism there is the perspective of local residents who live as they are and the perspective of certain community groups that commodify the situation.

In addition, there are certain values that can only be obtained from visiting the slum area. So it is not uncommon for tourists with social value goals (charity, empathy, awareness, etc.) to change their perspective on the image of a city in a certain country. Related to this, efforts to deal with slum areas will be easier to implement if each stakeholder coordinates with each other and has the political will to create a commitment to managing slum areas. Institutional strengthening becomes an important action as a form of partnership and reduces impact due to capacity issues of each stakeholder. the division of roles of various stakeholders is the key in order to coordinate well and not weaken each other. The development of slum tourism provides a new perspective in tackling the problem of poverty as a global issue.

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