



Article

The Influence of Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed on Entrepreneurship in a Cross-Religious Community

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ABSTRACT

Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed has become a tourist icon for the Muslim community in Surakarta, attracting tens of thousands of visitors daily. While the primary purpose is for prayer, many also come to enjoy the mosque's comfortable atmosphere, particularly first-time visitors. The economic potential from the influx of visitors has created business opportunities for the surrounding community, including food, beverages, souvenirs, toys, motorcycle taxi services, and parking facilities. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with an exploratory method involving field observations, in-depth interviews, and literature review. Findings reveal the emergence of entrepreneurship among the community surrounding Masjid Sheikh Zayed. Not only Muslims actively engage in business around the mosque's front area, but also members of other religions, notably Christians from the Pentecostal Church Isa Almasih (GPIA) Sola Gratia. They have established food outlets directly in front of the church across from the mosque, and many patrons frequent these establishments.

Keywords: *Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed, Entrepreneurship, Cross-Religious Community*

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INTRODUCTION

Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed Solo is a must-visit religious tourism destination when vacationing in Solo City. Located in Gilingan, Banjarsari, Surakarta, this mosque is a replica of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Built in 2021, it was a gift from the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to President Jokowi as a symbol of friendship between the UAE and Indonesia

(Fauzi, 2023). The Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed features distinctive Middle Eastern ornaments with rich Islamic architectural elements, and it also incorporates Indonesian culture, notably the batik kawung pattern on the floor. Besides serving as a place of worship, Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed functions as a center for religious activities, social services, community development, and a religious

tourism destination that upholds the sanctity of its purpose (Paramita & Erdiansyah, 2016).

Currently, tourism plays a significant role in boosting the economy in Indonesia, particularly in Solo (Primasasti, 2024). The development of tourism can have positive economic impacts on the local community, creating direct effects on sectors like trade, landowners, hotels, restaurants, and more. As tourism grows, regional income increases, addressing issues such as poverty and unemployment (Yakup & Haryanto, 2021). This phenomenon is evident around Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed, which has fostered an entrepreneurial spirit among the local residents.

This assertion is corroborated by data from the Statistics of Surakarta Municipality (BPS Kota Surakarta, 2024) which shows that in 2022 the number of visitors in Surakarta City amounted to 1,728,283 national tourism visitors without any data from Masjid Sheikh Zayed. However, in 2023 the number of visitors in Surakarta City amounted to 3,859,547 domestic tourist visitors with data from Masjid Sheikh Zayed contributing 3,023,000 domestic tourist visitors (BPS Kota Surakarta, 2024). This fantastic number has great potential to create business opportunities around Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed.

Traditionally, mosques are seen as a powerful symbol for Muslims, serving as places of worship not only for mahdhah rituals—direct acts of worship to Allah—but also for ghair mahdhah acts, which involve doing good for others and the environment (Rohimat, 2020). Typically, mosques are spaces exclusively used by Muslims for religious activities. For instance, at Masjidil Haram, non-Muslims are prohibited from entering and engaging in activities around the area, emphasizing the mosque's role as a sanctuary dedicated solely to Islamic worship.

However, Masjid Sheikh Zayed exemplifies a broader function of mosques beyond traditional

boundaries. In addition to serving as a place of worship, this mosque also functions as a significant economic hub. This includes a variety of economic activities, such as the sale of food and beverages, with vendors from diverse backgrounds, including non-Muslims, operating in the vicinity. This phenomenon reflects a shift in the role of mosques, showing that they can serve not only as spiritual centers but also as vital parts of the community's economic life.

The presence of non-Muslim vendors around Masjid Sheikh Zayed highlights how the mosque has created an inclusive and supportive environment for diversity. It signifies that mosques can act as bridges between communities of different religious backgrounds, integrating economic activities within a place of worship while maintaining its spiritual values. Through this approach, Masjid Sheikh Zayed demonstrates that religious spaces can accommodate a range of activities that enrich the community as a whole.

