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Sasi local wisdom as a cultural capital for sustainable tourism development in Raja Ampat Regency, West Papua

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Abstract: This research aimed to describe the development of tourism in Raja Ampat, West Papua, Indonesia, which has entered its 19th year, which is developing and still exists with the support of local wisdom of coastal and island communities called *sasi*. This research was conducted by applying ethnographic methods and triangulation of field data to gather data on local wisdom of indigenous peoples in Raja Ampat. Results of the research showed that *sasi* as a form of practice for protecting and conserving marine natural resources has traditionally been carried out for generations in Raja Ampat, and has various local terms such as *kalad*/*bu*, *kabus*, and *samson*. *Sasi* local wisdom as the community's cultural capital has become the basis and strategic issue related to protecting the marine and coastal natural resources in supporting and maintaining

Keywords: cultural capital, local wisdom, *sasi*, sustainable tourism.

Introduction

May 9, 2022 is the 19th anniversary of Raja Ampat Regency, West Papua, which is celebrated with various ceremonies and celebrations. Various cultural attractions and development exhibitions were held to commemorate the 19th anniversary of the birth of Raja Ampat as a maritime district. A myriad of achievements and successes were displayed in the development exhibition, one of which was the coastal waters, seas, and small islands in Raja Ampat, which have high tropical marine biodiversity due to the variety of marine biota and high endemic fish, white sand and clear water, towering karst islands lined up to form a collection of small islands that add to the beauty of tropical marine biodiversity in the waters of Raja Ampat (Allen & Erdmann, 2009)

Raja Ampat's tropical marine biodiversity is believed to be very high because this regency is located in the world's coral triangle, namely the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Australia (McKenna et al., 2002). In the past, before it becomes a definitive district based on Law number 26 of 2002 regarding the expansion of a new autonomous region in Papua, Raja Ampat was part of the Sorong regency (Mentansan et al., 2021). The waters of Raja Ampat were strategic fishing areas and the best fish producers for fishermen from the city and regency of Sorong, Ternate, and Tidore and several surrounding areas close to Raja Ampat. However, the high intensity of fishing activity by outside fishermen using various modern fishing technologies can damage and destroy the beauty and richness of the area's marine life (Bailey, 2007); (Sjafrie & Giyanto, 2007). This condition is exacerbated by local fishermen collaborating with outside fishermen to jointly use destructive fishing equipment such as potassium, fish poison, bombs, nets, and diving compressors (Veron, 2002; Veron et al., 2009). Damages to the waters and marine life of Raja Ampat occurred due to fishermen's use of destructive fishing

equipment, as mentioned above. Damages to the waters and marine life of Raja Ampat occurred due to fishermen's use of destructive fishing equipment, as mentioned above.

When Raja Ampat was expanded as a new autonomous region in 2002, community development and empowerment began to be carried out with the support and active participation of various parties and other stakeholders (Mentansan et al., 2019), for example, to mitigate and prevent the widespread impact of the practices of outside fishermen and local fishermen who catch fish using destructive fishing gear, preventive actions were then initiated by non-governmental organizations that focus on conservation. Conservation NGOs that are very aggressive and intense in campaigning for the conservation movement and against the destruction of Raja Ampat's marine ecosystems are The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International which have been working in Raja Ampat through research activities since 1998 (Grantham et al., 2013).

Based on the results of studies conducted in collaboration between conservation NGOs (TNC, CI, WWF), Papua University Manokwari, Cenderawasih University Jayapura, LIPI (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia) Jakarta, and Raja Ampat regency government, Raja Ampat waters are designated as a conservation area which now has an area of approximately 1.3 million hectares of conserved waters (Mentansan et al., 2019). The declaration of Raja Ampat waters as a conservation area was carried out by the indigenous Ma'ya tribe in Waifoi village on November 15, 2006, to hand over their customary waters as a regional marine conservation area. This declaration was strengthened through the Tomolol agreement on Misool Island, which was echoed by elements of traditional leaders, religion, and the government to establish seven marine conservation areas in Raja Ampat, namely Mayalibit Bay marine conservation area, the Dampier Strait marine conservation area, the Ayau-Asia marine conservation area, the Misool marine conservation area, Kofiau, and Boo marine conservation area and Fam island marine conservation area (Barat & Perikanan, 2019).

