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## A Room with a View: Local Knowledge and Tourism Entrepreneurship in an Unlikely Indonesian Locale

Kathleen M. Adams

*Loyola University Chicago*, [kadams@luc.edu](mailto:kadams@luc.edu)

Dirk Sandarupa

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# **A Room with a View: Local Knowledge and Tourism Entrepreneurship in an Unlikely Indonesian Locale**

**Kathleen M. Adams\***  
Loyola University Chicago

**Dirk Sandarupa\*\***  
Independent Scholar

**Abstract:** This article highlights the understudied role of local knowledge in contributing to the resilience of small-scale entrepreneurial tourism businesses in touristically-unpredictable times. Drawing on a micro-case study of a South Sulawesi (Indonesia) tourist-oriented restaurant-hotel that has thrived despite tourism's ebbs and flows of tourism, we suggest that greater attention to the ways in which successful small-scale tourism entrepreneurs draw on local wisdom can help identify additional foundations for building resilience strategies. In spotlighting local knowledge as an under-recognized resource, this article also speaks to recent calls for the decolonization of tourism studies.

**Keywords:** resilience, entrepreneurship, local knowledge, decolonizing tourism studies, Indonesia

## **Introduction**

In recent years, with the eruption of natural disasters as well as simmering political and religious tensions in island Southeast Asia, we have witnessed growing concerns about tourism's unpredictable, precarious nature, and the ramifications of this for local livelihoods (e.g. Biggs, Hall, and Stoekl 2012; Calgaro and Lloyd 2008; Cohen 2008; Baker and Coulter 2007). These issues have been especially acute in Indonesia, where terrorist bombings of tourism facilities, outbursts of religious violence, a SARs episode, and threats of volcano eruption (such as Bali's currently-simmering Mt. Agung) have

prompted periodic plunges in tourism, challenging the long-term survival of small, locally-run tourism businesses (Henderson 2003, Hitchcock and Putra 2007; Hitchcock 2010; Kuo et. al. 2008; Patrick 2017). Such concerns have inspired a growing flurry of publications addressing ways to minimize the precariousness of tourism-dependent communities in uncertain times. Some scholars have explored disaster tourism, dark tourism, or danger zone tourism as generators of new genres of visitors (e.g. Duffy 2014; Yamashita 2016; Adams 2001, 2006b). Others, drawing inspiration from ecological studies, have explored the interrelations between tourism and resilience (Cheer and Lew 2017; Cheer et al. 2017; Cochrane 2010; Hall, Prayag, and Amore 2018; Strickland-Munro and Moore 2010; Adams, In Press). While such studies highlight important potential avenues for addressing the challenges faced by Southeast Asian tourism-oriented communities in times of tumult, this article suggests that additional insights can be gleaned via closely-hewn case studies of small-scale tourism entrepreneurs who have met with success despite seemingly insurmountable odds.

In the pages that follow, we offer a case study of an Indonesian tourism entrepreneur's family business that was established in an unlikely location at a time of political uncertainty and inter-religious violence in Indonesia, when international tourism arrivals were at a low, and domestic tourism was unpredictable. Such dynamics might have frightened outside investors, but this venture has enjoyed tremendous success, blossoming into a restaurant-hotel and recently garnering commendation from district-level government officials for transforming outsider perceptions of the area. We argue that the success of this business was largely due to a combination of "local knowledge" - insights into *in situ* cultural practices and social and religious concerns - in tandem with other forms of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977; 1984; 1986). In spotlighting the underexplored yet critical role of local knowledge in developing a successful, resilient, tourism-oriented business, we hope to offer a modest corrective to some of the classic Eurocentric frameworks that have tended to historically dominate business-oriented tourism scholarship (See Pritchard and Morgan 2007, p. 11).<sup>1</sup> That is, we hope to foster a richer appreciation of "ways of knowing about and being in tourism that does not [solely] privilege Western epistemologies" (Chambers and Buzinde 2015, p. 5). While some studies have addressed the role of indigenous knowledge in ecological and sustainable tourism (e.g. Butler and Menzies 2007; Carr, Ruhanen and Whitford 2016; Rosalina 2017), or in community-based tourism (Jamal and Stronza 2009), ethnographically-grounded studies examining how

local knowledge figures into tourism entrepreneurs' strategies and tactics remain few and far between, especially in the Southeast Asian context.<sup>2</sup> This case study seeks to enhance our understanding of the ties between successful small-scale tourism entrepreneurship, local knowledge, and resilience.

