REMOTENESS AS RESOURCE:

Ethnographic perspectives on mobility and economic resilience in Sebesi Island, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: Sebesi Island provides an illuminating context for exploring mobility, resilience and livelihoods on small islands. Despite its remote location in the heart of the Sunda Strait and its exposure to environmental hazards—including volcanic eruptions from Mount Anak Krakatau, earthquakes, tsunamis, and illegal sand mining—the Sebesi community has cultivated adaptive livelihood strategies and demonstrated enduring resilience. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, archival research, and oral histories, this study situates Sebesi within the growing discourse of Islandness and mobility, framing mobility not simply as movement but as a relational, transformative, and place-anchored strategy of survival. The findings reveal that Sebesian mobility—expressed through inter-island farming, trade, motorcycle workshops, junk businesses, harbor portering, and community lending—enables livelihood diversification and economic resilience. Rather than seeking displacement, residents choose to remain and adapt, continuing to live their lives, where movement becomes a response to structural marginalisation and environmental precarity. Furthermore, Sebesians succeed in retaining place-based identity while navigating systemic constraints. By integrating global island scholarship with localised knowledge from Sebesi Island, this paper bridges a critical gap in small-island research, offering a bottom-up perspective on how mobility fosters resilience and sustainable livelihoods. Ultimately, it argues that remoteness catalyses—not curtails—entrepreneurial adaptation, positioning mobility as a central strategy for island communities to survive and thrive.

KEYWORDS: Mobility, migration, livelihood diversification, Sebesi Island

Introduction

Sebesi Island, located in the Sunda Strait at coordinates 05°055'37.43" to 05°058'44.48" South and 105°027'30.50" to 105°030'47.54" East, spans 2,620 hectares and lies approximately 12

kilometres north of Mount Anak Krakatau, one of the most active volcanoes in Indonesia. It is the nearest inhabited island to Mount Anak Krakatau, hosting nearly 3,000 residents. Administratively, Sebesi Island falls under the jurisdiction of Tejang Village, Rajabasa District, South Lampung Regency, Lampung Province. Lampung Bay and Sebuku Island border the island to the north, the Indian Ocean to the west, the Krakatau Archipelago—including the iconic Mount Anak Krakatau—to the south, and the Sunda Strait to the east. It comprises four traditional settlement units, or *dusun* (hamlets): Dusun I 'Bangunan', Dusun II 'Inpres', Dusun III 'Regahan Lada', and Dusun IV 'Segenom' (Wiryawan et al., 2002).

Figure 1 - Map of the Sebesi islands and their position within the surrounding islands in the Sunda Strait. (Source: Geospatial Information Agency (BIG, 2020), combined with location data from field research conducted in 2020 and the Indonesian Topographic Data of Java Island from BIG,2017).)

The most recent data on the population of Sebesi Island, as of 2021, indicated 2,742 people. As of 2022, it is estimated that the island is home to approximately 2,795 people from around 787 families (Riskianingrum et al., 2024). The inhabitants of Sebesi comprise several ethnic and sub-ethnic groups, including the Javanese, Bantenese (widely referred to as the Javanese Serang sub-ethnic group), coastal Lampungnese, Bugis, Batak, and Minang (locally known as Padang). The Bantenese form the dominant ethnic group, representing 58.2% of the population, followed by the Lampungnese at 32.2%, Sundanese at 8%, and the remaining 1.6% consisting of Betawi, Batak, Minang, Palembang, and Bima communities (Wiryawan et

al., 2002). Culturally, the influence of the Serang Javanese from Banten and coastal Lampungnese is prominent, with the Serang Javanese language functioning as the lingua franca on the island, despite their position under the Lampung Province.

As a small island with a land area of less than 3,000 hectares in a comparatively remote location, Sebesi has a heightened vulnerability to natural hazards (Lewis, 2009). These inherent challenges also shape Sebesi's economic landscape, characterised by limited market access, constrained human resources, and scarce non-human resources. Such limitations often lead to a reliance on economic activities closely linked to natural resources, such as fishing, inter-island trade, and tourism (Jedrusik, 2011). These characteristics are evident on Sebesi Island, where its geographical isolation has driven the community to develop self-reliant strategies for meeting their needs through agriculture, fishing, and tourism.

