

Local Initiatives in Community Resilience Amid Pandemic: Do They Matter?

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Abstract

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community have been felt globally and studies on transformation based on initiatives from local knowledge and culture are limited. This paper profoundly analyses how communities in Bali's urban areas can build resilience amid the COVID-19 crisis through local initiatives. This paper uses reflections from systematic literature reviews that are supported by qualitative in-depth interviews with 20 informants on community resilience in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in Kuta and Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia. We found that the urban community can learn from vulnerabilities and risks and then develop initiatives based on local knowledge, culture, or wisdom combined with information provided by the central or local authority. Cases of local initiatives in urban communities show that collective action arises due to social learning. The result is enhanced understanding, knowledge, and strengthened social interaction within the community to support community resilience in facing similar disasters.

Keywords: *Local Initiative, Social Learning, Transformation, Urban Community, COVID-19.*

1. Introduction

The ongoing Covid-19 crisis has caused various health, psychological, economic, social, and educational changes. The ability of a system to deal with unpredictable disturbances, causing stress and disrupting existing systems is referred to as a state of resilience (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017). Resilience is defined as adaptive capacity (Ann S. Masten, J. J. Cutuli, Janette E. Herbers, 2012), while community resilience means connecting networks of adaptive capabilities between community members (Norris et al., 2008)

During the pandemic, local initiatives in the community emerged from community collaboration with the Government and NGOs (Moeenian et al., 2022; Ningrum et al., 2022). The involvement of many actors while paying attention to the vulnerabilities faced by the community and actively involving the community can increase collective action in society and encourage the process of social learning between interdependent actors (Pahl-Wostl et al., 2007; Tafesse et al., 2020).

This paper aims to analyse community resilience in urban areas amid the COVID-19 pandemic crisis through local initiatives in many forms. The concept of resilience raised

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in the study is more than the community's ability to survive and return to its original condition/bounce back. Community resilience will ultimately be created from a transformation in community to the better conditions than what existed before the disaster (Folke, 2006; Imperiale & Vanclay, 2021; Magis, 2010). The social learning process occurs because of the cognitive capacity of the community. This process continues to develop from the disasters experienced and the interactions between individual actors to groups of actors and institutions as the community faces disasters together (Folke et al., 2005; Olsson et al., 2004). Although the study has been carried out in the context of climate change, it still needs to cover the COVID-19 disaster, whose impact is not only on certain community groups but also on all population groups worldwide.

In this paper, the authors will first explore the impact of COVID-19 and local initiatives in Kuta and Denpasar (urban area) in Bali, Indonesia that in parallel with social learning, to support transformation and resilience in facing possible crises in the future.

2. Methods and Data

The paper is based on two methods. First, we reflect on the result of the literature review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method on urban community resilience in dealing with the COVID-19 Pandemic (Ningrum, et al., 2022). The most current studies on urban resilience use social capital as the starting point in their discussion (Anderson, 2020; Caruso et al., 2020; Lijster & Tullio, 2021; Scott et al., 2021); technology (Beasy & Gonzalez, 2021; Benini et al., 2021; Farrer, 2020; Feroz et al., 2021; Hassankhani et al., 2021), creating social innovation with expert collaboration (Maudrie et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021; Talmage et al., 2020), and decentralization policies (Ahsan, 2020; Jamieson et al., 2021; Kimani et al., 2021; Mercado, 2020; Osafo, 2021; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Studies on how communities practice social learning through local initiatives and cope with the COVID-19 crisis have not been widely studied yet. According to Imperiale & Vanclay (2021), distraction is a window of opportunity for social actors to learn and transform. The individual and collective agency has a cognitive dimension to direct the feelings and behaviour of the community toward their goals. In community resilience, the human cognitive agency reduces local vulnerabilities and risks from disaster impacts. Previous studies were also limited to discussing interactions between actors in socio-ecological governance, although the interactions can be a learning process that can build community capacity to adapt to crises, empower local capabilities, reduce risks and impacts, and increase well-being (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017).

Second, this study completes the analysis using a case of a community-based local initiative in urban Bali in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. The authors in-depth interviewed 20 informants; three (3) informants from the provincial government, eleven (11) informants from the local government, two (2) persons as the traditional village officials, two (2) informants from academicians and researchers and two (2) person randomly chosen from the local residents. This research also deepens the analysis by collecting information from secondary sources such as newspapers, websites, reports, and video discussions in urban resilience seminars.