Before offering theoretical and methodological background, we turn to unpack the title of our article. "A Room with a View" alludes to a 1908 E. M. Forster novel (subsequently transformed into a critically-acclaimed 1985 film by James Ivory and Ismail Merchant) about British tourists staying in a small *pensione* in Florence, Italy at the tail end of the Grand Tour era. Many of the film's British characters embody the norms, dictates, and repressions of the Victorian era, filtering Italy's offerings (unfamiliar practices, foods, etc.) through their own culturally-restrictive traditions. In contrast, the young, nonconformist British hero and his father (and the heroine, albeit more ambivalently and tentatively), represent a more forward-looking, openness to Italy (and life more generally), often bucking older British social conventions. Early in the film, the heroine expresses her dismay over her room's dismal view. She had hoped for a view over the Arno River. Her comment prompts a room exchange instigated by the nonconventional hero and his father, and eventually a romance. The film ultimately explores the question of how life should be led: should one follow strict, often problematic conventions or forge a new path, following one's heart?

What does a British novel about upper crust English grand tourists visiting a celebrated, historic destination have to do with an Indonesian entrepreneur establishing a tourism restaurant in a risky off-the-grid locale? In many ways, the entrepreneurial family profiled in our case study can be seen as embracing the non-conventional path in their tourism entrepreneurship. Rather than follow long-standing Western-driven tourism business prescriptions about when and where to open a new business, our subjects drew on their own rich - even intuitive - local knowledge of regional sociocultural practices. Our article pushes for a fuller appreciation of the importance of this kind of intuitive local knowledge (in tandem with other forms of cultural and social capital) in crafting resilient, locally-run tourism-oriented businesses in times of touristic unpredictability. The film's title (and plot) also evokes another underlying theme in this case study: just as a hotel room is part of a larger structure solidly implanted in the soil and a window offers a vision of worlds beyond, our subjects' approach to their tourism enterprise entails a rootedness in (and fidelity to) the local community, paired with a forward-looking desire to advance and pursue the view.

## Theoretical Background

Almost two decades ago, Page, Forer, and Lawton (1999) declared our understanding of small-scale local tourism entrepreneurship as “terra incognita.” Much has changed since this somewhat sensational declaration. A growing body of research has been emerging on small and micro tourism entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia, beginning with Dahles and Brass’s (1999) landmark edited volume, which presented a wide swath of case studies of small-scale Indonesian tourism entrepreneurs, ranging from guides, gigolos, and beachside masseuses to pedicab drivers and homestay/budget accommodation entrepreneurs. Additional studies have highlighted a wide array of themes, including motivational factors in tourism entrepreneurs’ decision-making (Ahmad, Jabeen, and Khan 2014); the relationship between entrepreneurs and state bureaucracies (Bennett 2008); and the narrative strategies embraced by tourism entrepreneurs to foster sales (e.g. Causey 2003), among other topics.

As scholars have suggested, multiple factors can contribute to the success of a small tourism business. Some have cited the interlinkages forged between small-scale and larger-scale tourism enterprises as contributing to business success (Go 1997; Tefler and Wall 1996). Other scholars have noted the importance of personal networks, family labor, and emotional support (Dahles 1999, p. 12; Green and Pryde 1989). Yet, some scholars caution that such extended family and social networks can also “exert levelling pressures on successful individuals to redistribute wealth, instead of reinvesting it in economic ventures” (Ferguson, Dahles, and Prabawa 2017, pp. 173-174). Still others have highlighted managerial characteristics, such as training, business skills, and experience (Ibrahim and Goodwin 1986), among other factors. Numerous tourism studies have stressed the importance of understanding the habits, interests, and tastes of foreign tourists for successful tourism ventures, often suggesting that local would-be entrepreneurs are at a disadvantage due to lack of Western cultural and business knowledge (Bunten and Graburn 2017, p.15).<sup>3</sup> While these knowledge lacunae can certainly factor into the failure of some small-scale locally-operated tourism enterprises oriented towards a foreign clientele, this article highlights the other side of the coin. We argue that local knowledge - a nuanced understanding of *in situ* sociocultural practices, including religious, economic and ecological concerns - is an equally important and understudied factor in the success of small-scale tourism entrepreneurs.

Especially in tumultuous environmental or political-religious climates, where income from international tourism is unreliable, local knowledge becomes all the more important for the resilience of small-scale tourism entrepreneurs.<sup>4</sup>

But what is local knowledge? Earlier, we glossed “local knowledge” as insights into *in situ* cultural practices and social and religious concerns. Such insights are rooted in specific cultural contexts, anchored in local environments, and entail deep, often intuitive appreciation of local practices, rather than analytical understandings (Butler and Menzies 2007, p. 18). As Butler and Menzies elaborate, the concept shares terrain with the that of “indigenous knowledge” (understandings held by autochthonous peoples): both refer to ways of knowing that “have a subaltern relationship with Western “modern” scientific knowledge” (ibid, p. 17). Moreover, both local knowledge and “traditional knowledge” are dynamic, “long-term, cumulative and contemporary” (ibid, p. 18). As mentioned above, in recent years, tourism scholars have begun to attend to the important contributions of indigenous and local knowledge to various aspects of tourism enterprises, most frequently in ecotourism and community-based tourism. However, not enough attention has been devoted to exploring the role of local knowledge for the resilience of small-scale tourism entrepreneurs. This case study represents a step in that direction.

