



# Beyond Tourism: The Ways of Salatiga Culinary Business People to Survive Covid-19

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## ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the sustainability of tourism-related livelihoods was significantly impacted. Tourism-related SMEs, including culinary businesses, have strived to find ways to endure the pandemic. Therefore, developing strategies to cope with the crisis became essential. Viewing the COVID-19 pandemic in a holistic context, responses from culinary entrepreneurs indicate a context of the crisis that can either harm them as a vulnerable context or serve as an opportunity to improve their livelihoods. Within the framework of sustainable livelihood theory, this research examines the efforts of Salatiga culinary entrepreneurs in securing their livelihoods during the COVID-19 pandemic. Presenting an empirical case of culinary entrepreneurs in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia, this research employs a qualitative approach and collects data through in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies. The interviews were conducted during participants' spare time, with repeated visits made to acquire detailed information. The results indicate that while major culinary entrepreneurs have managed to keep their businesses afloat, some have chosen to pivot to other industries. In conclusion, those entrepreneurs who diversified their businesses beyond the tourism sector have become more adaptable in adjusting their livelihoods to the pandemic and are better prepared for the unpredictable duration of the COVID-19.

*Keywords: Tourism; SMEs; Livelihood; Culinary Business; COVID-19*

## 1. Introduction

Studies on sustainable tourism development highlight the importance of ensuring viable and long-term economic operations in tourism destinations (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). However, tourism is like a 2-sided coin. On the one hand, tourism generates an economic activity that directly affects the surrounding neighbourhood, such as providing jobs, creating business opportunities, and contributing domestic income to local government and communities (Al Haija, 2011; Kim & Jamal, 2015; Wang & Yotsumoto, 2018). On the other hand, tourism may come to replace existing livelihood in tourism destinations (Lasso & Dahles, 2018) which often creates a

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dependence towards tourism-based livelihood (Tao & Wall, 2009). Heavy dependence upon tourism livelihood is risky since tourism industry is vulnerable to numerous external factors such as political conflicts and global health crises (Dahles, 2002; Tao & Wall, 2009). When a crisis happens, socio-economic turbulence will directly affect the tourism destination including the entrepreneurs. The latest COVID-19 pandemic raises the issue of the sustainability of tourism-based entrepreneurs in facing a crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely deteriorated tourism-based businesses in many countries. As the most visited city before the pandemic, Hong Kong was the first to be significantly affected due to its close geographical proximity to mainland China at the onset of the outbreak (E. Koh, 2020). Following Hong Kong's decision to implement an entry ban, the net output in the accommodation and food services sectors experienced a significant decrease, reaching nearly 50% in the first quarter of 2020 (Census and Statistics Department, 2020). In Thailand, more than 60% of small restaurants located in Bangkok suffered adverse impacts from the pandemic. Sunthornpan & Hirata (2022) found that major restaurants experiencing severe impacts were compelled to adopt multiple strategies, including laying off full-time and daily workers, reducing production capacity, temporarily closing their establishments, and permanently shutting down. Similarly, in the United States, major restaurants adjusted their financial conditions by laying off workers and reducing working hours (Nhamo, Dube, & Chikodzi, 2020). The International Labour Organization estimated in 2020 that the pandemic could increase global unemployment by between 5.3 million and almost 25 million (Monitor, 2020). To mitigate the outbreak, countries have implemented various measures such as providing employment subsidy schemes, granting tax and fee relief, easing social security contributions, boosting health insurance, and increasing spending on health supplies (E. Koh, 2020; Nhamo et al., 2020; Sunthornpan & Hirata, 2022). These challenging circumstances and strategic implementations are also being faced in Indonesia.

Like in other countries, tourism businesses in Indonesia were also heavily affected by the pandemic. Indonesian government has given assistance to tourism-based businesspeople in surviving COVID-19 by providing tax relief, extending credit, offering financial aid and soft skills development through *Kartu Pra-Kerja* (a card from the government to grant holders to receive financial assistance), providing economic stimuli for tourism industries, and boosting super priority tourism destination to attract local and international visitors (Kemenparekraf, 2021; Sugihamretha, 2020). However, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic caused multi-layers of issue towards the entrepreneurs that heavily burdening the tourism-based entrepreneurs, including those who run businesses in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia.