3. Findings

The closure of various tourist attractions in Bali is the leading cause of the decline in the main economic activity. The efforts of the Government of Bali to reduce the spike in the spread of the virus are by establishing regulation no. 05/SK/MDA-Prov.Bali/III/2020 related to customary-based handling of pandemics. Through this regulation, a teamwork (gotong royong) was formed, which was tasked with preventing COVID-19, consisting of

components of the official government structure and traditional village official. This approach is the implementation of policies that do consider not only health and economic aspects (in Bali, it is called *sekala*) but also consider spiritual aspects (it is called *niskala*) (Surtiari et al., 2021). Custom-based rules are essential in building community resilience in groups of people who still practice customs daily, including dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ominous conditions from the impact of COVID-19 in Bali have led to a COVID-19 handling system that is different from other cities. The handling of COVID-19 is carried out using two approaches, namely the *niskala* and *sekala* approaches (Ni Putu Mirna Sari et al., 2022). The *niskala* approach is based on spirituality, which has a metaphysical power. Meanwhile, the *sekala* approach is a visual approach practised in rules that can be implemented daily. These two approaches later became the basis for forming customary rules for COVID-19. In Balinese terms, this set of rules is called the *gering agung pararem*. Every traditional village in Bali is required to issue a *gering agung pararem* to regulate the handling of COVID-19 in their respective traditional villages with a *niskala* and *sekala* approach under the conditions in their respective villages. Throughout the province of Bali, 1,493 traditional villages have implemented the *gering agung pararem*, as of June 2020 or three months since COVID-19 entered the Province of Bali (Ni Putu Mirna Sari et al., 2022). Within the community structure, it is divided into two. First, structures built based on regional administration, such as *Rukun Warga (RW)* at the neighbourhood level, and structures built on custom or what is known as *Banjar*. In developing the daily practices carried out by the people in Denpasar, *Banjar* has an essential role because it regulates daily life and characterizes *Kuta* and *Denpasar* as a big city but still maintains solid culture's practices.

The *niskala* approach in *gering agung pararem* includes, among others, Hindu religious ceremonies (in Balinese, it is called *nunas ica*), which means praying to God so that the COVID-19 disaster will end soon and find a way out. In addition, the *niskala* practice is also carried out *ngenang-ngening*, in Balinese terms, *ngenang-ngening* means that the Hindu community is expected to pray in their respective homes to be safe and avoid the risk of COVID-19. For non-Hindu people who are in the *Banjar* system, they can carry out worship activities according to their respective religions and beliefs. Meanwhile, applying the *sekala* approach is handling COVID-19 according to health protocols during the COVID-19 period, such as wearing masks, keeping a distance, washing hands, and applying lockdown rules as previously stated.

This *niskala*-based handling policy was a joint decision of the Hindu community within the organization *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI)* with the issuance of regulations at the provincial level. The *sekala* approach involves the Government, administrative villages, and traditional villages regulated in the governor's decrees and the Bali Provincial Customary Council by forming a custom-based *gotong royong* Task Force Team. This *gotong royong* group was formed by involving traditional village officials (in Balinese terms, it is *The Prajuru*) at the *Banjar* level and involving village officials as organizational administrators.

Apart from that, the *gotong royong* team also involves youth in traditional villages (Balinese terms are called *yowana*) who can handle COVID-19 (Prasetia & Paramartha, 2020). To implement the rules that have been determined both *niskala* and *sekala*, the *gotong royong* team works closely with the security team in the village, which is called *Pecalang*. The existence of *Pecalang* was originally to maintain security and order in the traditional village. *Pecalang* was formed as a community pioneer in maintaining Balinese culture amid modernization which could threaten the Balinese culture (Putri et al., 2021). During a pandemic, *Pecalang* has an active role in maintaining community activities to comply with the rules set out in the scale rules, especially in implementing the COVID-19 health protocol.

Anyone who violates the gering agung pararem rules, especially the sekala rules, will receive a sanction that each traditional village has determined. For example, residents who leave the house without wearing masks will be fined a maximum of Rp. 50,000. Restaurant operating hours are also regulated until 10 PM, if it exceeds the specified hours, the restaurant owner will be fined Rp. 100,000 while supermarkets are fined Rp. 500,000. Likewise, when visiting neighbours' homes, it is only limited to 10 PM, if it exceeds the host or guest, a fine of Rp. 250,000. In ensuring that the community follows these rules, the Pecalang is always on duty to monitor people's behaviour.

Although most of the tasks of the gotong royong team at the traditional village scale are carried out voluntarily, the Governor of Bali contributes Rp. 50.000.000 for each customary village (Seluruh Desa Adat Telah Miliki Pararem Cegah Gering Agung Covid-19 - Balitopnews.Com, 2020). The Gotong Royong team also assists in registering people infected with COVID-19 and reporting the condition of home-isolated patients to the nearest health service centre. In distributing social assistance from the local Government and other private parties, the gotong royong team contributes to distributing basic needs assistance.

The handling strategy, wrapped in a niskala (spiritual) and sekala approach, shows efforts to integrate local knowledge and culture with scientific knowledge about the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, communities with vulnerability exposure from the pandemic in Urban areas of Bali can be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Mapping Vulnerability and Local Initiatives Facing COVID-19 in Urban Bali

Vulnerability	Group People	Local Initiatives	Community Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job lost. - Income lost. - Infected with COVID-19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low-income groups with significant or completed income loss. - Local and Immigrant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spiritual or wisdom and a custom-based <i>gotong royong</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building local institutional systems in handling the COVID-19 disaster and the possibility of future disasters - Maintaining the spiritual condition of Hindus in Bali - Increasing the role of custom tradition not only in spiritual activities but also in improving the cognitive abilities of the community regarding the handling of COVID-19

4. Discussion

A case of adaptation in Bali shows that a process of social learning occurs, both cognitive and interactional. In the cognitive process, the community carries out learning that causes changes in perceptions about feelings of empathy, awareness of shared vulnerabilities and needs, a shared desire and capacity to use resources, and shared responsibility in solving collective problems. Local values, beliefs, and narratives exist in building resilience (Imperiale & Vanclay, 2021). Cognitive outcomes refer to collective actions that create new knowledge and solutions to new problems (Tafesse et al., 2020). The cognitive capacity-building process in the community in the face of a disaster can reduce the impact and risk.