Over the past decade, various scholars have underscored the need for tourism studies to counterweight its heavy emphasis on Western theoretical conceptualizations of tourism phenomenon with locally-cultivated understandings, which are equally significant and have frequently been eclipsed. In short, there has been a call to “decolonize” tourism studies (e.g. Coles, Hall, and Duval 2016; Hollinshead 2016). As Keith Hollinshead writes “investigators have to learn to not just rely on removed, etic, and clinical assessments of cultural being and becoming that have been a part of academic social science over the last century, but they need to know how to blend such ‘academic forms of insight’ with local and contextual ‘non-academic’/ ‘communal’/‘collateral’ ways of knowing” (Hollinshead 2016, p. 350). In spotlighting the under-recognized role of local knowledge in contributing to a traveler-oriented restaurant’s success (when tourism business strategy manuals derived from European and American would suggest otherwise), this article contributes to what Hollinshead (2016) has called “plural knowability” and others have more broadly termed “critical tourism studies” (Ateljevic, Morgan, and Pritchard 2012).

## Methodology

This qualitative project analyzing a tourist-oriented restaurant's success drew on a mixed methods approach (Bernard 2006), interviews, participant observation, autoethnography, and photographic documentation. Kathleen Adams's participant observation (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994) with members of the restaurant's core customer base (tourists and Toraja travelers moving between their ancestral homeland in the mountains and the lowland capital of Makassar) helped inform our understandings of travelers' perceptions of the business and the niche it has come to fill. In addition, Dirk Sandarupa's participant observation alongside the restaurant's employees as they prepared food or waited tables, and with local Bugis communities (accompanying one of the founders when she negotiated with farmers and fishermen for locally-sourced foods to serve in the restaurant) fostered insights into employees' work relationships, perceptions of their jobs, aspirations, and ideas concerning the outsiders stopping at the restaurant en route to their ultimate destinations.

We also drew on the critical methodologies of autoethnography and analytic autoethnography (Anderson 2006; Ellis 1997, 2004). Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard (2005) have written persuasively about the interpretive, reflexive methodology of autoethnography, which entails drawing on "one's own lived experience as a resource" (Morgan and Pritchard 2005, p. 35). Both Adams's and Sandarupa's personal experiences of making the nine-hour bus journey between the lowland capital of Makassar and the Toraja highlands on many occasions over the course of thirty years enabled them to appreciate the bodily exhaustion, boredom, hunger, crankiness, unease tingled with excitement that travelers often carry with them as they make their way through the lowlands en route to upland Sulawesi. Understanding these experiences at a visceral level enabled us to make sense of the mindsets of some of the travelers arriving at the restaurant. Leon Anderson (2006, p. 373) further distinguishes this form of "evocative" autoethnography from what he terms "analytic autoethnography." He defines analytic autoethnography as entailing research where the researcher is "(1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (ibid, pp. 373). As a close relative of the restaurant's Indonesian founders, Dirk Sandarupa divided the past ten years of his life between residing and working at the restaurant and living in Makassar (three hours away) while attending

graduate school. Dirk Sandarupa witnessed the restaurant's initial conception and planning, participated in and documented these early phases, partook in the restaurant's growth, and the planning of the adjacent hotel, which celebrated its grand opening this year. His experiences of the early uncertain years, and the slow, careful cultivation of bonds with local community members and officials (who differed in ethnicity and religion), enriched our grasp of the history and vision behind the restaurant. His analytic autoethnography helped us discern the factors enabling the restaurant to succeed despite seemingly negative odds.

We supplemented data drawn from participant observation and autoethnography with open-ended interviews with 26 of the current employees, as well as customers (both foreign and domestic tourists, most of whom were interviewed at their final destination in the Toraja highlands), and the husband and wife team who founded the restaurant. Observations culled from these discussions were recorded in daily field notes and analyzed to identify emergent themes pertaining to research questions.

The research also entailed photographic documentation (Feighey 2003) of hotel construction, employee training, daily work, restaurant operations, and holiday celebrations with the local community, as well as interactions with food vendors from the adjacent community.