The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth analysis of how the presence of Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed influences entrepreneurship growth among the surrounding community. The study aims to analyze the impact of entrepreneurship on the local community, considering the cross-religious context of the residents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies related to the topic of this research have explored the intersection of mosques and entrepreneurship. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one notable study focused on the role of mosques in entrepreneurial activities. Specifically, the research investigated the creative measures taken by the As-Shiddiq Kartasura Mosque Management (DKM) to combat the spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia. With the pandemic rapidly affecting regions across the country starting in early 2020, it became evident that preventing the disease's spread was not solely the responsibility

of the government but also required individual and organizational efforts. The As-Shiddiq mosque utilized socio-entrepreneurship—a novel approach during this crisis—to address these challenges (Rohimat, 2020).

The study employed qualitative research methods alongside Friedmann's alternative development approach to understand this phenomenon. It found that the mosque's socio-entrepreneurial role included repurposing Zakat, Infak, and Shodaqoh (Islamic charitable funds) to support empowerment programs. This integration of socio-entrepreneurship not only provided economic benefits and food security to the community but also showcased the mosque's high levels of creativity and innovation despite its limitations. The findings highlight how the DKM's strategic use of resources and innovative thinking offered significant hope for community development during a challenging time (Rohimat, 2020).

According to Paramita & Erdiansyah (2016), entrepreneurship is the ability to think creatively and innovatively in exploiting available opportunities. It encompasses the attitudes, actions, and processes undertaken by entrepreneurs in starting and running their businesses. The opportunities generated by the presence of Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed have prompted the surrounding community to maximize their profits and create job opportunities. Moreover, the mosque's community empowerment programs also contribute to the economic growth of the Gilingan area.

Mosques are expected to function not only as places of worship but also as centers for addressing various social, economic, and educational issues within the community, as highlighted in Rohimat et al., (2022) research on transformative mosques. A mosque that is creative and innovative can make significant contributions

by empowering the community through relevant programs that meet societal needs. One such example is the Masjid Sheikh Zayed in Surakarta, which is anticipated to serve not only as a spiritual icon but also as an institution capable of addressing social and economic challenges in its vicinity. With its substantial potential as a hub for economic and social activities, Masjid Sheikh Zayed is expected to adopt a transformative mosque approach and develop innovative programs that benefit a cross-religious community, thereby setting a model for other mosques to follow in playing a transformative role within society.

Previous research related to Masjid Sheikh Zayed includes a study by Haq & Syamsiyah, (2023) titled "The Impact of Masjid Sheikh Zayed on the Marginalized Economic Community." This architectural study aimed to understand the impact of Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed on the economically marginalized community. The results showed three outcomes: 18% of residents benefited from the economic flow due to property ownership, 46% experienced no impact, and 36% faced eviction threats.

1. Another related study on places of worship influencing entrepreneurship is by Gunawan et al., (2016) titled "Analysis of Tourism Development on the Socio-Economic Community: A Study on Religious Tourism at Puh Sarang Church, Kediri." This article examined the social and economic impacts of the Puh Sarang Church tourism area on the surrounding community. The findings indicated that stakeholder roles are crucial in tourism development, which significantly improved the community's socio-economic conditions.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a descriptive qualitative methodology with an exploratory approach. Descriptive qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth and comprehensive depiction of phenomena through the collection of rich and

detailed data. The exploratory approach is used to investigate and understand the dynamics and processes occurring in the field. The methods utilized include in-depth interviews, field observations, and literature review (Stanley, 2014). In-depth interviews are conducted with key informants who are directly involved in economic activities around Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed, including cross-religious vendors. Field observations are carried out to directly observe interactions and economic activities around the mosque, providing contextual data that cannot be obtained solely through interviews. Literature reviews are conducted to establish a theoretical foundation and to examine previous research relevant to this topic.