Salatiga is acknowledged for its urban tourism destination in Central Java Province, Indonesia. More than 6000 culinary entrepreneurs participated in creating the image of Salatiga as the culinary destination. As a result, this town received a promotion from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economic to become a UNESCO Creative Cities Network as Gastro History City (Berita7.online, 2021). However, the culinary entrepreneurs in Salatiga suffered a fatal impact from the COVID-19 pandemic and its health protocol regulation such as quarantine regulations, inter-city banning trip and lockdown policy. As a result, the Directorate General of Taxation reported that tax income from hotel and restaurant industries in Salatiga fell to 10 billion Rupiah, or closely equal to 80% in 2020 (Salatiga.go.id, 2021; Santoso, 2020), which indicated the strong impact of low tourism activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following Chambers and Conway (1992) that measures the sustainability of a livelihood lies on its ability to cope with and recover from crisis, thus, analyzing the ability of tourism-based entrepreneurs in Salatiga to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic becomes an important agenda.

Previous study has shown the impact of COVID-19 pandemic towards the tourism industry. Several researches has been done to understand the impact of COVID-19 towards the tourism industry, such as creating a managerial strategy to secure the business during the pandemic

(Alves, Lok, Luo, & Hao, 2020; Chowdhury, Sarkar, Paul, & Moktadir, 2020; Dayour, Adongo, Amuquandoh, & Adam, 2021; Hardilawati, 2020; Kim & Jamal, 2015), evaluating the tourism concept (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020; King, Iba, & Clifton, 2021; Nepal, 2020), analyzing the impact towards the tourism industry and its destination (Alonso et al., 2020; Ranasinghe et al., 2020) and sustaining the tourism business during the pandemic (Adams, Choe, Mostafanezhad, & Phi, 2021; Burcu, 2021; Dayour et al., 2021). However, the unpredictable length of COVID-19 pandemic raised fear about the sustainability of the tourism-based livelihood. As the nature of tourism industry is vulnerable to external crises, it is essential to examine the business not only on the survival management strategies, but also on the tourism entrepreneurs' capability to utilize their existing capital to sustain their livelihood. To study the coping strategies of these entrepreneurs in facing the pandemic, this study will investigate the capability of the culinary entrepreneurs in utilizing their existing livelihood capitals to sustain their subsistence. Thus, this present research aims to contribute to the ongoing debate of tourism on the sustainability of local livelihood in facing a crisis.

Even though previous studies on sustaining livelihood during the crisis point out a significant role of coping strategies in surviving the crisis, the examination of livelihood capitals utilized by the entrepreneurs remain untouched and yet to be studied. In line with sustainable livelihood theory, previous studies on livelihood sustainability issues have primarily viewed crises as vulnerable contexts that harm local SMEs, focusing on strategies to cope with the difficulties posed by these crises (Alves et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Lasso & Dahles, 2018). In practice, crises are not always threats for SMEs; they can also present new opportunities. Raung and Prabawa (2021) found that SMEs in the convection industry strive to utilize crises as opportunities not only to survive but also to expand their businesses. However, within the tourism context, there is limited literature discussing crises as opportunities for tourism SMEs. Therefore, this research takes a different focus and context from previous studies by analyzing tourism-based SMEs and examining crises from a more holistic perspective. While crises may represent a vulnerability context (DFID, 1999), they can also serve as opportunities for tourism-based businesses. Subsequently, this research focuses on analyzing the strategies of culinary SMEs, not only to survive but also to explore possibilities for improving their businesses in order to maintain the sustainability of their livelihoods..

## **2. Sustainable Tourism, MSMEs, Livelihood & Adaptive Strategies Interconnectedness**

Community Tourism development has been viewed as an effective tool to develop local community livelihood, which covers their holistic aspect including its security, future needs, and inter-relatedness among stakeholders in the destination (Blackstock, 2005; Kim & Jamal, 2015). In some destinations, tourism has been suggested and adopted as a strategy of livelihood complementary tool to alleviate poverty in rural destinations (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; Ranasinghe et al., 2020; Tao & Wall, 2009).

However, tourism development is also often implemented as an approach that focuses more on sustaining tourism activity or tourism-centric (Hunter in Lasso & Dahles, 2018) rather than securing the people's livelihood. In some cases, this situation appears to threaten the sustainability of local livelihood as the introduction of tourism leads to a total livelihood replacement from the existing subsistence (Lasso & Dahles, 2018; Mbaiwa, 2011). Therefore, this highlights the importance of local livelihood, with or without tourism activity, rather than focusing on the maintaining of tourism as the main strategy for local livelihood. Although livelihood studies are mostly conducted in rural areas, in tourism context, livelihood studies are also appropriately applied in urban tourism destination (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015).