### **The Road to Arum Pala Restaurant: Local Knowledge of Travelling Toraja (and Tourist) Sensibilities**

Traveling between the South Sulawesi capital of Makassar and the tourist destination of the Toraja highlands entails a long, sometimes bone-rattling eight-hour bus journey. The highway parallels the coast for the first three and a half hours, passing through Bugis county seats, towns, and rural farming areas until it reaches the port city of Pare Pare. There, the road abandons the coast, narrows, and winds and bumps its way north into the hills, ultimately climbing up to the ethnically and religiously distinct Toraja highlands. Known for elaborate funeral rituals, traditional architecture, haunting burial sites, and spectacular scenery, the Toraja highlands are a major international and domestic tourist destination (Adams 2006a). The road carries buses and mini vans bearing these tourists, as well as local Indonesian traders, travelers, students, and migrants returning for visits to ancestral villages. Three hours from Makassar, the road hugs the coast, offering up sweeping views of calm



seas and smaller islands. This stretch of the road, in the Barru District, is less densely populated than the exhaust-choked, dusty portions of the road to the south, where the roadsides are lined with shops, filling stations, and bustling truck-stop restaurants churning out fast food for the passenger-laden vehicles plying the road.

It was on this isolated, seaside stretch of the road that Stanis Sandarupa preferred to stop for lunch with his family when travelling to the highlands to visit Toraja kin. Sometimes, he also stopped in this area with tourists to take photos in the 1990s, in the days when he had supplemented his income as a university lecturer in Makassar by working as a guide. Despite the inspiring seaside scenery, many South Sulawesi travelers found this section of the road lonely (*sunyi*, Indonesian; or *makarorong*, Torajan), even eerie. Though the road was dotted with bamboo and plywood stands selling corn and yams and several small villages were nearby, just inland from the road, this region was home to only three unassuming roadside restaurants, several miles apart.<sup>5</sup> For most, this was a pass-through zone - not a destination, or even a rest stop.

Yet, Stanis Sandarupa remained captivated by the sea views from one particularly-isolated Barru restaurant and in 2000, while passing through the area with a minivan full of tourists, he discovered the restaurant was for sale. Bursting with excitement, he phoned his wife Katrin and shared his plans to buy the restaurant. They would need to sell their Makassar house and move their family of five into a cramped two-bedroom home to make the purchase, but Stanis was determined. Based on his own personal and cultural experiences (what we term ‘local knowledge’) as a Toraja who, like many other Torajans, had spent a lifetime moving between Makassar and the Toraja highlands, Stanis knew that Toraja travelers and returning migrants would always flow along this road, as would tourists. He also knew from his years of experience travelling this road with other Torajans, that Torajans were mistrustful of the food sold in the lowland roadside food stalls and restaurants. In the Toraja popular imagination, lowlander business were sometimes presumed to run unsanitary kitchens - to serve un-boiled water, to reuse barely-washed utensils, and to sell food that had lingered unrefrigerated for far too long. Rather than dine in these “risky” lowland rest-stop cafes, Toraja travelers often brought their own snacks from home for the long journey, or purchased only “reliable” snacks - packaged foods such as instant noodles or bottled drinks. More broadly, for many Christian Toraja highlanders, riding through the Muslim

Bugis lowlands entailed traveling through a zone of vague unease (see Adams 2006, pp. 12-13). Drawing from this local knowledge, Stanis instinctively knew that a Toraja-run restaurant on this lowland stretch of the road would be sure to draw a steady stream of Toraja travelers, even when international and domestic tourism arrivals dipped. He also had a sense of international tourists' predilections for sea-views, based on his guiding experience as a graduate student and his experiences since purchasing a Toraja-focused tourism business (Torindo Tours and Travel) in 1996. His instincts told him that both tourists and Torajan travelers could one day find it irresistible to stop at this stretch of the road for a rest and meal, before resuming the arduous eight-hour drive between Makassar and the Toraja highlands.

Stanis remained determined to buy the restaurant, despite the disapproval of extended family members, and his friends' cautions against the purchase. As many warned him, Indonesia was in a period of political and economic tumult, with ethno-religious rioting and violence erupting elsewhere on Sulawesi as well as on other islands. Tourism had plummeted and showed little likelihood of regaining traction. Moreover, many voiced concerns about starting a business in a Muslim Bugis area, where his family would be the only Christian Toraja entrepreneurs in the region. Yet Stanis was not deterred. He had spent much of the 1990s pursuing a Ph.D. in linguistic anthropology at the University of Chicago, and told his friends that he had systematically researched situations where ethnic or religious violence erupted in Indonesia and beyond: his studies suggested that instances of violence were least likely in locales where one group was clearly dominant. His academic knowledge reinforced his instincts (culled from local knowledge) that this would be a good place to plant business roots.