This research aims to explore the forms of mobility occurring on Sebesi Island. While migration represents the initial movement of settlers to the island, ongoing mobility has opened up diverse livelihood opportunities for its inhabitants. In line with Jedrusik's (2011) analysis, our observations on Sebesi Island reveal a broader range of economic activities. The Sebesians exhibit remarkable adaptability and entrepreneurial spirit, leveraging their remote location to create new opportunities for income generation. An active trade network connects Sebesi Island not only to Kalianda (South Lampung) but also to Java Island, as the island serves as a vital supplier of agricultural commodities. This dynamic economic landscape underscores the Sebesians' resilience and ability to capitalise on their geographic and social mobility.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The literature on island studies provides critical entry points for situating Sebesi Island within broader debates about *islandness*, mobility, migration, and resilience. Foley et al. (2023) argue that "islandness" is not a static condition but a relational and situated concept, continually produced through the interplay of material geographies, cultural practices, and political economies. In this framing, Sebesi's *islandness* emerges not merely from its bounded geography within the Sunda Strait, but through the lived experiences of vulnerability to Anak Krakatau's eruptions, seismic hazards, and socio-economic marginalisation. Significantly, *islandness* in Sebesi is shaped by the paradox of precarity and persistence. Despite recurrent risks and limited institutional support, residents actively reproduce their attachment to place, underscoring the dynamic and contested character of what it means to inhabit a small island.

Mobility is a fundamental concept that describes the movement or transport of people and goods, playing a central role in shaping economic and social opportunities. To sustain livelihoods and access essential resources, mobility must be facilitated in a manner that ensures security and environmental sustainability (Ogryzek et al., 2020). Spatial mobility, commonly referred to as "migration," involves individuals, families, or groups relocating from one habitat to another, often with the intention of permanent settlement. Migration is generally seen as part of a broader continuum of movements, ranging from short-term, frequent mobility associated with daily life to long-term relocations across regions or national borders (Bedford, 1981). On Sebesi Island, mobility is closely tied to migration, particularly during the initial settlement phases when residents began arriving on the island. Given the island's current population composition, it is evident that Sebesi has been shaped by migration, primarily driven by individuals and families from surrounding islands. This

aligns with King's (2009) definition of migration as a significant force shaping island communities.

Theorisations of mobility provide further conceptual grounding. Sheller (2021) situates mobility at the heart of contemporary social and environmental transformations, emphasising how flows of people, resources, and ideas reshape the lives of islanders. For Sebesi, mobility is not simply outward migration, but a circular and relational process. Seasonal farming in Sebesi, small-scale trading in local communities and nearby harbors, and knowledge exchange through inter-island kinship networks all constitute forms of mobility that underpin livelihood diversification. These practices disrupt binary framings of isolation versus connectivity, demonstrating instead how mobility both sustains Sebesi's socio-economic fabric and reshapes its *islandness*.

Azfa et al. (2022) further highlight how attachment to place often supersedes narratives of abandonment that dominate discussions of climate-vulnerable islands. Their study demonstrates that communities frequently resist relocation, prioritising cultural identity, kinship ties, and socio-spiritual belonging over external discourses of "inevitable displacement." A similar dynamic is observable in Sebesi, where inhabitants consistently choose to remain despite repeated volcanic threats. Rather than perceiving relocation as a rational solution, Sebesians view mobility as a strategy that expands opportunities while sustaining attachment to their home island. This resonates with broader calls in island studies to foreground local agency in shaping adaptation pathways, rather than privileging externally imposed models of "resilience."

Islands are frequently positioned as peripheral, exoticised, or marginalised in broader socio-political imaginaries, yet islanders themselves simultaneously contest and internalise these framings. Knoll's (2021) notion of the "Other Within" contributes a critical perspective on how external imaginaries and internal identities intersect in small-island settings. Sebesi exemplifies this tension: it is both marginalised in national policy discourse—often overlooked in disaster governance—and central within the lived realities of those who navigate its risks daily. The Sebesian identity is thus produced through both external othering (as a risky, peripheral island) and internal affirmation (as a meaningful, enduring home), echoing Knoll's insights on the layered politics of small island belonging.