The formation of the marine conservation areas mentioned above is determined based on socio-cultural studies of the local wisdoms of the community which were practiced from generation to generation as coastal and island communities. One of the local wisdoms found and seen as being in harmony with the concept of sustainable development in Raja Ampat and as an entry point for the tribes in Raja Ampat to quickly accept and make modern conservation concepts in the form of zoning accepted is sasi (McLeod et al., 2009; Ainsworth et al., 2008) as the culture of the maritime community in maintaining, protecting and managing their natural resources so that it does not become extinct due to destructive fishing activities by outside fishermen. Sasi and zoning have become foundation and the basic concepts for the protection and preservation of Raja Ampat's marine natural resources to support sustainable tourism development in the marine regency of Raja Ampat. Therefore, this research aims to describe Raja Ampat archipelago and its indigenous people, which is an archipelagic area that has coastal and marine local wisdom as a fishing community. The local wisdom, such as *sasi*, is a prohibition or a form of traditional conservation to protect marine natural resources including fish, sea cucumbers, breed, *lola*, and shrimp. This local wisdom, *sasi*, which is also known as *kalad/bu*, *samson*, is a prohibition on taking fish in a limited marine area for a certain period of time, and has become the cultural capital and the foundation for protecting and preserving the high tropical marine biodiversity in the waters of Raja Ampat, so that the development of sustainable marine tourism continues to this day.

Methodology

This field research is conducted by applying the ethnographic method and carried out in Raja Ampat as a place to practice *sasi* local wisdom. Field data collection was carried out by

triangulation, namely through observation techniques on *sasi* activities carried out by indigenous peoples, especially the indigenous people in Warsambin and Waifoi villages of Teluk Mayalibit bay district, Raja Ampat regency, processions, closing and opening processes of *sasi*. Interviews were conducted to collect data on how the *sasi* procession, requirements, and timing of *sasi* are implemented and how is the implementation of the cultural meaning of *sasi* as well as its contribution to conservation and sustainable tourism. The document analysis technique was carried out concerning research on the potential of Raja Ampat marine biodiversity, local wisdom of Raja Ampat indigenous people, and cultural meanings and sustainable tourism in the practice of community local wisdom concerning their customary waters.

The results of the research analysis are presented in the form of a qualitative descriptive narration of scientific variety to explain local sasi wisdom as cultural capital in the development of sustainable tourism in Raja Ampat Regency.

Results and Discussion

Raja Ampat indigenous people are traditional fishing communities who spend most of their time at sea. However, there are also some fishermen in the villages of Raja Ampat who are skilled in gardening and cultivating sago because they have sago gardens and hamlets. Apart from having a high level of tropical marine biodiversity, it can also be said that Raja Ampat community is a pluralistic society with a high level of socio-cultural diversity because the islands in Raja Ampat are not only inhabited by indigenous people but also inhabited by various other ethnic groups. For example, Biak-Numfor tribe who migrated to Raja Ampat in the 18th century have controlled and inhabited most of the islands with potential marine natural resources. In addition, there are also tribes from Ternate, Tidore and Seram who also come to live on the islands of Raja Ampat. The two tribes above are known as *beser/betew* tribes for Biak-Numfor tribe, and *umka/umkai* for tribes originating from Ternate, Tidore and Seram. After these two tribes reproduced through the marriage process that occurred between them and the native Raja Ampat tribes, other tribes such as Usba tribe, Wardo tribe, and Kafdarun tribe also developed. These five tribes live side by side with the indigenous Raja Ampat tribe, namely *ma'ya* tribe, the indigenous tribe that inhabit the island of Waigeo such as Ambel, Wawiyai, Lanyanyan and Kawe. The others are Matbat, Biga, Matlou tribes on Misool Island, Banlol tribe on Salawati Island, and Batanta tribe on the Batanta island of Raja Ampat.

The plurality of the society in Raja Ampat contributes to the diversity of customs, culture and traditions including local wisdom to protect and preserve marine natural resources from generation to generation which is carried out jointly and led by local traditional leaders.