The research location focuses on Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed in Solo and the surrounding community of vendors, including those from different religious backgrounds. This location was chosen due to the significant economic potential resulting from the large influx of visitors to the mosque, who come for both worship and religious tourism. This study examines various types of businesses that have emerged around the mosque, such as food stalls, beverage vendors, souvenir shops, and other services. The research informants include Muslim and non-Muslim vendors operating around the mosque, as well as community leaders and mosque administrators who have insights into the economic empowerment programs organized by Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed. The collected data is then qualitatively analyzed to understand how the presence of the mosque influences the development of entrepreneurial spirit and cross-religious interactions in the area.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal that the impact of Masjid Sheikh Zayed on local entrepreneurship is substantial. Since its establishment, the mosque has not only served as a place of worship but also as an economic hub for the surrounding community. Its presence has encouraged local residents to open various

businesses, including food stalls, beverage stands, souvenir shops, and other services, all of which contribute to the local economic growth.

Masjid Sheikh Zayed acts as a major attraction for tourists visiting the area. Every day, tens of thousands of people come to pray, admire the mosque's architectural beauty, and experience the spiritual ambiance it offers. This influx of visitors creates significant business opportunities for the local community, prompting them to innovate and develop new enterprises to cater to the needs of tourists.

The positive impact of Masjid Sheikh Zayed extends beyond the Muslim community to encompass people of various religious backgrounds in the vicinity. For instance, some non-Muslim vendors have established businesses near the mosque and benefit economically from the large number of visitors. The collaboration and interaction among vendors from different religious backgrounds reflect the tolerance and harmony present in the community around Masjid Sheikh Zayed.

Food and Beverages

Food and beverage sales constitute the largest segment of businesses around Masjid Sheikh Zayed, accounting for over 40 percent of the total local business activities. The food and beverage sector holds substantial prospects due to the large number of visitors to the mosque each day. These visitors come not only for worship but also to enjoy the mosque's ambiance and architectural beauty, often seeking refreshments after exploring the area. This makes the culinary business sector highly promising and profitable.

One reason sellers choose certain products is due to the ease of production and the high consumer interest in those products. "It's easy if you want to make it, just brew it if it's iced tea, so I prefer to sell iced tea here, the capital is also not

big.” (E. Nur, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

Another seller reasons that choosing food products is due to the high consumer preference for snacks like “bakso” (meatballs). “It’s faster to run out when selling somay, many people like to buy it too. The target is more than the stuff.” (S. Sugimin, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

The ease of production is a significant motivator for sellers in creating beverages such as iced tea, orange juice, and coffee. “I used to be unemployed, and I had no skills, so I just did what I could, I could make drinks, and I sold drinks, the easiest thing was to sell drinks.” (Ratna, personal communication, 26 March 2024) Similarly, traditional snacks commonly consumed daily in the community, such as “cilok,” are also chosen for their ease of preparation and high market demand. “Many people like cilok so I took the initiative to sell cilok. I look at the target market first, if selling food and drinks here the target is wider than selling stuff.” (N. Ngatmin, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

Based on this statement, it can be found that the reason they sell food and beverage products is the business is easier, no special skills are required, the capital spent is not too much and the target market is wider. Given that food and beverage products are the basic needs of everyday people so there will always be demand and become a very potential business opportunity (Davis et al., 2018). The local community has responded well to this opportunity, opening a variety of food-related businesses, including eateries, beverage stalls, and snack kiosks. The diversity of products offered, ranging from traditional to modern cuisine, attracts a broad spectrum of visitors. Additionally, effective marketing strategies and the strategic location around the mosque further enhance the appeal of food and beverage businesses. As a result, the culinary sector has become a backbone of the local

economy, significantly boosting the income of the community surrounding Masjid Sheikh Zayed.

Sales of Accessories and Toys

The sale of accessories and toys has emerged as an appealing business opportunity around Masjid Sheikh Zayed due to high demand from visitors. It would not be complete when visiting a place without bringing home souvenirs. This has motivated local people to choose to sell accessories.