Following Chambers and Conway (1992), a livelihood is considered sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks. To holistically measure the sustainability of livelihoods, the Pentagon Asset framework is used to analyze the resources that an individual or

community possesses (DFID, 1999). This framework explains that, in achieving sustainable livelihood goals, people may utilize their assets, which comprise natural, physical, human, social, and financial capital. Such assets are significantly influenced by the vulnerability context, such as crises. Vulnerability contexts—including terrorist attacks, national and global economic turbulence, political turmoil, and health issues like the COVID-19 pandemic (Banki, Ismail, & Muhammad, 2016; Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; Gössling et al., 2020)—are difficult to predict, making it challenging for tourism-related stakeholders to assess their ability and capacity to survive a given crisis (Gössling et al., 2020). Moreover, when tourism faces crises and vulnerabilities due to external factors, measuring sustainability in a tourism destination becomes increasingly complex. In dealing with crises, people employ sustainable livelihood strategies, which encompass a range of activities and choices influenced by their access to assets (DFID, 1999). When a crisis strikes, major tourism industries are recorded to perform an extreme coping strategy either performing a managerial adjustment (Alves et al., 2020; Dayour, Adongo, Amuquandoh, & Adam, 2020; Tungkup, 2021), or terminating their business (Nicola et al., 2020; Shafi, Liu, & Ren, 2020). Such severe decision will cause a major impact towards the stability of the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) involved in the tourism businesses.

In developing countries, the implementation of livelihood development through tourism involves micro, small and medium enterprises as the major economic contributor (Ranasinghe et al., 2020; Tosun, 2001). In Indonesia, the MSMEs are claimed as the main driving force of economic growth with more than 50% contribution of national income (ILO, 2019; Tambunan, 2006). While numerous scholars also identified contributions from the MSMEs in supporting the national economic level in each region, providing significant employment, protecting national heritage, and conveying cultural knowledge towards visitors (Al Haija, 2011; Kim & Jamal, 2015; Komppula, 2014). However, studies upon the MSMEs indicate the vulnerabilities of the tourism MSMEs to sustain the economic stability due to numerous factors such as their limited knowledge to navigate a business, tourism entrepreneurs' dependence on the tourism activity to gain sales, their lack of experience to prepare facing threats in tourism industries, and anticipate financial turbulence (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; Singh, Corner, & Pavlovich, 2007). Not to mention that tourism is considered as a risky industry due to their dependence upon external factors (Banki et al., 2016; Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; Gössling et al., 2020; Tao & Wall, 2009), these tourism MSMEs face a higher vulnerability compared to the general MSMEs (K. Y. Koh & Hatten, 2002). As a result, an effective strategy to prevent a failing livelihood is needed to secure the existence of tourism MSMEs in the midst of crises. Therefore, an adaptive strategy is needed to alleviate vulnerabilities in the tourism MSMEs.

Adaptive strategies are created from the reflection of responses of culinary entrepreneurs in shaping and securing their livelihood in times of crisis. Such strategies are considered as long-term and well-planned strategies to change circumstances (Brooks, Adger, & Kelly, 2005; Gallopín, 2006). Therefore, the effectiveness of the adaptation process and social acceptability are the crucial factors that determine the success of adaptive strategies (Adger, Arnell, & Tompkins, 2005; Smit & Wandel, 2006) and this ability will boost entrepreneurs' capability to achieve a resilience state.

The concept of resilience is to understand responses based on external changes and shocks that push toward innovation (Williams and Vorley in Dahles & Susilowati, 2015). Following Scotts and Laws (Scott & Laws, 2006), resilience may occur in the form of creating a new fundamental state after visualizing the recent crisis. Resilience is also considered as taking an opportunity that is opened up during the crisis through recombining structures and processes and renewing the system to encourage innovative development (King et al., 2021). In other words, resilience may appear in the form of different business activities by utilizing the opportunity that comes during the crisis.

### **3. Method**

This research adopts a qualitative approach with constructivist views to examine the culinary entrepreneurs' point of view in encountering the COVID-19 pandemics on their business (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This research involves 5 café and coffee shop business owners and 6 restaurant business owners that run their culinary businesses in Salatiga as participants. Salatiga is chosen as the place to conduct this research due to their recent popularity and significant loss from tourism. High dependence towards university students coming to Salatiga from numerous cities around Indonesia, this town has more than 6000 culinary MSMEs involved in creating the image of culinary tourism destination, in which later led to be promoted to become a UNESCO Creative Cities Network as Gastro History City in 2020. However, the positive trends of tourism development in Salatiga are devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with closely equal to 80% of tax income loss from the hotel and restaurant industries that later caused a series of issues to run the culinary business such as difficulties to gain raw materials, issues of product and environmental hygiene and significantly reduces of travelers' visit and sales (Irawan, 2020).