Sasi Local Wisdom as a Cultural Capital for the Preservation and Protection of Raja Ampat's Natural Resources

Sasi is a term used by coastal and island communities in Maluku and Papua to restrict and prohibit the use of marine natural resources for a certain period of time with certain types of biota (Mentansan et al., 2019; Mentansan et al., 2021). *Sasi* is a culture brought by Christian evangelists from Maluku to Papua's bird's head region to support and obtain money for ministry and evangelism work in coastal areas and islands in Papua. At first, this sasi practice was carried out only for religious purposes, for example, the construction of church buildings, priests' houses, fences, and procurement of church bells, carried out and led by priests for various types of marine biota such as fish, lobster, sea cucumbers, *lola*, clams, and turtles. The results of *the sasi* will then be brought into the church, where the procession is carried out after worship (Mentansan et al., 2019). From inside the church, the pastor and congregation members went together to the beach and prayed and closed the sea area that

would be used as a place for *sasi* by giving a sign in the form of a peg made of mangrove wood and writing the word *sasi*. This sasi activity is usually attended by community leaders, traditional leaders, and government figures.

(Source: West Papua BBKSDA, 2019)

Figure 1. The closing process of sasi by the church in Raja Ampat

The practice of *sasi* local wisdom to preserve environmental resources, especially in Raja Ampat as a maritime regency, continues to be socialized and practiced by fishing communities in this regency. *Sasi*, as an island tradition, is essential for the people of Raja Ampat, especially the indigenous people as the owners of these marine natural resources in order to maintain the continuity and sustainability of various types of marine life as a source of food for the community and it also to be enjoyed by future generations. *As* a culture of the Raja Ampat community that has been carried out from generation to generation until now, Sasi aims to obtain increased catches and harvests, as told by Marten Ayelo, a traditional leader of the Kawe sub-tribe in Raja Ampat.

A violator would receive some sanctions if he intentionally entered the area under sasi, who took fish, lobster, clams, sea cucumbers, or other marine biotas. The perpetrator would be sick and receive social sanctions from the community, such as being excommunicated from the community's social environment. To atone for the culprit, he must apologize to the priest and society for his transgression.

Based on the results of an interview with Mambrasar, a traditional leader in Kampung Mumes Raja Ampat, *sasi* is very helpful and helps the community in the villages in protecting the sea because the outsiders who come and catch fish usually use the modern fishing gear as well as poison and fish bomb that destroys coral reefs, big fish and small fish. Therefore, destructive actions by outside fishermen must be anticipated by awakening the local wisdom of *sasi* by Raja Ampat people, which has been entrenched to this day. In addition, the support from conservation NGOs through area patrols and community reports, especially from fishermen, is beneficial in protecting the Raja Ampat sea.

(Source: Mentansan, 2019)

Figure 2. Interview with Mambrasar in Mumes Village in 2019

Several other names for the local wisdom of *sasi* in the indigenous people of Raja Ampat are, for example, *Samson* in the language of the Matbat tribe on Misool Island, which means prohibition. Sasi local wisdom or *samson* is a customary regulation mutually agreed upon in the Matbat community to prohibit anyone from disturbing a location that has been closed through a traditional procession for the common good. *Samson* activities are usually carried out once a year, and the closed as sasi areas are usually six to seven months. The leader in the samson ceremony is called *mirinyo* in Matbat language. The *Samson* ritual procession is carried out by reciting mantras and is carried out precisely at sunrise with the *mirinyo* position positioning himself in front of the village and facing the sea by taking a wood from a laurel tree with its branches still intact as a place to hang offerings such as *sababete* (cigarettes, areca nut, tobacco, and red cloth). The *Mirinyo* stuck the log as a symbol of prohibition and a sign that this location had been closed. The prohibition sign stuck by a *mirinyo* is called a *gasamsom*. Immediately, the prohibition for people to enter and take something in the area that has been in *Samson* applies to every community in the village as well as outside fishermen. Suppose it turns out that there is a violation in the *Samson* area. In that case, the violator will be sanctioned to do work that benefits the community's interests in general. All members of the community bear supervision of the Samson area, and everyone must report if there are violations found in the area.