Similarly, Nimführ and Otto (2021) examine the politics of "smallness," demonstrating how smallness can be strategically mobilised as both a constraint and a resource. Sebesi's limited geographical scale and political visibility indeed constrain institutional support and infrastructural development. However, as the study reveals, smallness also facilitates adaptive practices: close-knit kinship systems, *sakai sambaian* (mutual assistance), and flexible livelihood strategies emerge precisely because of small-scale interdependencies. Thus, Sebesi demonstrates how "smallness" is not merely a condition of vulnerability but also a driver of innovative socio-cultural resilience. Finally, Farbotko et al. (2018) introduce the concept of "transformative mobilities" to describe how movement across and beyond islands catalyses the development of new identities, livelihoods, and adaptation strategies. Their work highlights the importance of viewing mobility not as mere displacement, but as a transformative process. On Sebesi, mobility generates diversified economic niches—from motorcycle workshops to harbor portering—that would not be possible within the island's limited resource base alone. In this sense, Sebesi provides a case where transformative mobilities directly sustain community persistence in a hazardous environment.

Taken together, these works frame Sebesi Island as a site where *islandness*, mobility, and smallness intersect in dynamic and context-specific ways. Sebesi contributes to island studies by showing how communities negotiate environmental precarity not through abandonment but through adaptive mobilities and the reworking of smallness into socio-cultural and economic resilience. The island thus exemplifies broader debates within the field while offering a distinctive empirical case from the volcanically active Sunda Strait.

Methods

The initial survey of Sebesi Island was conducted from August 2 to 4, 2019. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted between October 2020 and September 2022 to analyse mobility patterns within the Sebesi community. Data collection methods included unstructured interviews, field observations, and literature reviews. Informants, considered critical data sources for addressing the research questions, were selected through a purposive sampling method. These informants included community leaders, Sebesi residents operating stalls, individuals managing boat transportation businesses, and those engaged in commodity trade. Additionally, archival studies were employed in this study. Sebesi, a relatively small island historically marginalised under colonial administration, has been overlooked in many colonial records. Consequently, oral history was employed as an alternative means of reconstructing local perceptions of mobility. Oral history provides accounts of past events as recounted by individuals directly involved or by those who witnessed them. It serves as a valuable tool for preserving historical narratives, particularly in cases where photographic or textual documentation is scarce (Erman, 2011). In response to the limited availability of official written records about Sebesi Island, the research primarily relied on newspapers published between 1883 and 2018.

This study incorporated three detailed oral histories and unstructured interviews with 60 respondents, alongside archival research conducted at the National Archives of Indonesia (ANRI) and the National Library (PerPusNas). Data were analysed thematically, combining phenomenological reduction with ethnographic coding to interpret the relationships between mobility, livelihood, and economic resilience. Triangulation across methods enhanced validity, while reflexivity and adherence to ethical protocols—including informed consent, anonymity, and respect for local religious norms—ensured research integrity.

Result

The Construction of Settlement on Sebesi Island

Although archival records from the Dutch colonial period provide limited information about Sebesi Island's early inhabitants, it is believed that people from the vicinity of Rajabasa accessed the island through the Kalianda coast. Historically, the Sunda Strait archipelago, including Sebesi, held strategic importance within 17th century maritime networks heading to the Banten Kingdom. The island's abundant freshwater and deep anchorage made it a suitable temporary stop for VOC ships before reaching Banten Port (Riskianingrum, et.al., 2024). Following the catastrophic Krakatau eruption in 1883, Sebesi Island was left uninhabited. The eruption claimed the lives of the entire population, including the island's owner, Prince Singa Brata, and his family. With no surviving descendants, ownership of the island became uncertain. A prince from Rajabasa, Pangeran Minak Poetra, claimed ownership as the younger brother of Prince Singa Brata. Following traditional Rajabasa clan

rules, Minak Poetra was appointed as Penyimbang (Head of Clan), a role approved by the Sultan of Banten in the 1890s. At the time, the Rajabasa clan was subordinate to the Banten Sultanate (Riskianingrum et al., 2024).