Data were collected from August to November 2021 through in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies. During this period, Salatiga had just begun to reduce travel restrictions, resulting in participants having ample spare time due to the low number of customers. To obtain detailed information, repeated visits were made according to the participants' availability. Thematic analysis is conducted to analyze the data gathered. Interviews were transcribed and coded to identify smaller themes. Subsequently, the data were grouped into several smaller themes and classified under larger themes. These larger themes were organized into a matrix and compared and contrasted with the other collected data. Finally, a synthesis was drawn, incorporating a discussion of the data and relevant theories.

## **4. Results & Discussion**

### **4.1. Culinary Businesses in Salatiga**

In recent years, café and coffee shops have dominated the local culinary business in Salatiga. These café and coffee shop business owners generally started their business in between 2010 – 2017. Café and coffee shop business owners decided to establish their business in Salatiga due to several reasons such as doing retirement plan work from their previous job, creating a place to become the art gallery and workshop of his work, continuing business plan from their friends, and educating people in Salatiga to enjoy a cup of coffee. Usually, these café and coffee shop business owners are directly involved in the business to meet and greet the customers, managing the marketing strategy and directly involved in handling the operational activity such as becoming the barista, operational manager or cook of the café and coffee shop. Therefore, most of the time these business people tend to stay in their café and coffee shop to ensure the operational activity works well. With the increasing popularity of café and coffee shop business in Salatiga, it is estimated that there were more than 20 coffee shop businesses established in 2019.

All studied coffee shop owners directly involved in running their coffee shop daily. For example, Anto prepares his coffee shops by checking his storage stock and purchasing run-out items from the stock list. During the pre-opening activity, his coffee shops approximately took 1 hour of preparation which include certain activity such as heating the water to make the espresso, reloading empty coffee cups, straws and plastic bags, refilling the coffee beans and flavored syrups, and informing his customer that his coffee shops is ready to serve them. He has 2 coffee shops and both stores operate from 12.00 until 18.00 in the evening. During the operational working hours, Anto runs the operational activity of the main coffee shop by himself while his brother-in-law handles the branch store. Their daily operational activities are interacting with customers, preparing the espresso for the upcoming customers in the peak hours, checking the remaining ingredients, and sending promotional content to social media. Apart from the

operational activity, Anto also maintains good communication with all of his ingredient suppliers, which include the coffee beans suppliers. Anto utilizes his social media to promote his coffee shop along with its daily activity. Regularly Anto would also join a culinary event during the weekend to increase sales and promote his business into a wider market. Culinary growth in Salatiga did not end with the massive expansion of café and coffee shops, but also from the restaurant businesses as well.

Restaurant businesses show significant growth in Salatiga. These restaurant business owners are relatively more varied since some of the participants have started their business before 2010 and the remaining started their restaurant in between 2014 – 2017. Restaurant business owners decided to start their business in Salatiga mainly due to seeing the potential market of transit visitors and migrating students in Salatiga and doing self-exploration towards their passion and interest in the culinary industry. These restaurant business owners are directly involved in the business to handle certain tasks such as preparing recipes for their restaurant, purchasing ingredients, meeting with suppliers and authorities, handling the orders and customers, and maintaining the service performance of their restaurants. These restaurant business owners usually work as the cook, or as the operational manager to handle the restaurant daily. As a result, most of these culinary business people also spend most of their time in the restaurant from day to night. At the end of 2019, it is estimated that there were more than 94 restaurants established in Salatiga (BPS, 2021).

All participated restaurant business owners involved their family members to run the business. Tari, as one of the restaurant business owners in Salatiga, runs her restaurant with her husband. Tari prepares her store after managing her restaurant daily income and checks the purchasing list from her restaurant. She starts her morning routine from 08.00 to prepare her restaurant such as making orders to her daily ingredient suppliers, allocating her restaurant income, and checking the restaurant stock list. The employees come to her restaurant at 10.00 to do the pre-opening preparation and are ready to receive customers at 11.00 in the afternoon. The pre-opening preparation involves cleaning the restaurant interior and kitchen utensils, preparing the vegetables and rice for the restaurant, and checking the daily supplies from the supplier. During the working hours, Tari hires 7 employees to run the restaurant from 10.00 until 23.00. Her daily activities in the restaurant are preparing the stocks from her recipe, managing the employee working schedule, arranging her restaurant promotional content and meeting another culinary business owner to expand her network, while supervising the employees as well. In order to increase sales at her restaurant, Tari made several strategies to reach her customers such as collaborating with a digital marketer to create digital advertisements, offering a membership card to her dine-in customers, and joining culinary festivals on the weekend to attract new customers.