### **Cultivating Neighborly Support: Local Knowledge and Rapport-Building**

Thus, despite cautions from friends and family, the couple bought the restaurant from its once-wealthy Bugis owner (who resided in Makassar) whose bankruptcy had obliged him to sell. The parcel included the restaurant - a beautifully crafted one-room wooden structure with a corrugated tin roof at the edge of the sea - and twelve small open-air picnicking stands (see Figure 1). As soon as the school holidays began, the family relocated to the restaurant, making repairs, and sleeping together in the one room structure. Their menu was minimal: only two items were offered, Bugis corn porridge (from the

prior owner's recipe) and coconut juice. When evening fell, they discovered that the restaurant's lonely setting had not only lent itself to rumors of ghosts, but also to nefarious human activities: provocatively-clad sex workers (*kupu kupu malam*, Indonesian) showed up, along with drunken men and thugs. As they discovered, under the prior owner, the restaurant had been a locally-known gathering-spot for illicit activities (*kenakalan*, Indonesian<sup>6</sup>). So dark was the restaurant's reputation that even local soldiers and police feared the prior owner and turned a blind eye to the restaurant's nocturnal activities. Frightened, Stanis and his wife Katrin began closing the restaurant by 10 PM. However, the activities persisted outside, and they were often awakened by showers of rocks pelted at their windows or, on one occasion, by an attempted break-in. Clearly, the late-night orientation of the prior restaurant was one potentially economically-devastating piece of local knowledge they lacked!

Yet, other forms of local knowledge were soon to make up for this. Stanis began to approach the local villagers, as well as the local soldiers and police. Counter to the classic "time is money" approach embraced by most Western businesses, Stanis took time off from the demands of establishing the restaurant and getting his tour company off the ground, and began spending hours each day talking informally with the male villagers and local officials, exchanging thoughts, and simply spending time together. From his own childhood and youth in a rural Toraja area, he understood the cultural importance of informal time spent visiting with neighbors, sipping coffee or tea and chatting in non-goal-directed ways, while building trust and rapport. Over the course of these ambling conversations, Stanis shared his knowledge of South Sulawesi folklore<sup>7</sup>, astonishing his Bugis neighbors with his rich understanding of their cultural heritage. His wife Katrin, in turn, began spending time with women in the village, building rapport and sharing positive strategies for becoming more economically independent. Some of these women were widows with limited means, others were wives saddled with heavy child-rearing and household responsibilities, and her ideas were generally welcomed. As Stanis and Katrin's ties with the local community, local soldiers, and local police developed, and they became more accepted locally (despite their different cultural and religious background), the illicit activities evaporated. They could now keep the restaurant open all night, eventually making it possible to capture business from the night buses that carried travelers between Makassar and the Toraja highlands.



**Figure 1.** The restaurant’s picnic stands, repainted by the Sandarupa family soon after buying the parcel in 2000. Source: Dirk Sandarupa.

### **“Learn, Listen and be a Part of the Process”: Labor and Local Knowledge**

Although the restaurant had little to no income at the start, in the early 2000s, the family knew they needed local support. Thus, they hired a Bugis neighbor and his daughter to keep an eye on the place when they needed to be away in Makassar.<sup>8</sup> By 2006, the Sandarupa family began to expand the restaurant’s offerings, adding chicken and fish to their repertoire. By 2008, as the restaurant’s business grew to include more buses and tour groups, they expanded the menu yet again, as well as the staff. Initially, they tried hiring Torajan relatives and high-school students from highland villages, as well as some local Bugis. They knew that both Bugis and Toraja had cultural ritual demands that would unpredictably pull them away from work. For the Torajan employees, frequent funeral rituals necessitated their return to highland villages for a week at a time, sometimes several times over the course of a season. For the Bugis employees, it was weddings that required absences of several days. The Sandarupas understood these cultural dictates and made it their business philosophy to “never fire anyone but themselves.” Moreover, some of their Bugis employees were attending high school while working at the restaurant. Flexibility became embedded in their scheduling.

Ultimately, they found it hard to retain Torajan employees, who found the location too far from home, too far from a large Toraja community, and too lonely. In the beginning, even their teen-aged children complained of the

“creepy” locale, and pined to return to Makassar. But their parents’ mantra was to “learn and listen, and open your minds...to be a part of the process.” As their son explains:

What I learned...from my father and mother is never to chase success, but be the mindset, because success has its own limits, but our minds keep expanding, limitless...so we are willing to learn and listen, open our mind. And that’s where our father started to feed our mind through his guiding. We learned to see other cultures, ethnicities, and religions. What’s more important is that our mindset has changed. As we grow older, we get more involved with the local people and help them to grow with us, too...we’re not looking for something on top, we’re looking for something to live on forever, not just us alone, but togetherness.

In short, according to his parents’ imparted philosophy, the business was not centered on profit, but rather its energies focussed on growth, local knowledge, and community.