The Dutch colonial administration later endorsed Minak Poetra as the Penyimbang of Rajabasa for his collaboration in suppressing rebellions in Banten (ANRI, K.33 No. 17, r.17293). However, Sebesi remained abandoned during his tenure (ANRI, K.33 No. 17, r.17290). In 1896, the island, along with Sebuku Island, was sold to Hadji Djamaloedin, the chief of Kalianda Village. The sale was validated in 1900 by a decree from the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies (Algemeen Handelsblad, 30-11-1926, "De Koning Van Sebesi," p. 9; Interviews with Hassanudin, Hadji Djamaloedin's grandson, conducted in 2021 and 2022, further confirm this story). Under new ownership, Sebesi Island experienced a revival through agricultural activities. The post-eruption volcanic soil was fertile, enabling abundant agricultural production. Workers from the Banten region were recruited as seasonal coconut pickers, stimulating the growth of settlements. By the late 1930s, some workers requested permission from Saleh Ali, Hadji Djamaloedin's son, to engage in farming through profit-sharing arrangements. Initially temporary, these workers eventually settled permanently.

According to an elder from Tejang Village, the island began to be re-inhabited around the 1930s (Riskianingrum et al., 2024). Migration increased sharply in the 1940s, driven by economic hardship in Banten during the Japanese occupation (Mochtar, p.c., 2020-2022). Migrants primarily came from Banten, shaping the island's dominant language and culture, Jaseng (Java-Serang). Lampung cultural influences came later with migrants from Canti, Banding, and Way Muli on South Lampung's coast. Additionally, settlers from Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara, some of whom initially arrived as visitors, chose to remain after marrying local women. Migration to Sebesi surged further in the 1950s and 1960s, as earlier settlers invited relatives to join them. Many arrived after witnessing the success of neighbours who had previously migrated. At this time, Tejang Harbor served as the island's main entry point, symbolising the continued flow of new settlers seeking opportunity on Sebesi Island.

In the 1960s, Sebesi Island was administratively classified as Tejang Hamlet, comprising three dorps, namely Segenom, Regahan Lada, and Bangunan. At that time, village administration remained under the jurisdiction of Rajabasa District on the mainland, requiring residents to handle all administrative matters there. As the island's population grew, a village office was established in 1972 under the name Tejang Village, and the three dorps transitioned into official hamlets. Following presidential directives, Tejang Village received development aid, including the construction of a primary school and environmental improvements. This development led to the establishment of a fourth hamlet known as Inpres Hamlet.

Between 2010 and 2020, the island's average annual population growth rate was 1.39%, with a population density of 120 people per square kilometre. Unfortunately, neither the village government nor the local BPS records provide data on age groups. Currently, Tejang Village has three elementary schools located in Inpres Hamlet, Segenom Hamlet, and Regahan Lada Hamlet. There is one junior high school (SMP) and one vocational high school (SMK). Additionally, healthcare remains a significant challenge. The island has one Assistant Health Center (Pustu) staffed by two midwives stationed in Tejang Village. However, there are currently no practicing doctors or water ambulances available for emergencies, posing a severe risk to residents in need of urgent medical care (Riskianingrum et al., 2024).

Life-Changing Decisions: Migration to Sebesi Island

Migration focuses on people within places rather than the act of movement itself, a perspective particularly relevant to mobility studies. Both migration and human mobility play a significant role in shaping the livelihoods of islanders. On Sebesi Island, mobility sustains livelihoods and connects the island to its surrounding areas and the South Sumatra mainland. Despite its geographical remoteness, Sebesi remains far from isolated.

Figures 2a, 2b - Sebesian Communities using boats to and from Sebesi Island during the late 1960s (archival photos).

Grandma Kani vividly recalls her family's migration to Sebesi Island in 1955. At the age of nine, she traveled with her parents and three younger siblings from Tegal Cabe, Banten. Facing economic hardship, her father decided to migrate to Sebesi, motivated by neighbours who had already made the move. The family set sail in a canoe but faced initial challenges. Their journey was interrupted by strong west winds, forcing them to stay at Ketapang Village for three days before eventually returning to Banten. Undeterred, her father attempted a second voyage, this time successfully reaching Sebesi after a two-day journey at sea. Upon arrival, they landed at Tejang Harbor and settled in *Pekon Nampai*, which means "new village" in the Lampung language. Houses were scattered, and her father began cultivating coconuts, eventually gaining land cultivation rights. Their fortunes improved, and they were able to send money from agricultural products back to their hometown. However, their success was short-lived. Her father fell ill with a blood-vomiting disease, a condition that affected several residents of *Pekon Nampai*. With limited healthcare on the island, her mother returned with him to Banten for treatment, leaving Grandma Kani and her siblings in the care of neighbours. To finance medical expenses, the family pawned their cultivation rights to the group's leader, a coordinator overseeing Banten migrants. Sadly, her father passed away.