In 2019, the culinary business in Salatiga reached its peak momentum. There are numerous culinary entertainment and cultural festivals which involve culinary as part of their attraction (Salatiga.go.id, 2019) that attract more people to enjoy and visit Salatiga. Such attraction is also being supported by the widespread information of news media from journalists and local governments (Salatiga.go.id, 2019). Therefore, more people are interested to build a new café, coffee shop and restaurant business in Salatiga due to its positive growth in culinary attraction. However, such euphoria cannot last longer due to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Most of the culinary events and cultural events are being postponed due to the rising COVID-19 infection cases in town. When the local government applied numerous health protocols to prevent the virus spread, the culinary attraction in Salatiga could not run their business normally.

#### **4.2. How the COVID-19 Has Devastated the Culinary Business in Salatiga**

In early March 2020, the first COVID-19 infection case was announced in Salatiga. This issue led to a series of policy implementations in town to minimize the spreading of COVID-19 virus such as isolating the infected victim in the nearest hospital, implementing curfew to reduce people's

mobility, and closing major industries which require direct interaction. When the health regulation of COVID-19 protocol is applied, culinary businesses are heavily affected. Major customers avoid meeting, interacting, and placing orders directly in the culinary stalls and it affects the major culinary industry which did not receive any customers during the pandemic. This difficult experience is also being encountered by the coffee shop businesses in Salatiga.

All participated coffee shop business owners experienced a sudden drop of visitors and customers during the early COVID-19 pandemic spread in Salatiga. They all claimed that the first 5 weeks were really bad and none of them were able to meet their operational needs due to the severe virus spread in Salatiga. For example, Anto, as one of the coffee shop business owners, claimed that he had to permanently close his store due to the worsening condition. He closed his branch store one week after the infection announcement. His main store, which was in one of the supermarkets in Salatiga, could not meet the daily operational needs after 5 weeks of COVID-19 cases spreaded. As a result, Anto suffered a great loss in financial assets for renting the stores and time to nurture his business from the beginning. Therefore, Anto closed his stores and decided to find another way to support his family. Before the pandemic, he could earn around 250 – 350 thousand Rupiah in daily and gain up to 800 thousand Rupiah per day during the culinary events on the weekend. As a result, he could receive more than 10 million Rupiah of income from his 2 stores and the culinary event that he joined in a month. During the pandemic, he could not get more than 250 thousand Rupiah per week from 2 stores and none from the culinary event.

*“At that time (the first week of COVID-19 pandemic spread in March, 2020), it was really crazy! Suddenly all the businesses shut down and I could not imagine there will be no people going out to buy a coffee and visit a supermarket! I did not receive anything during that first week and not so long after that, the campus decided to send back the students to their hometown” (fieldwork, 2021)*

When the pandemic hits, running the coffee shop business becomes extremely difficult. The coffee shop business owners struggles to continue the business because majority of the coffee shop business owners highly depending their daily livelihood from the daily income generated by their coffee shop businesses. When their coffee shop businesses could not generate daily income for uncertain period of times, such situations harm the coffee shop business owner’s livelihood. This difficult circumstance is not being experienced by the coffee shop businesses alone, but also by the restaurant businesses in Salatiga as well.

Similar situation is also being experienced by the restaurant business owner involved in this research. All the restaurant business owners claimed that the early COVID-19 pandemic caused them a great loss due to the unmet sales. As a result, these restaurant business owners had to adjust and find reasonable solutions for their current situation. Tari as one of the restaurant business owners in Salatiga also had to struggle in securing her business during the pandemic. Significant adjustment was being made because her restaurant lost more than 80% of income due to major economic disruption. Tari reduced her employees from 7 employees to 2 employees within the first 6 months since the first COVID-19 infection case was announced. Further, she also had to reduce the employees’ working hours and adjust their salary based on their allocated working hours. She had to readjust her cooking recipe and manage her stock preparation to be more efficient. Before the pandemic, Tari said that her restaurant relied 80% of the income from the dine-in customers and the rest 20% from the take away and purchase from online applications. Tari could earn 2 - 2.5 million Rupiah in daily and 2.5 – 3 million Rupiah during the weekend. Approximately she could earn more than 50 million Rupiah in a month from her restaurant. After the pandemic, she lost 80% of her dine-in customers while the take-away and online purchases could not increase significantly due to major economic disruption. She only could earn around 300 – 500 thousand Rupiah in daily. Sometimes she received nothing, especially after the local government imposed a new COVID-19 health protocol and increased the COVID-19 regional status in Salatiga.

