

## MARINE TOURISM IN THE GILI ISLANDS: A CHALLENGE IN IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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### Abstract

In coastal areas, marine tourism is one sector with great potential to drive economic growth. One of the destinations experiencing rapid development in this sector is the Gili Islands, North Lombok. However, in the midst of the rapid development of tourism in the Gili Islands, there are various challenges related to environmental, social, and economic sustainability. The beauty of the underwater world, coral reef ecosystems, and rich marine biodiversity are the main attractions for domestic and foreign tourists. The study aims to discover the challenges in implementing sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands. The study was conducted in the Gili Islands, North Lombok. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method. The questionnaire was distributed to business actors of marine tourism in the Gili Islands. The question form is an open question. The questionnaire was shared online. After gathering the data, the researcher analyses the data and describes the results descriptively. The study found that implementing sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands confronts serious problems encompassing a lack of supervision, a lack of resources, a lack of collaboration between stakeholders, and a lack of sustainable education initiatives. The stakeholders should consider those aspects in implementing sustainable tourism in the Gili Islands. It is hoped that the research results can contribute to the development of sustainable tourism management models in the islands and become a reference for stakeholders in formulating more effective and inclusive policy strategies.

Keywords: marine tourism, challenge, implementation, sustainable tourism

### Introduction

In coastal areas, marine tourism is one of the sectors that has great potential in driving economic growth (Kinseng et al., 2018; Wenbin Liu & Zongfeng Cao, 2018). One of the destinations experiencing rapid development in this sector is the Gili Islands, consisting of Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, and Gili Air, located in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. The beauty of the underwater world, coral reef ecosystems, and rich marine biodiversity are the main attractions for domestic and foreign tourists (Tempo, 2021). Furthermore, during the rapid development of tourism in the Gili Islands, there are various challenges related to environmental, social, and economic sustainability (Papageorgiou, 2016; Miller, 2003). Poorly managed tourism practices, such as the construction of tourism facilities that are not environmentally friendly, an increase in the volume of marine debris, pressure

on coral reef ecosystems due to excessive snorkeling and diving activities, and the economic dependence of local communities on the tourism sector without diversification of income, are complex problems.

According to (UNWTO, n.d.) sustainable tourism is “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”. Sustainable practice in the tourism industry is called sustainable tourism, which aims at reducing negative impact and maximizing positive impact (GSTC, n.d.). Thus, Sustainable tourism is one of the concepts that integrates economic, social, and environmental impacts.

The implementation concept of sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands has actually been pursued through various regulations, conservation programs, and collaboration between the government, business actors, and local communities (Taufik, 2024). However, these efforts still face various challenges. The challenges are essential elements that need to be identified. Analyzing the challenges, especially sustainable marine tourism, helps stakeholders understand effective strategies to implement to manage sustainable marine tourism. Additionally, the study will be conducted in the three Gili islands, North Lombok. The researcher employs a descriptive qualitative method. The main source of data is from stakeholders. The study will share open questions related to implementing marine tourism sustainability.

Related to previous research, (Parmawati et al., 2020) (Johnston et al., 2017) (Suryani, 2022) concerning their studies on the marine tourism challenge development. However, this study focuses on analysing the challenges in implementing marine tourism sustainability. Therefore, this research aims to identify the main challenges in implementing sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands. Through this case study, it is hoped that the research results can contribute to the development of sustainable tourism management models in the islands and become a reference for stakeholders in formulating more effective and inclusive policy strategies.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Indonesian islands have unique qualities of marine tourism attractions, especially in the Gili Islands. The current trends in marine tourism in each location still have a lot of flaws (Briandana et al., 2018). The marine tourism product is made up of a variety of marine activities, including fishing, boating, sailing, diving, snorkelling, surfing, windsurfing, parasailing, water-skiing, canoeing, kayaking, jet skiing, and jet boat riding (Jennings, 2003). Scuba diving, snorkelling, windsurfing, fishing, observing marine mammals and seabirds, the cruise and ferry industries, all beach activities, sea kayaking, visits to coastal villages and fishing lighthouses, maritime museums, sailing and motor boating, maritime events, and Arctic and Antarctic tourism are all included in the list of activities associated with marine tourism (Martinez et al., 2021). Marine tourism is an activity that involves seawater activities, including participating in shark diving, whale-watching, and visits to marine protected areas (Jonas et al., 2019). Marine tourism can be grouped into three categories, namely; (Tourism Business Africa, 2014) (I) Cruising and boating, which includes shipping, yachting, and cruising, (II) Sports and recreation, which includes water sports like swimming, sailing, and plunging, (III) “Leisure class –