Social interaction can occur in the adaptation process through formal and non-formal institutions built in the cases in Bali. Inter-community interactions are made culturally and historically through structuration (repetitive habits) and intentionality (Ortner, 2006). The process of local initiative as a form of social learning that produces a social transformation can be seen in Figure 1.

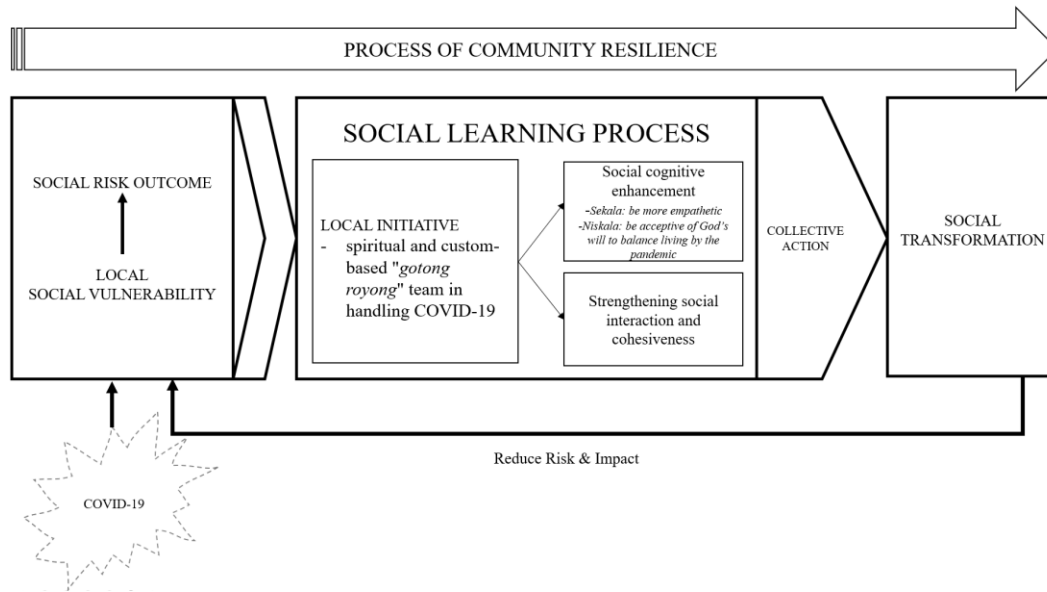


Figure 1. The process of social learning and transformation to achieve community resilience.

This study reveals that the diversity and flexibility of local-level institutions create various learning platforms for social interaction, problem formulation, maintaining diverse perspectives, and generating innovative knowledge for collective action (Azad et al., 2021). In the formal and informal learning arenas, the desire and willingness of the community to be independent of external funding and assistance are apparent. Social learning thus paves the way for institutional collaboration, partnerships, and multi-stakeholder engagement, which facilitate collective action based on social learning. Therefore, maintaining institutional diversity and flexibility at the local level is recommended to turn social learning into active problem-solving measures and to increase community resilience to disaster shocks.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, transformation occurs not only in community efforts to reduce the health impact of the spread of the virus but transformation steps in all dimensions of community wellbeing in urban areas. The ability of urban communities to follow health protocols, strengthen social cohesion, and connect with external resources are some of the transformation forms that can be found in society to achieve better conditions to reduce risk and impact during a pandemic breakout.

5. Conclusions

Exploration of how community resilience in urban areas can cope with the COVID-19 pandemic has been done by bringing cases of the Balinese urban area. Local initiatives can be seen as a social learning process in the community, including increasing knowledge and interaction with various social system actors. COVID-19 has occurred since 2020 and will continue until the beginning months of 2023. Covid has provided lessons for communities to increase their capacity to adapt through various initiatives innovatively that have emerged in society. This research argues that community resilience is not only to restore conditions and systems within the community to their original state after being hit by a disaster but also a process to learn from local wisdom and vulnerability to achieve better conditions. This process can increase community capacity and create a transformation within the community when facing a similar pandemic disaster.

As explained by Imperialle & Vanclay (2021), community resilience viewed from the social dimension, sharpens overall resilience and enhances the community's ability to

survive and increase its ability to adapt to the next stressor. Local initiatives built based on community characteristics and combined local knowledge and culture with science do matter to improve community capabilities in dealing with disasters. A positive transformation will occur in community resilience if there is collective action from all elements, the Government, the private sector, and the community. Moreover, an increment in knowledge and interaction within social institutions that emphasize community resilience by collective action, enables community empowerment to create initiatives capable of minimizing the impact of disasters.

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