After his death, her mother returned to Sebesi, but the family was unable to reclaim their cultivation rights. They survived by pawning valuables and working as coconut pickers. At a young age, Grandma Kani contributed by helping her mother support the family. Her life took a turn in 1967 when she married Dato' Husein, the trusted confidant of the island's owner. Her husband managed coconut gardens in Regahan Lada, and the marriage elevated her status, transforming her into a respected figure within the Sebesi community. This migration story underscores the resilience of island communities in overcoming economic and social challenges. The experiences of families like Grandma Kani's reflect the dynamic interplay of migration, livelihoods, and adaptation on Sebesi Island (Grandma Kani, p.c., 25 February 2021).

Another narrative highlights the story of Mr. Mochtar and his father, Mr. Sangsang, a pioneering figure in the settlement of Sebesi Island in the 1930s. As the leader of the first Banten group to arrive, Mr. Sangsang played a crucial role in establishing a foothold on the island. Initially arriving with around 30 others, their primary occupation was coconut harvesting, an everyday activity in the region. The group's first stay included building temporary huts and working for three months before returning to Banten. However, the work and opportunities on Sebesi Island inspired Mr. Sangsang to seek a more permanent arrangement. By 1937, he had successfully negotiated a crop-sharing agreement with Saleh Ali, the son of the island's owner. This arrangement granted him two hectares of cultivated land planted with coconuts, a crop that thrived in the island's environment and offered a sustainable livelihood. With the promise of better living standards, Mr. Sangsang chose to bring his wife and children from Banten to Sebesi Island, marking the start of a new chapter for his family. This move also signalled a shift from transient work to permanent settlement, contributing to the growth and development of the island community.

Bapak Mochtar was born on Sebesi Island in 1952, during a period when his father, Bapak Sangsang, was achieving significant success in coconut cultivation. According to his father's accounts, by that time, clustered settlements known as *umbul* had begun to form along the Tejang coastline. Over time, an increasing number of individuals arrived on Sebesi Island in search of livelihood opportunities. Due to the island's limited facilities, Bapak Mochtar was sent by his father to pursue religious education in Banten during the 1970s. After spending a decade studying at a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Banten, he returned to Sebesi Island in 1978 to establish a religious school and serve as a *guru mengaji* (Qur'anic teacher). By the 1980s, Bapak Mochtar had become a prominent figure in education on the island, being appointed as the headmaster of the only elementary school on Sebesi.

In 1988, Bapak Mochtar was elected as the Village Head of Tejang on Sebesi Island, a position he held for two consecutive terms until 2000. During his tenure, Sebesi Island experienced significant infrastructural development. Key achievements under his leadership included the construction of roads connecting the island's four hamlets, the establishment of a pier to improve transportation and trade, the addition of an *SD Inpres* (government-funded elementary school), and the construction of a *Pustu* (auxiliary public health post) in the village of Tejang. These advancements marked a transformative era for Sebesi Island, as Bapak Mochtar's leadership laid the foundation for improved education, healthcare, and infrastructure, thereby enhancing the quality of life for its inhabitants (Source: Personal interviews with Bapak Mochtar, 2020–2022).

As Sebesi Island continued to develop and transportation to and from the island became more accessible, the number of migrants arriving on the island increased, with some choosing to settle permanently. Among them was Dato Saleh Salui, who relocated to Sebesi Island in 1996. Before moving to Sebesi, Dato Saleh Salui, who worked as a ship captain, was frequently docked on Sebesi Island. His decision to migrate was influenced by the growing economic challenges he faced after losing his job as a ship captain. Seeking new opportunities, particularly in agriculture, Dato' Saleh Salui explored the possibility of acquiring farmland on Sebesi Island by engaging with the residents. Inspired by a dream that he interpreted as a guiding sign, he ultimately decided to move to Sebesi Island. There, he purchased cultivation rights to a plot of land in the Regahan Lada hamlet from a resident, marking the beginning of his new agricultural livelihood.