comprising of eco-marine the travel industry, for example, visits to Marine Protected Area's (MPAs), and experience and review the travel industry; for instance, whale viewing and shark diving individually". Marine tourism is defined as leisure, relaxation, and tourism activities that occur in the maritime environment and provide hospitality to visitors (Diakomihalis, 2007). Furthermore, according to the definition above, marine tourism can be defined as recreational activities in or around the ocean, seas, and other sizable saltwater bodies. It is a subcategory of tourism that focuses on experiences that are based on the coast and the water, frequently fusing leisure, adventure, and nature.

In today's open and globalized world, international marine tourism requires revitalization, restructuring, and perspective clarification, particularly about the idea of sustainable development (Troian et al., 2023). Perceptions of stakeholders regarding the significance of sustainability in marine and coastal areas, both as it is now and as it is expected to develop over the next several decades (Dimitrovski, et al., 2021). This means that the sustainable concept should be integrated as part of a strategy for the sustainability of marine tourism. The development management of sustainable tourism must maintain a high level of customer satisfaction, provide a meaningful experience for customers, raise their awareness of sustainability issues, and spread sustainable tourism practices among them (Streimikiene et al., 2020). The tourism sector may be sustained with the development of sustainable tourism (Palacios et al., 2021).

In addition, Sustainable tourism includes economic, social, and environmental protection (Streimikiene et al., 2020). "Sustainable tourism fully considers its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities." (UNWTO, 2023). It should be clear that the tourism industry is considered sustainable if it can provide equal weight to the planet, social and cultural, and economic factors (Virtanen et al., 2020). Planet refers to business activities that must prioritize environmental sustainability, without having a significant negative impact on the environment (Nieuwland, 2023). Thus, traveling and visiting a place that respects the environment, boosts the local economy, and conserves cultural legacy for future generations is known as sustainable tourism. It's about reducing adverse effects and increasing beneficial contributions to the locations we visit.

Meanwhile, implementing sustainable tourism is a complex system. Several interconnected elements make up the development of sustainable tourism planning. The system is complicated as a result, with distinct objectives and management techniques for every component (Husain et al, 2024). Therefore, the ability to analyze challenges is a crucial step to begin the implementation of sustainable tourism. There are some strategies for "implementing sustainable production systems are presented and discussed as follows: preserving resources' value by conserving them, focusing on waste-prevention initiatives by reinstating resources within the intended flow, boosting management's focus on sustainability, encouraging collaboration among stakeholders along the value chain, increasing the adoption of environmentally friendly technologies, tracking progress toward sustainable methods and technologies, increasing awareness of the circular economy design idea, and boosting the number of educational initiatives that promote sustainable production" (Hegab et al., 2023). These can be key indicators

of success in sustainable marine tourism as they represent an important aspect of sustainability.

### Research Method

The study was conducted in the Gili Islands, North Lombok. This study employed a qualitative method. Qualitative research focuses on specific people, occasions, and settings, making it amenable to idiographic analysis (Gerring, 2017). The goals are to gain a comprehensive and meaningful picture of the social world of study participants by learning about their experiences, viewpoints, histories, and material and social conditions (Moriarty, 2011). Data were collected mainly through the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to business actors of marine tourism in the Gili Islands. There are eight managers as a source of data. The question form is an open question. The questionnaire was shared online. After gathering the data, the researcher analyzes the data and describes the results descriptively. The following is a diagram of the research;