*“During the pandemic, I saw that the customers in my restaurant always decreased after I heard the COVID-19 infection status in Salatiga. I understand that the government was implementing their health protocol to reduce the virus infection in Salatiga through limiting people's mobility and activity. However, I completely had no idea and solution on how to deal with the restaurant while the infection cases in Salatiga were increasing rapidly, and my income also reduced significantly at the same time! During the first month I got very few customers who came and purchased my product. Even the online orders are very rare” (fieldwork, 2021)*

Similar to coffee shop owners, restaurant owners also heavily depend on their business cash flows and daily income for their livelihoods. When their daily income is disrupted, restaurant owners face difficulties in meeting their family's needs as well as the operational needs of their businesses. Consequently, as the pandemic continues with no clear end in sight, restaurant owners find themselves in an increasingly challenging situation in sustaining their businesses.

### **4.3. Culinary Entrepreneurs Surviving the Pandemic**

The culinary entrepreneurs decide to find ways to secure their livelihood in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. Numbers of efforts to secure the business have been made by the culinary entrepreneurs through making their business more efficient by doing cost reduction, managing their financial allocation and plan, creating an innovation to adjust with pandemic and health protocol regulation. When such efforts have been made, the culinary entrepreneurs are expecting that their strategies can overcome the difficult situations caused by the pandemic and making their business able to generate income to secure the entrepreneurs' livelihood during the pandemic. This transition raises the issue of their sustainability of their tourism livelihood during the crisis. The approaches employed by most participants reflect coping strategies designed to secure their livelihoods during times of crisis. In tourism development, scholars agree that a livelihood is considered sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks (DFID, 1999). These strategies provide opportunities for survival during difficult times. However, although these coping strategies relatively assist business owners in enduring the pandemic, their livelihoods remain at risk because they rely solely on income from their culinary businesses, which places them in a precarious position during crises (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015). While economic activity in daily needs market sectors continues, turbulence in the tourism sector is rising due to its inherent vulnerabilities during crises (Scoones, 1998). As observed by tourism scholars, as long as individuals depend on tourism-related businesses as their sole source of income, their livelihoods will remain vulnerable, particularly in times of crisis (Calgaro, Lloyd, & Dominey-Howes, 2014; Gössling et al., 2020).

In line with classic theories on sustainable livelihood, as articulated by Chambers and Conway (1992) and the DFID (1999), the data reveal that all participants employ livelihood strategies as they engaged in various activities and make choices to maintain their livelihoods. Such actions highlight the adaptability of participants in navigating challenging economic landscapes. By leveraging different resources and strategies, these individuals seek to secure their livelihoods amid uncertainties.

Similar to many businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, nine out of eleven participants implemented a common coping strategy by making temporary adjustments in management practices (Alves et al., 2020; Dayour et al., 2020; Tungkup, 2021). While these adjustments provided immediate relief, they primarily serve as short-term solutions that fail to significantly reduce participants' vulnerability in the ongoing pandemic. The reliance on temporary measures underscores the precariousness of their situations, as such strategies may not be sustainable in the long term.

Interestingly, two participants adopted more extreme strategies by closing their businesses entirely, a trend consistent with findings from Nicola et al. (2020) and Shafi et al. (2020). This decision reflects a recognition of the severe challenges posed by the pandemic, prompting these