Facing fluctuations in coconut commodity prices, Dato Saleh Salui shifted his focus in the 2000s to cultivating bananas and expanding into cocoa farming. Through his extensive

networks and access to information, he learned about the lucrative potential of vanilla cultivation. Motivated by this opportunity, Dato Salui ventured into vanilla farming, which proved to be highly profitable. The substantial profits from vanilla cultivation allowed Dato Salui to invest in purchasing land and a house in Kalianda. This strategic investment was driven by his awareness of the inherent risks associated with Sebesi Island's remote and isolated location, despite its economic opportunities. Dato Salui viewed the island primarily as a temporary base for sustaining his livelihood, recognising the long-term importance of establishing security and stability elsewhere (interview, February 4, 2021).

On the other hand, Midwife Sari chose Sebesi Island as the focal point for her professional and personal development. Her familiarity with the island stemmed from her maternal aunt, who had long resided in Regahan Lada Hamlet. During the 1980s, she frequently visited her aunt's home on Sebesi. Upon completing her midwifery education in Kalianda, Midwife Sari resolved to serve the community of Tejang Sebesi Village. This decision was influenced not only by her altruistic desire to support the health and welfare of the Sebesi community but also by the strategic opportunity to secure a position as a Civil Servant Midwife (Bidan PNS). She recognised that working in a remote area like Sebesi Island offered greater prospects for direct appointment, compared to competing through formal examinations in urban areas. Midwife Sari began practicing in 2011, and her expectations were realised when she was officially appointed as a Civil Servant Midwife in 2017 by the Regent of South Lampung. This appointment served as recognition for her dedication to remote service. Despite contemplating a transfer to the mainland following the 2018 tsunami that struck Sebesi, she continues her service on the island. Her civil servant status, however, requires her to remain in her current position for an additional 5 to 10 years. Nonetheless, her decision to leave Kalianda and embrace life in a remote setting has proven to be a pivotal step, providing her with a more transparent and secure professional future (personal interview with Midwife Sari, February 4, 2021).

The experiences of migrants, whether those who choose to reside temporarily or permanently on Sebesi Island, illustrate that migration is primarily driven by economic considerations to meet livelihood needs.

Mobility Patterns on Sebesi Island and their impact on livelihood diversification

Mobility, the movement of people, goods, and ideas, is a key factor driving changes in economic, social, and environmental systems. Tacoli (2009: 514) emphasises that mobility, combined with livelihood diversification, plays a vital role in reducing vulnerabilities to environmental risks, economic shocks, and social marginalisation. In island communities such as Sebesi Island, mobility is not merely a physical movement but also reflects embedded cultural routines and adaptive strategies essential for sustaining livelihoods. The Sebesian term *balèk-balèk* in Jawa Serang language or *mulih-ulih* in the Lampung language, "going back and forth," encapsulates a pattern of movement where individuals routinely commute between their homes, workplaces, and markets. This habitual form of mobility highlights the close integration of living spaces and productive activities. Over time, the dynamic mobility of Sebesi's population has significantly shaped its economic landscape, transitioning from subsistence agriculture and fishing to inter-island trade, transport services, and tourism.

Figures 3a, 3b - The pier on Sebesi Island has long been a vital facility for facilitating population mobility. The pier during the 1980s(left) and during 2022 (right). (Source: authors' collections.)