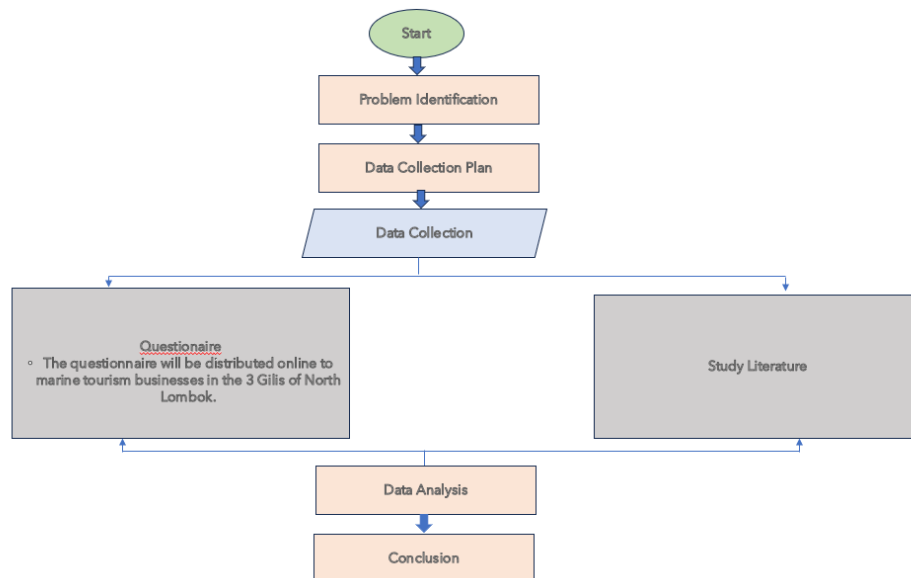


Figure 1. Research Flow

### Result and Discussion

The three Gilis in North Lombok - Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno and Gili Air - have long been recognized as icons of marine tourism in Indonesia. These three Gilis offer incredible natural charm, ranging from white sandy beaches, clear waters, and amazing underwater biodiversity. However, behind their beauty, these areas also face various challenges related to tourism management, environmental sustainability, and the socio-economic dynamics of local communities. This research focuses on analyzing the challenges in implementing sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands, North Lombok. The finding is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Result of Research

Respondent	Response
1.	<i>“Too many people, and there is no intense supervision.”</i>
2.	<i>“Zoning is implemented, but it is not optimal due to limited resources.”</i>
3.	<i>“Collaboration between stakeholders is still not good.”</i>
4.	<i>“Building awareness and good cooperation between elements of society, companies, and government to support environmental conservation programs in Gili.”</i>
5.	<i>“We need to learn more about the sustainability of marine tourism.”</i>
6.	<i>“Insufficient budget and under-trained human resources.”</i>
7.	<i>“Facilities, support systems, and regulations are needed to support various activity initiatives and the continuity of good and sustainable environmental conservation programs.”</i>
8.	<i>“There are still limited training programs for employees on environmentally friendly practices, implementing efficient waste management systems, and encouraging the use of renewable energy. In addition, collaboration with local communities to educate tourists about the importance of environmental conservation can also be a strategic step.”</i>

Source: Research Result, 2025

Based on respondent 1, the Gili Islands are facing overcapacity. It means that there is a need to pay attention on the carrying capacity approach. In some instances, overcrowding has led to the damage or near-destruction of historical sites and even the natural environment in tourist-developed places. Therefore, notwithstanding measuring challenges, the idea of tourist carrying capacity must be incorporated into tourism planning, as started by governments and other developers (O’Reilly, 1986). It is also required to have frequent supervision to ensure the marine tourism activity, either from stakeholders or the community host. Control can be defined as the process of determining what must be achieved, namely the standard, what is being done, namely the implementation, assessing the implementation, and, if necessary, making improvements, so that the implementation is in accordance with the plan, namely in line with the standard (Mangowal et al., 2022). Meanwhile, respondents 2,6,7, responses that limited resources are still becoming a barrier in implementing sustainable marine tourism in the Gili islands, such as facilities, support systems, insufficient budget, and under-trained human resources. It is essential to consider the resources to support tourism development (Susanty, 2024; Venables, 2016).