“I used to sell at CFD. Now I open a stall here because there are many visitors. Most people who buy are young people, usually buying 2 to 3 pieces. Usually with their friends for friendship bracelets. Here, Alhamdulillah, there are buyers, especially since the visitors are not only local people, there are people from outside the city too.” (J. Joko, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

Based on this statement, it can be found that accessories are a business that can compete amid intense business competition. Accessories such as souvenirs, keychains, and other memorabilia are popular choices for tourists looking for keepsakes. The beauty and uniqueness of the accessories sold around the mosque often attract visitors who wish to purchase mementos of their visit to this historic and religious site.

“The income is not bad, but not as much as those who sell food or drinks. The problem is that on weekdays it is a bit quiet, there are few visitors. Especially my target market is children, so it is most crowded on Saturdays and Sundays. Here on weekdays, the dominant visitors are adults. But the name of sustenance is also different, yes if there are many visitors, Alhamdulillah, I can get a lot of profit, but if there are fewer visitors, it is enough.” (M. Menik, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

Based on this statement, it can be found that toys also have a strong market, especially among visitors with children. Children accompanying their

parents frequently request toys as entertainment during their visit. Vendors near the mosque offer a variety of toys, ranging from dolls and toy cars to educational games, all of which capture the attention of young visitors. This makes the toy stalls a promising business venture and significantly contributes to the local economy.

The presence of accessory and toy stalls not only meets the needs of visitors but also adds a festive atmosphere around Masjid Sheikh Zayed. Visitors can enjoy a pleasant shopping experience while engaging in religious tourism. These stalls provide a variety of interesting product options for visitors from different backgrounds, thereby enhancing their satisfaction during their time at the mosque. Thus, the presence of accessory and toy stalls is both economically beneficial and increases the appeal of the area surrounding the mosque.

Additionally, the businesses selling accessories and toys around Masjid Sheikh Zayed reflect the creativity and innovation of the local community. Vendors continuously strive to offer high-quality and attractive products to draw more customers. By understanding visitor needs and preferences, they can offer the right products and boost sales. The ongoing support from visitors seeking souvenirs and entertainment for their children helps these businesses thrive and positively contributes to the local economy.

Parking Facilities

Parking lots are one of the potential businesses for people who live around Masjid Sheikh Zayed, preferably those who have a large yard. The parking lot, which is not ideally available at Masjid Sheikh Zayed, has become an economic source for the surrounding community. Data from Masjid Sheikh Zayed management shows that the existing parking lot is unable to accommodate the vehicles of visitors who come.

“Seeing the enthusiasm of people both inside and outside the area who come here, the

parking lot provided is not enough. So, many residents around the area took the initiative to open parking lots in their yard.” (M. Z. Anwar, personal communication, 21 May 2024)

It was observed that the entire road shoulder area around Masjid Sheikh Zayed is currently used as a parking lot, starting from the Ngemplak Road intersection to Ahmad Yani Road. Judging from the conditions in the field, local people are trying to open a parking lot business in their yard. The huge profits from this business cannot be denied, bearing in mind that this business does not require a lot of capital, provided that the owner already has vacant land or a large yard.

“This parking lot existed after Masjid Sheikh Zayed was built, I manage it myself and at the same time open selling iced tea here. I earn quite a lot when I open the parking lot. Masjid Sheikh Zayed has a huge impact on the surrounding community. Many local residents sell souvenirs like Mrs. Tatik, who also sells homemade souvenirs on the street. The parking lot next door is also open for cars, the rate is 15,000 rupiah if in the yard of a resident's house. If I park my motorcycle, the tariff is only 3000 rupiah. So, if you say it has an impact, yes it has an impact because also those who do not have income can sell or those who have empty land can become parking lots.”(Di. Didik, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

Based on this statement, it is found that the community around Gilingan utilizes vacant land as a parking lot. This shows that the presence of Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed affects economic activity in a positive direction. Many residents also take advantage of the opportunities that exist by utilizing empty land or their yard as a parking lot. In summary, the potential of this parking business is huge and exciting as it can be a passive income that is worth trying.