Evolving Mobility Patterns in Sebesi Island

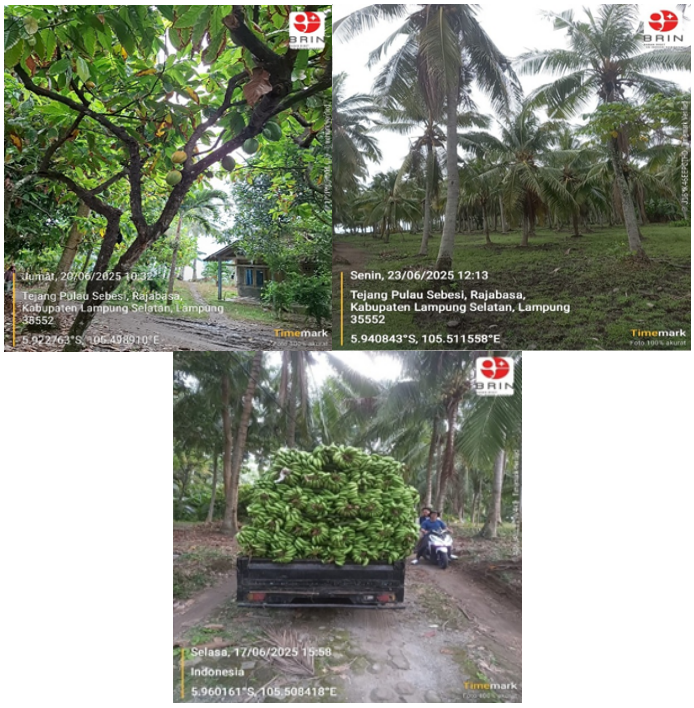
The development of mobility on Sebesi Island can be traced back to the 1970s, when the increasing population and trade activities necessitated regular transportation services. Initially, commuting between Sebesi Island and the mainland, Canti Harbor in the Lampung Selatan region, was facilitated by cargo boats transporting agricultural produce, particularly cloves, to trade hubs. The cost for transporting approximately 500 kilograms of cloves was IDR 300,000, making inter-island trade a profitable venture. Recognising the demand for more structured transportation, Mr. Syaifullah, a pioneer from Sebesi, introduced the first public boat service in 1978. With a modest investment, he established regular passenger transport between Sebesi and Canti with a small boat, accommodating up to 10 passengers per trip. By the mid-1980s, advancements in boat capacity and frequency had peaked, allowing boats to carry up to 30 people and load up to 300 kilograms, with boats operating twice daily. Today, boat services remain central to Sebesi's mobility, albeit reduced to a single daily trip, priced at IDR 35,000 per passenger. Currently, boats not only facilitate passenger mobility but also serve as a primary conduit for transporting agricultural commodities, such as coconuts, bananas, and cocoa, which underpin Sebesi's economy (Syaifullah, p.c., 8 November 2021).

Mobility on Sebesi Island is intrinsically tied to its diversified livelihood strategies. While agriculture remains the dominant occupation, inter-island transportation and fishing constitute significant complementary sources of livelihood. The transportation sector, for instance, employs boat captains, crew members, engineers, and harbor labourers. Ships such as Karya Usaha, Sunjaya, and Karya Mulya transport passengers, motorbikes, including cars, and goods, sustaining over 30 local workers (Yudi, ship captain, p.c., 5 May 2021).

Fishing is another cornerstone of Sebesi's economy, utilising boats, involving approximately 150 families. Fishermen primarily use *jukung* boats equipped with 5.5 PK outboard motors for daily fishing operations. Commonly caught species include mackerel, red snapper, squid, and coral fish, which are sold locally or transported to Kalianda for sale. The fishing economy operates on a system where boat owners (often referred to as boat bosses) rent boats to fishermen, who, in return, deliver a portion of their catch as payment.

Agriculture as a Primary Livelihood

The fertile volcanic soils of Sebesi Island, enriched by the 1883 Krakatau eruption, have made plantation agriculture the predominant livelihood. Coconut, banana, and cocoa form the island's primary agricultural commodities. Banana production, in particular, has become a cornerstone of Sebesi's economy, with shipments reaching major urban areas, including Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (the Jabodetabek region). Historically, banana cultivation evolved as a significant economic activity during the 1960s, when surplus harvests began to be sold outside the island. By the 1970s, bananas gained prominence due to their market demand, ease of cultivation, and abundant yields. Furthermore, Cocoa cultivation has gained prominence since the 1990s. Initially introduced by a small number of farmers, cocoa production expanded significantly with the support of government agricultural officers, who provided training in crop management in the 2000s. The harvest, typically occurring during the fasting month or in May, sees Sebesian households drying cocoa beans in front of their homes, reflecting the communal nature of agricultural practices. The transportation of bananas and other agricultural commodities involves a complex network of mobility and resource sharing. For example, boat owners like Mr. Edy collaborate with fellow banana collectors to optimise cargo loads. Bananas are shipped alongside coconuts and timber to meet the boat's capacity, with costs for banana transport reaching IDR 250,000 per 100 bunches. Similarly, the transportation costs of coconuts from Sebesi to Canti Harbor are approximately IDR 250,000 for 1,000 coconuts. By contrast, longer routes to Anyer cost IDR 2,500,000, reflecting the economic importance of efficient mobility systems in sustaining agricultural trade (Bapak Edi, p.c., 15 September 2022).