Furthermore, respondents 3 and 4 stressed that stakeholders' collaboration becomes part of the challenge on the Gili island. As we know, collaboration between stakeholders can create quality and sustainable tourism. Overcoming the problem above, tourism destinations require to adapt an integrated plan that involves the components of stakeholders, including government, academia, business actors, local community, industry, media, and tourism organization (Susanty, 2024). It will become a strategic step as well. In addition, respondents 5

and 8, underline that the lack of training programs about sustainable tourism is one of the problems in the Gili Islands. Learning about sustainable terms is a crucial step to understanding how to perceive the environment. The next generation of environmental leaders and stewards must be educated to be global citizens with sustainability mindsets in light of the ever-evolving and more complicated issues confronting the earth and humanity (Husic, 2024).

Furthermore, intensive supervision is required to implement as part of the sustainability of marine tourism, especially in the Gili Islands. Without frequent control from stakeholders, it might lead to a negative impact on the destination. In some cases, the Gili Islands experienced overcapacity during snorkeling and diving activities. Too many tourists in one destination. This can have a bad impact on the environment and the ecosystem under the water. This means that the destination experienced non-sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism applies a concept which is known as maximizing positive impact on the destination while minimizing negative impacts (Susanty, 2024). Therefore, Intensive control assists in balancing the expansion of tourism with the preservation of the environment, culture, and society, especially in the Gili Islands, North Lombok.

Moreover, implementing sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands requires the support of resources to monitor the sustainable activities. Thus, insufficient resources may postpone sustainability. Resources are also essential for sustainable tourism because they are the foundation on which tourism depends on. Human resources play a vital role in delivering the tourism experience: skilled workers such as guides, hospitality staff, and community leaders are key. Empowering local communities in the Gili Islands ensures that the benefits of tourism are felt by all. Sustainability initiatives are financed by financial resources. Funding is required for monitoring systems, eco-friendly infrastructure, conservation projects, and educational initiatives.

Then, in the Gili Islands, working collaboratively is needed to manage sustainable marine tourism. Several interconnected elements make up the development of sustainable tourism. The system is very complicated, with distinct objectives and management approaches for every component. The objectives of local communities, corporations, NGOs, and the government are frequently diverse. Collaboratively, it may strike a balance between social well-being, environmental preservation, and economic progress. Among stakeholders, this occurrence leads to unforeseen disputes (Husain et al., 2024). Collaboration between stakeholders is fundamental for sustainable tourism, as no single party can handle the impacts of tourism on its own. Collective work makes it simpler to come up with innovative, adaptable solutions.

Last but not least, sustainable project education for sustainable tourism entails developing initiatives and programs that instruct individuals, including visitors, companies, and local communities, on how to travel, conduct business, and live in ways that preserve the environment, honor cultural norms, and boost local economies. The local community still requires advocacy to comprehend how tourism and the environment are related (Suryani, 2022). The local community is still unaware of the diversity of recreational activities and environmental challenges. The educational programs allow the local community of the Gili Islands to understand more about sustainable tourism. Building their awareness regarding the environmental impact, social-cultural problems, and economic issues. Thus, the

challenges above can become barriers to promoting sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands. It is a complex aspect to tackle as it has interrelated components. However, a collective work may become part of the solution. Government, local community, organization, business actors, and technology should work together to manage sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands.

Based on the previous study conducted (Suryani et al., 2022) found that there are three issues that the community faces, such as financial, creativity, and a lack of legal procedure. Meanwhile, this study found that the implementation of sustainable marine tourism in the Gili Islands confronts the serious obstacle that encompasses a lack of supervision, a lack of resources, a lack of collaboration between stakeholders, and a lack of sustainable education initiatives. This indicates that the study discovers new challenges that need to be kept in mind in implementing sustainable marine tourism development.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of sustainable marine tourism faces complex challenges in the Gili Islands, North Lombok. These include a lack of supervision, a lack of resources, a lack of collaboration between stakeholders, and a lack of ongoing education initiatives. Although this study offers a first overview of the use of sustainable tourism in the Gili Islands, many aspects remain unexplored. Therefore, future research should expand the study area to include several additional tourism sites, both established and emerging. Further research is recommended to focus on how active community participation in tourism planning and management contributes to the success of sustainable programs. This includes assessing the factors that encourage or inhibit such participation, as well as its impact on local social and economic well-being. By understanding these dynamics, the results of the study can provide practical recommendations for policymakers and industry players in developing more inclusive and sustainable tourism models.

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