From early on, Stanis and Katrin Sandarupa were determined to establish not only a restaurant, but to make Arum Pala a tourist destination. The mixture of customers - Indonesians of different ethnicities and religions, as well as occasional European package tour groups (subcontracting with Stanis’ company as their local operator) - made for cultural gaps with the rural, generally insular staff. Stanis and Katrin became de facto cultural brokers, teaching their employees about Western cultural expectations and tastes. They also taught greetings in various foreign languages, and demonstrated recipes for several Western dishes that were incorporated into the menu. They were well situated to serve as cultural brokers, given the cultural capital they had accrued in the earlier decades of their lives (Stanis’ years of guiding foreign tourists, and the years they spent in Chicago when Stanis was pursuing a graduate degree and Katrin was working at a university cafeteria and catering Indonesian meals for graduate student events). Stanis’ experiences in guiding also meant that he recognized that lunching tourists might be interested in dance, thus they began arranging for local community members to perform traditional Bugis dances to welcome tour groups to the restaurant (see Figure 2).

Katrin also decided that, rather than purchasing ingredients for the restaurant’s food from large businesses or the public market, she preferred to work



**Figure 2.** Bugis dancers welcoming tourists. Source: Dirk Sandarupa.

with local fishermen and farmers. In keeping with their philosophy that the restaurant should benefit local people, she began to buy vegetables from staff members who also had gardens and sold vegetables. She also encouraged staff members to sell their traditional cookies in the restaurant. She approached local fisherman and made daily arrangements for the kinds of fish she would buy from them as they returned from sea (see Figure 3). Previously, local fishermen and farmers had been obliged to spend time at the three-day-a-week market if they hoped to sell their goods. Since Katrin began buying directly from them, they now only need to go once a week, and younger boys and teens are now finding it worthwhile to take on fishing as an after-school job for pocket money, something that would have been unthinkable prior to the arrival of the restaurant.

These steps not only mean that more profits are flowing into the local community, they also enable Katrin to control the food supply ensuring, for instance, that the fish are freshly caught and have not been doused with chemical preservatives (as is increasingly the norm with long distance fishermen going out to sea for several days). As Katrin sums up, “It would probably be cheaper for me to buy food from industrial food producers, but then the food might not be safe. This way, the fishermen know they have a buyer before they do the work, and I know I am serving safe food.” In a time of mounting alarm over food safety, and of growing interest in locally-sourced food, Katrin’s instincts to ensure that locals also profit from the restaurant have paid off, not only in terms of profit but in terms of forging bonds with the community. This locally-oriented approach that does not prioritize economic profits as the primary goal has also enabled community members to feel more invested in the restaurant.



**Figure 3.** Cooks sorting freshly caught fish. Source: Dirk Sandarupa

### **Religion, Culture and Local Knowledge**

Although Stanis and Katrin are Catholic, they also appreciated the cultural and social importance of Muslim Bugis practices. The worn mosaic-paved entryway to the restaurant bears a Bugis greeting written in lontara-styled script, installed by the prior owner yet carefully maintained by the current owners. The greeting reads, “*Ta pada Salama*” (see Figure 4). The words bear multiple meanings: most commonly they are translated as conveying a simultaneous welcome and goodbye and as conveying a prayer for those arriving and departing to enjoy safety and peace. Stanis long made it a point to indicate the words and their meaning to outsiders arriving for the first time, and his son has posted the image and its unpacking on the restaurant’s Facebook page. As many Bugis have commented: “these are beautiful words.”



**Figure 4.** Mosaic entryway to the restaurant. Source: Dirk Sandarupa.

As Catholic Toraja entrepreneurs in a predominantly Muslim area, the family knew that their restaurant could not hope to survive if it served pork, a meat favored by Torajans. Instead, they serve only halal food, following Islam-certified methods for animal slaughter and food preparation. The family also recognized the social and religious importance of the mosques in the two nearby Muslim Bugis communities. Thus, early on, they joined the mosques in each community (not as converts but as supporters) and began making donations. They also drew on their knowledge of Muslim cultural practices, and during Lebaran (the Islamic fasting month), they donate food to the mosques each week, so that the local communities can gather together inside the mosque to break the fast with the donated food. On the day of Lebaran itself, they make cash donations to the two local mosques. As Katrin explained, this is their way of giving back to the local community, and crafting community with them. Likewise, on Catholic holidays, they make food contributions to their neighboring Muslim communities. On Easter, for instance, they distribute rice to all of their Muslim employees (see Figure 5). Their 2018 Easter Facebook entry explains their views (translated from Indonesian):

What we believe does not need to be believed by others. Every religion teaches its members how to celebrate their great day. We are imperfect as human beings, but we believe there are two important things in life. First, all humans are the same (we all have thoughts, hearts and souls). We only appear different on the outside, in skin color, culture, ethnicity, religion or nationality. Second, we believe that every religion teaches one thing: Love...as always, every year, whatever holiday we celebrate, we always share what we have with one another.