When the time to open the *Samson* has come, it is indicated by various changes in natural phenomena such as good weather and low winds. Then the *samson* will be opened by *Mirinyo* with the same ritual carried out in the morning, and the community members involved face the sea. The traditional leader, called the king, will thank the marine guards, sea dwellers, and ancestors who have died to protect and guard the *Samson* area and give excellent results. The sound of triton shells (a clamshell) being blown by the *mirinyo* loudly became a sign that the *Samson*'s local wisdom had ended. People flocked to find and catch fish, sea cucumbers, and various types of marine life to be sold and partly consumed by the community (Ainsworth et al., 2008).

Kalad/bu is the local wisdom of sasi which is practiced in the life of the community in Mayalibit Bay as the abode of the indigenous Raja Ampat tribe. *Kalad/bu* is carried out to cover some of the waters that have been determined based on the potential of fish, ebi shrimp, mangrove crabs and sea cucumbers in the sea. Usually, *kalad/bu*, which comes from the ambel

language, is carried out because of the needs that must be met by the local community, for example, building a church, building a priest's house, building fences, bell towers, and preparing to welcome guests who will come to their village.

The leader of traditional *kalad* ritual is also carried out in the same way as Matbat community in Misool, which is led by a traditional leader, attended by local and community leaders. *Kalad/bu* is carried out within a period of five to six months by putting signs and writings on prohibited areas using mangrove tree trunks (Suhardjono, 2013). The *kalad/bu* will be opened when the agreed month has been reached and will be harvested by the village community members who carry out the *kalad/bu* and involve the people of the surrounding villages by inviting them to attend the opening ceremony for the *kalad/bu*, and the catch of the community will be sold to the city in Raja Ampat, as well as in Sorong City, some of which are consumed by the community (Situmorang et al., 2015).

(Source: Alfred, 2018)

Figure 3. Open *sasi* traditional ceremony

The Benefits of *Sasi* Local Wisdom for Sustainable Tourism Development

Sasi local wisdom that is owned and maintained and practiced in coastal and island communities in Raja Ampat is a cultural capital that has been used as the foundation and basis for the protection and preservation of marine natural resources as well as a source of food for future generations and as a support for the development of conservation-based sustainable tourism (Anggoro et al., 2016). The fast absorption of modern conservation systems and local wisdom by indigenous people in Raja Ampat is beneficial for preserving and developing local customs. On the other hand, it is the backbone of marine tourism development in Raja Ampat (Mentansan et al., 2019). Below are some of the benefits of *sasi* local wisdom as a buffer for developing marine tourism in Raja Ampat. First, Raja Ampat, as a marine regency with high tropical marine biodiversity, is experiencing a massive threat due to fishing practices using destructive technology (Palomares et al., 2007; Ainsworth et al., 2008) so that local community wisdom in the form of prohibition and closure of certain water areas through *sasi, kalad/bu, samson*, and *kabus* is the right step as a means of protecting and preserving marine biodiversity of indigenous people from the threat of damage and extinction. Second, with the resources of fish, coral reefs, lobsters, mollusks, seagrass beds, and various other marine biota that are protected through the fortress of local wisdom *sasi, kalad/bu, samson*, and *kabus*, there will be tourism products sold by the community and the government, namely marine tourism. Third, the traditions, customs, and culture of the marine community in Raja Ampat will continue to be preserved and developed for generations to come.

Conclusions

Based on the results and discussion above, it is concluded that the local wisdom of *sasi, kalad/bu, samson*, and *kabus* is a way to protect and preserve the natural resources of indigenous peoples in Raja Ampat which is carried out traditionally and has been carried on until now. Local wisdom of the community in Raja Ampat is one of the tools to fortify and maintain tropical marine biodiversity in the sea from the threat of damage done by local fishermen and outside fishermen. The existence of local wisdom that continues to be carried out by the community in Raja Ampat guarantees the sustainability of marine resources as a tourism product in the development of sustainable tourism in the maritime district of Raja Ampat, West Papua province.

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