Motorcycle Taxi Services

Motorcycle taxi services play a crucial role in ensuring smooth access for visitors to Masjid Sheikh Zayed, especially for those coming from outside the city by bus. With the bus parking area located more than 600 meters from the main mosque area, visitors have to walk quite a distance to reach their destination. This situation presents an opportunity for motorcycle taxi drivers to offer shuttle services, making the journey easier for visitors who might be tired or in a hurry.

"I used to work odd jobs, sometimes doing labor, sometimes parking, sometimes lifting. But now there is this Masjid Zayed, I can take a motorcycle taxi every day, the income is enough for one day, and there is also a community here. So it's easy to find customers, this mosque also brings blessings to the surrounding residents, some are motorcycle taxi drivers, and some are trading food and drinks. It's also quite far from here to the bus terminal or parking lot, so most customers are tired of going around the mosque, so they use our services."(R. Roni, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

Based on this statement, it can be found that the availability of motorcycle taxi services not only facilitates access to the mosque but also enhances comfort and time efficiency for visitors. For many, especially those traveling with family or large groups, motorcycle taxis offer a practical solution to avoid the exhausting walk. The service is also very helpful for the elderly, pregnant women, and those carrying heavy luggage, as it allows them to reach the main area of the mosque more quickly and comfortably.

"I used to be an ordinary housewife, then after the establishment of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque many people came from out of town, now many of my neighbors offer motorcycle taxi services for tourists, I also take a motorcycle taxi as well, it's not bad for daily income, especially on Saturdays and Sundays when there are many visitors. I usually

take a motorcycle taxi from the front of the Zayed Mosque to the bus parking lot for 5,000 rupiah, sometimes also to Tirtonadi terminal for 10,000 rupiah."(S. Sri, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

"Around the mosque, there are motorcycle taxi services, and if we look closely, the ones who become motorcycle taxi drivers are mostly women because most of the worshipers who come are women. Because it is not a mahram either, so most female worshipers ask for a female motorcycle taxi too."(M. Z. Anwar, personal communication, 21 May 2024)

Based on this statement, it can be found that not only male motorcycle taxi drivers, there are also female drivers who specifically serve female passengers. The presence of female motorcycle taxi drivers provides a sense of safety and comfort for female visitors who might prefer traveling with a female driver. This initiative not only boosts the confidence of female passengers but also expands economic opportunities for women in the area around the mosque, demonstrating inclusivity and sensitivity to the needs of visitors.

Overall, motorcycle taxi services around Masjid Sheikh Zayed not only offer an effective transportation solution but also create new economic opportunities for the local community. As more visitors utilize the motorcycle taxi service, drivers' incomes have increased. This service has become an integral part of the mosque visit experience, ensuring that all visitors can reach their destinations easily and comfortably, while also supporting the local economy.

Cross-Religious Vendors

Cross-religious vendors sell a variety of food and beverage products around Masjid Sheikh Zayed, fostering harmony and goodwill among different religious communities. Items such as ayam geprek and various types of drinks are offered by these vendors, providing a diverse culinary

experience for mosque visitors. They set up their stalls in front of the Pentecostal Church Isa Almasih (GPIA) Sola Gratia, located directly across from the mosque. This arrangement illustrates a positive collaboration between the Muslim and Christian communities in the area.

The presence of these cross-religious vendors not only enriches the culinary experience for visitors but also has a significant economic impact. With the high volume of visitors to the mosque daily, the food and drink they sell are in high demand. The substantial profits from these sales help improve the livelihoods of the vendors and their families, simultaneously boosting the local economy.

"I started selling here after the Sheikh Zayed Mosque was built. I happen to be from Sola Gratia Church, so the church itself owns this sale, my friends and I take care of it and manage it. It's not bad, because it used to be quiet and now it's crowded with visitors because they want to see the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. If you ask about the effect on the surrounding community, yes, it is very influential. Women who used to be unemployed now have an income."(N. Novi, personal communication, 26 March 2024)

Based on these questions, it can be found that not only Muslims who are engaged in business around the mosque but also members of other religions, particularly Christians from the Pentecostal Church Isa Almasih (GPIA) Sola Gratia. They have established food stalls directly in front of the church across from the mosque. Many patrons frequently visit these eateries, indicating the popularity of the food offered. This interaction reflects the tolerance and openness among different religious groups in the vicinity of Masjid Sheikh Zayed.