**Figure 5.** Distributing rice to employees, 2018. Source: Dirk Sandarupa.



Their engagements with the local mosques and their respect of Muslim religious practices has earned them a local Muslim clientele, which has been important in enabling them to survive in times when international tourism has stalled, for it is travelling Bugis and local officials and residents who ensure that there are always customers. In fact, the restaurant has become a destination for local government officials to take visiting dignitaries. And, in recent years, local Muslims are starting to look to the restaurant as an attractive location for their events.

### **A Room with a View: From Restaurant to Tourist Hotel**

By 2012, the family had realized the first step of their dream: the restaurant was drawing a steady stream of both local customers and long-distance buses stopping for travelers to grab quick snacks before resuming their journeys. Likewise, when tourism was not obstructed due to tragic events elsewhere in Indonesia, charter tour buses were also making stops at the restaurant. Torajans travelling away from their homeland for business, schooling or jobs were all familiar with Arum Pala restaurant and many Torajans interviewed in the highlands spoke of their relief to now have a Toraja-run restaurant at a good breaking point on the journey. As one Torajan explained: “We used to always feel uncomfortable eating at Bugis restaurants. We didn’t know if the places were clean, and the food was bad...now we can stop on our travels to eat good food in a Toraja-run place and not worry.” Indeed, just as Bugis and other Muslims trust the restaurant as a place that meets halal standards, Torajans trust the restaurant because it is Toraja-owned. Stanis and Katrin’s recognition of the importance of local travelers and their intuitive understanding of the varied needs of these groups paved the groundwork for the restaurant’s success.

In 2012, as part of their long-term plan to make the spot a tourist destination (rather than simply a tourist lunch stop), they began constructing a small hotel. The first overnight guests arrived at the hotel in summer 2012, when the first eight rooms were completed (see Figure 6). Work has continued intermittently since that time, interrupted for a period by Stanis’s unexpected death in early 2016. The hotel’s grand opening occurred in April 2018, when eight additional rooms and an expansive new lobby and multipurpose room were completed (see Figure 7). The hotel and restaurant enterprise now has 27 employees - all Bugis from the local area - and is already drawing domestic tourists,

government officials, and even religious leaders, including a celebrated Muslim religious leader and his entourage, who stayed at the hotel for several days. In short, despite the enterprise's unlikely location (on what was an eerie, lonely stretch of road), the inauspicious timing of the restaurant purchase (in a period of bloody inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts), and the risks that are associated with being ethnic and religious minority entrepreneurs, Stanis and Katrin's efforts to launch their Barru enterprise as a tourist destination are meeting with success. While their cultural capital (education abroad and tourism-related experiences) and social capital (connections with European tour operators and Toraja travelers) certainly played important roles, we contend that their local knowledge also contributed to this success.



**Figure 6.** The hotel's first guests dining at the restaurant in 2012. Source: Kathleen M. Adams.



**Figure 7.** The newly expanded hotel in 2018. Source: Dirk Sandarupa.

## Conclusion

In keeping with calls to better understand the nature of resilience in tourism enterprises and locales (e.g. Bec, McLennan, and Moyle 2016), the micro-case study featured here has highlighted a tourism-oriented business that was able to grow and thrive despite seemingly impossible odds. Our qualitative, ethnographically-grounded examination of the history, philosophy, and activities embodied in this enterprise has underscored the under-recognized role of local knowledge in fueling a tourism-oriented business's ability to withstand the ebbs and flows of tourism in tumultuous times. Stanis and Katrin's dedication to learning about and building bridges with the local Bugis community, (carefully cultivating relationships and engagements with the local mosques, neighboring farmers, and fishermen), entailed a distinctly different path than those commonly taken by Western tourist-oriented businesses and Western hoteliers. Implicit in their activities and actions is an approach that foregrounds local knowledge as an important ingredient in forging a resilient tourism business. Also underlying their approach is a perspective that does not place economic profit above all else, but rather includes broader community well-being in the calculus.

It should also be noted that the couple's enterprise in this unlikely spot has made inroads into transforming outsiders' perceptions of the immediate area. Once seen as a lonely, even eerie, area by outsiders, and a center for drunken, illicit activities by locals, the restaurant and recently-completed hotel are now being held up by local community members and government officials as a visitor-worthy destination. As noted in the introduction, the enterprise has recently received official commendation from Barru Regency leaders for positively transforming perceptions of the area. While the theoretical contributions of this article center on highlighting the under-recognized importance of local knowledge in crafting resilient tourism enterprises, it is also worth recognizing the potentially transformative role such businesses can play in outsider perceptions of regions, and in fostering regional pride.