**Table 1.** Strategies Applied During COVID-19 in Salatiga

Participants	Culinary Types	Applied Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic			
		Cost Reduction	Financial Management	Innovation	Business Alteration
Andre	Restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing employee</li> <li>• Adjusting ingredients &amp; recipe</li> <li>• Closing branch outlet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting a bank loan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep opening the restaurant</li> <li>• Opening another culinary business</li> </ul>	
Imam	Restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing employee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consuming business cash flow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing casual labor</li> <li>• Moving the restaurant to his personal house</li> </ul>	
Awan	Restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consuming another source of income</li> <li>• Doing installment salary to employees</li> <li>• Consuming business cash flow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep opening the restaurant</li> </ul>	
Salim	Restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing employees</li> <li>• Adjusting ingredients &amp; recipe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing installment salary to employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjusting seating and interior</li> <li>• Selling cake and customized menu</li> </ul>	
Bagus	Restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporarily close the restaurant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consuming business cash flow</li> <li>• Selling personal assets to cover operational expenses</li> </ul>		
Tari	Restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing employees</li> <li>• Adjusting ingredients &amp; recipe</li> <li>• Reducing working hours</li> <li>• Adjusting employees' salary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consuming business cash flow</li> <li>• Consuming another source of income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling customized menu</li> <li>• Providing delivery services</li> <li>• Keep opening the restaurant</li> <li>• Doing casual labor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sell her restaurant ownership and start a refilling drinking water business</li> </ul>
Jaka	Coffee Shop		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consuming another source of income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling customized menu</li> <li>• Adjusting working hour</li> <li>• Adjusting seating and interior</li> <li>• Working as a private consultant</li> </ul>	
Indra	Coffee Shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing employees</li> <li>• Adjusting employees' salary</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing delivery services</li> <li>• Selling bottled coffee</li> <li>• Adjusting working hours</li> </ul>	
Eko	Coffee Shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing working hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consuming another source of income</li> <li>• Consuming business cash flow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling family-sized custom menu</li> <li>• Providing delivery services</li> <li>• Adjusting working hours</li> </ul>	
Reza	Coffee Shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing Employees</li> <li>• Temporarily closing the coffee shop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consuming another source of income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing delivery services</li> </ul>	
Anto	Coffee Shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing employees</li> <li>• Closing branch and main outlet</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling packaged coffee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close his coffee shop and start a catfish breeding business</li> </ul>

Source: Field Work (2021)

individuals to reconsider their engagement in the tourism sector. Among these two participants, two have opted to pivot by launching new businesses beyond tourism. This shift not only illustrates their willingness to innovate but also highlights a proactive approach to securing their livelihoods despite the uncertainties surrounding the tourism industry. The two entrepreneurs reconsider the existence of their culinary business due to the unpredictable end of COVID-19 pandemic. These entrepreneurs decide to give up their culinary business and start another business which sells the daily household needs. This strategy is also made based on a concern on the possibility of future long-term crises and the unpredictable situation in the tourism industry in Salatiga during the pandemic.

Anto, a coffee shop owner, decides to shut down his coffee shops and start a catfish breeding business. Identifying the potential threats if he keeps his coffee shop during the unpredictable end of COVID-19, Anto decides to make a catfish pond and breed catfish as his new business. He gets this idea after a discussion with his brother-in-law who later offers Anto to utilize a spare land next to his mother's house to become the fishpond. Since Anto's brother-in-law owned a catfish breeding business, Anto agreed to learn the business from him. His brother-in-law helps Anto to choose the proper catfish seed for the early breeding stage and accompanies Anto in constructing his first fishpond on the spare land that Anto's mother had. He accompanies Anto for around 1 month to finish the fishpond and spread the breeding seed fish. Anto's mother also helps him to pursue his new business during the COVID-19 pandemic. As she knows that Anto would like to run the new catfish breeding business far from his home, she decides to help Anto by feeding the fish and keeping the pond clean while he stays in Salatiga. Anto's mother also supports Anto's family by sending them some food, meals and rice to meet his daily household needs. He initiates his new business by utilizing his savings, which he has accumulated from his previous business. Anto uses his remaining savings for building 2 tarpaulin ponds, purchasing catfish seeds, food pellets and equipment to build the catfish breeding business. At the same time, he also sells grounded coffee beans on the online platform to gain more income.

By running the catfish breeding business, he now gains a new larger market than his previous coffee shop. Currently, Anto can market his catfish to restaurants, sellers at traditional markets and retailers of household supply needs. Moreover, with the help from his brother-in-law, Anto also has a regular buyer who buys the harvested catfish at a good price.

Similarly, Tari, a restaurant owner, decides to sell her restaurant after a few months of struggles and efforts to survive. Tari decides to have a conversation with her husband to decide the future of her culinary business during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tari is suggested to sell her restaurant and started to run a new business: a refilling drinking water store. While Tari's husband also has some relatives that can become her first customer from the culinary industry and household needs. Tari's husband also works in the business to meet the target sales through connecting the potential clients from the previous culinary business network that he knows. Tari's mother-in-law also supports her new business in terms of providing some of the operational needs such as purchasing some empty gallons and lending one old motorcycle for delivering the gallons to the customers. To strengthen the new business, Tari brings her savings and assets from the previous business into the new business plan. The entrepreneur also takes additional capital support in the form of a bank loan to start her new business. The new business currently reaches a wider market apart from tourists and visitors in her former restaurant.