This harmony not only strengthens interfaith social bonds but also creates a conducive environment for business development. Mosque

visitors benefit from the wide range of available food and drink options, while cross-religious vendors gain economic advantages. This is a tangible example of how places of worship can become centers of positive interaction that benefit the entire community regardless of religious background(Rohimat, 2023).

Masjid Sheikh Zayed, although a strong symbol for Muslims and a cultural emblem of the Middle East from the United Arab Emirates, embodies a genuine principle of economic tolerance. As a major place of worship in Surakarta, the mosque functions not only as a spiritual center but also as an inclusive economic hub. The presence of the mosque has generated economic opportunities that benefit not only Muslims but also the surrounding non-Muslim community. Despite Muslims being the primary beneficiaries of the mosque, the positive economic impact extends to non-Muslim vendors, demonstrating that the mosque's economic benefits are shared across all societal segments regardless of religious background.

According to Social Capital Theory by Dubos (2017), relationships and trust among individuals within a community can generate mutual economic benefits. Masjid Sheikh Zayed serves as a center of social capital, where not only Muslims benefit from its presence, but also the non-Muslim community. The positive interactions and mutual respect established around the mosque facilitate inclusive economic cooperation. Cross-religious vendors leverage existing social networks to expand their markets, ensuring that the economic benefits from activities around the mosque are shared by all involved parties. Such matters do not pose a barrier to a Muslim's faith, as long as they do not participate in formal worship within the non-Muslim community. In fact, this behavior reflects the Islamic principle of rahmatan lil-alamin (mercy to all the worlds)(Rohimat, 2018). In the context of ushul fiqh, this falls under the realm of muamalat,

where interfaith collaboration is permissible (Rohimat, 2021).

In reference to Multicultural Economic Theory by Purwani & Arvianti, (2020), this theory emphasizes the importance of diversity and inclusivity in the economy. Masjid Sheikh Zayed, as a symbol and center of economic activity, reflects the application of multiculturalism principles. Although the mosque is an icon for Muslims, its presence also creates economic opportunities for the non-Muslim community. With vendors from various religious backgrounds operating around the mosque, cultural and religious diversity becomes an asset that enriches the local economic dynamics. This demonstrates that embracing and utilizing diversity can create mutually beneficial economic advantages, reinforcing cross-religious economic integration.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed has emerged as a significant economic and cultural hub in Surakarta, not only for the Muslim community but also for individuals from other religious backgrounds. The mosque's role extends beyond a place of worship to become a catalyst for entrepreneurship and economic development in the surrounding area. The influx of visitors has created substantial business opportunities, including food and beverage services, souvenirs, toys, and transportation.

Notably, members of different religions, including Christians from the Pentecostal Church Isa Almasih (GPIA) Sola Gratia, have also capitalized on these opportunities by establishing businesses around the mosque. This cross-religious business activity highlights the inclusive nature of the mosque's influence on the local economy, demonstrating how religious institutions can foster economic cooperation and mutual benefit among diverse communities.

Recommendation

To sustain and enhance the inclusive economic environment fostered by Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed, it is recommended that the mosque continue to promote and support cross-religious business interactions. Initiatives should be developed to strengthen tolerance and cooperation among different religious groups, possibly through collaborative programs with Islamic community organizations, the Surakarta city government, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and relevant ministries related to economy and trade. These programs could include joint economic development projects, interfaith dialogues, and community support initiatives aimed at further integrating diverse religious groups into the economic fabric of the area. By actively fostering these relationships, Masjid Raya Sheikh Zayed can continue to serve as a model for inter-religious cooperation and economic development, benefiting all segments of the local population.

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