The implications of this micro-case study are multiple. Natural disasters, political tumult and other incidents are likely to continue to disrupt tourist flows, both domestic and international. If tourism planners are to succeed at understanding why some tourism-oriented businesses can withstand such erratic tourism flows, additional studies examining the role of local knowledge may be a step in the right direction.

## Notes

\***Kathleen M. Adams** is Professor of Anthropology at Loyola University Chicago and Adjunct Curator of Southeast Asian Ethnology at the Field Museum of Natural History. She has authored *Art as Politics: Recrafting Identities, Tourism, and Power in Tana Toraja, Indonesia* (2006, Univ. of Hawaii Press) and co-edited several volumes including *Everyday Life in Southeast Asia* (2012, Indiana University Press) and *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Service and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia* (2000, Univ. of Michigan Press), as well as journal articles. Her research interests center on heritage, critical tourism studies, museums, identity dynamics, art and material culture, and insular Southeast Asia. Email: kadams@luc.edu.

\*\***Dirk Sandarupa** (M.A.) is a Ph.D. student in English Literature at Hasanuddin University in Makassar, Indonesia. His interests are in linguistic anthropology, poetry, and fiction. He has published “Ideology and Honorifics in the Toraja Language (An Analysis of Politeness Strategies)” in *Proceedings of the National Seminar on Corpus Linguistics* (2017, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta), as well as an assortment of poems. Email: diruku86@gmail.com

1. Various scholars have proposed different avenues as correctives for Eurocentrism in tourism studies. Some have advocated paradigm shifts (Winter 2009), whereas others have proposed theoretical shifts, such as a focus on post-colonial theory (Chang 2015) or mobilities theory (Cohen and Cohen 2015). Still others have suggested epistemological-decolonization as “a more radical project that can provide an ‘other’ way of thinking, being and knowing about tourism” (Chambers and Buzinde 2015, p. 1). Citing Russell-Mundine (2012), Chambers and Buzinde advocate greater representation of indigenous peoples in driving tourism research on issues of concern to themselves, as well as greater reflexivity on the part of outsiders (“Whites”) involved in research in indigenous communities (2015, p. 8). Also see King’s (2017) recent discussion of these issues.

2. Phi, Whitford, and Dredge (2017) offer an interesting case study of community-based tourism in Mai Hich, Vietnam, highlighting knowledge dynamics at different sectors (from local knowledge most often held at the level of NGOs and local governments, to private sector tourism experts with different forms of knowledge and revenue-generating goals that may not

include the social community-building visions). Their emphasis is on tracking and mapping knowledge flows, and in interventions and innovations in a community tourism site.

3. Bunten and Graburn (2017) offer an interesting discussion of what they term “knowledge movements,” in the context of changing sensibilities about indigenous traditional knowledge and the information needed to successfully operate a tourism enterprise on their own terms. For them, knowledge movements include “the practical know-how needed to run a tourism business, a sense of what tourists want to understand, and how to manipulate touristic desire” (ibid, p. 15).

4. Resilience, a concept drawn from ecology, concerns the ability to withstand stress. As used in tourism studies, resilience emphasizes the capacity of tourism-dependent individuals and communities to endure and withstand unanticipated disruptions in tourism arrivals, be they due to major environmental crises such as the Boxing Day tsunami, or due to socio-political tumult. Recently, there has been a burst of scholarship on resilience (i.e. Cheer et al. 2017; Cheer and Lew 2017; Orchiston, Prayag, and Brown 2016). Much of this work is either conceptual/theoretical, or entails larger-level studies, at the regional or community level (Bec, McLennan, and Moyle 2016; Cochrane 2010; Strickland-Munro, Allison and Moore 2010). At present, there are far fewer fine-grained studies of individual resilience, be these individual artisans, tourism micro-entrepreneurs or local residents whose livelihoods are tethered to the tourist economy (Lew 2014). This paper answers Girish Prayag’s (2017) call for research offering direct analysis of the resilience-building strategies and projects pursued by individual tourism stakeholders to navigate the increasingly unpredictable ebbs and flows of tourism.

5. There are now four restaurants in this area.

6. *Kenakalan* translates as “naughtiness” but entails a far wider range of behavior than the English term. This Indonesian term covers everything from the antics of a baby, to criminal activities.

7. His Ph.D. dissertation had addressed Toraja oral literature and ritual verse: some of these tales also feature the exploits of Bugis or Makassarese heroes.

8. There were only two houses on the quiet stretch of the road near the restaurant: one was this family and the other was home to some Chinese men. The two nearby villages were not immediately adjacent to the restaurant.

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