The case of the two entrepreneurs illustrates how they utilize their livelihood assets in their efforts to maintain their livelihoods (Chambers & Conway, 1992; DFID, 1999). The first livelihood asset is social capital. Family members and close relatives play crucial roles during the process of starting a new business to secure the entrepreneurs' livelihoods. This highlights the importance of family bonds as social capital for culinary entrepreneurs during periods of business transition. Previous studies also demonstrate a similar association between family and community involvement in fostering resilience among entrepreneurs facing crises (Burcu, 2021;

Chen, Xu, & Lew, 2020). Social capital is built on strong bonds among family members, close friends, or ethnic groups (Sabatini, 2008 in Lasso & Dahles, 2018). These bonds often serve as the primary safety net for local households. Tourism scholars emphasize the significance of community support in recovering livelihoods in tourism destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chen et al., 2020). In the case of these culinary entrepreneurs in Salatiga, family ties have successfully aided them in initiating their new businesses.

In addition to family support, access to financial capital also assists these entrepreneurs. Savings play an important role in the initiation of their businesses. Before the pandemic, these culinary entrepreneurs were able to accumulate savings from their ventures. With financial capital from their savings, they have greater flexibility to innovate within their businesses and livelihoods (Alves et al., 2020; Lasso & Dahles, 2018). The ability to save is also strongly related to another livelihood asset: human capital (DFID, 1999). Their skill in managing finances, resulting in savings, demonstrates that these entrepreneurs effectively utilize their human capital, which contributes to their ability to survive during crises.

While other culinary entrepreneurs are still struggling in sustaining their culinary business as their main source of income, the two business-people manage to sustain their livelihood after giving up their culinary business. When these two culinary business people decide to alter their culinary business into another business, they adjust their market from solely relying on culinary customers into a wider market: business owners, retailers, and households. The two business people apply adaptive strategies when they forecast potential long-term threats of the pandemic to their culinary business and decide to create a well-planned respond to change their situations (Brooks et al., 2005; Gallopín, 2006). The strategies appeared to be effective and socially acceptable (Adger et al., 2005; Smit & Wandel, 2006) as the new businesses are welcomed by a wider market. Furthermore, the two entrepreneurs also display their ability in anticipating crises in the future (Raung & Prabawa, 2021) when they carefully read the potential threats if a similar pandemic happens. This strategy increases their resilience as they make innovation based on their visualization on the recent crises and they take opportunities that emerge during the crisis (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; King et al., 2021; Scott & Laws, 2006). The combination of adaptive strategy and utilization of social and financial capitals has significantly assisted the two businesspeople in securing their livelihood in the middle of the crisis.

## **5. Conclusions**

The experiences of culinary entrepreneurs in Salatiga during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated their inability to rely solely on tourism-based livelihoods during periods of crisis. Major culinary entrepreneurs implemented managerial adjustments, such as reducing production costs, adjusting financial performance, and creating innovations, which functioned as short-term strategies to survive the pandemic. However, their coping strategies remained confined to the tourism industry, leaving them to continue suffering from the impacts of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite their efforts, the unpredictable nature of crises within the tourism sector makes it difficult to ensure the sustainability of tourism-oriented MSMEs, as entrepreneurs remain exposed to ongoing challenges.

On the other hand, when the two tourism entrepreneurs transformed their businesses into ventures beyond tourism, the results indicated that these adaptive strategies enabled them to adjust to the pandemic and generate additional income in a fragile market. Although both entrepreneurs faced the unpredictable duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, they become more resilient in the face of crisis as they adopted adaptive strategies by closing their tourism-based businesses and opening new ventures beyond tourism. Therefore, this suggests that business transformation from tourism-based to non-tourism-based ventures can enhance entrepreneurs' resilience and adaptability in challenging times. The tourism industry should be viewed as a

complementary element to sustain livelihoods in certain areas, rather than as the primary livelihood option for the local population.

One limitation of this research is that the successful strategies implemented by culinary business owners in Salatiga may not yield similar results elsewhere, as each area has unique situations and contexts. Furthermore, the crisis analyzed in this study is limited to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research on sustainable livelihoods should focus more on analyzing adaptive strategies that significantly contribute to strengthening entrepreneurs' resilience.

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## 7. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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