Figures 4a, 4b, 4c - Cocoa, coconut and banana plantations in Sebesi Island. (Authors' photos 2025.)

The Role of Tourism and Mobility

Sebesi Island's natural environment, coupled with its proximity to Mount Anak Krakatau, positions it as a key destination for marine and volcanic tourism in Lampung. Tourism development began in the 1980s when the grandson of the island's owner, Mr. Hasan, facilitated the relocation of coastal residents inland to create designated tourist zones. Despite its natural potential, tourism growth has been hindered by inadequate infrastructure, limited government support, and poor environmental management (Yohan, 2016, pp. 41-47). Nevertheless, Sebesi serves as a gateway for researchers, ecotourists, and adventurers exploring Anak Krakatau. Since the 1990s, researchers have stayed on the island to study volcanic activity, while travellers and families continue to visit for its beaches and eco-tourism offerings. While foreign researchers and tourists visiting Mount Anak Krakatau have historically contributed to Sebesi's economy, the 2018 Sunda Strait tsunami and the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted tourism activities.

Figures 5a, 5b (top) - Tourism activities in Sebesi Island during the 1990s and 2000s (personal collection of Mr Hassanudin); 5c, 5d (bottom) – domestic tourists in June 2025, when a group of domestic tourists visited Anak Krakatau (authors' collection).

Diverse Livelihoods on Sebesi Island

The influx of newcomers to Sebesi Island, whether travellers or permanent settlers, has significantly contributed to the diversification of economic activities. In response to the decline in tourism, the resilience of Sebesi residents has led to the development of adaptive strategies, with some shifting from tourism to other economic pursuits, such as waste collection and small-scale businesses. These include food stalls, grocery stores, credit sales outlets, mobile phone kiosks, motorcycle workshops, and waste collection businesses. Food stalls are a notable feature along Sebesi's coastline, offering home-cooked meals, chicken

noodles, satay, instant noodles, and fresh beverages. The operation of these stalls depends heavily on mobility, as most ingredients are sourced from either the largest grocery store on Sebesi or the Kalianda market. Similarly, tools and spare parts for car and motorcycle repair shops are also procured from Kalianda, reflecting the interconnected nature of the island's economy.

An example of entrepreneurial resilience is the junk collection business established by Mr. Hayun in 2020. The 2018 tsunami and subsequent restrictions on Mount Anak Krakatau tourism disrupted his income as a tourist guide, a situation exacerbated by the pandemic. Drawing inspiration from a fellow guide in Kalianda, Mr. Hayun identified an economic opportunity in waste collection. Recognising the dual benefits of environmental awareness and economic gain, he initiated a system where residents collect and sell materials such as plastic bottles, cardboard, iron, and copper. These materials are taken to Mr. Hayun's home in Bangunan Hamlet, where they are weighed, valued, and purchased on the spot. This immediate payment system has encouraged widespread participation among the community. Current market prices include IDR 1,000 per kilogram for plastic bottles, IDR 500 per kilogram for cardboard, IDR 2,500 per kilogram for iron, and IDR 5,000 per kilogram for copper (Bapak Hayun, P.c., 2020-2022).

The collected waste is cleaned and categorised by material before being transported to Kalianda. According to Mrs. Hayun, the business entails significant logistical costs, particularly for residents of Sebesi. These include transportation fees for moving the junk from Bangunan to the port, ship fares, and subsequent land transport costs at Canti pier. Additional expenses include labour wages for the four workers employed to pack the junk. Shipping only occurs when at least four tons of material are accumulated to minimise transportation costs. Each shipment generates approximately IDR 5,000,000 in revenue, with transportation costs amounting to IDR 3,000,000, resulting in a net income of around IDR 2,000,000 per shipment (Hayun, p.c., 2020–2022).

Figures 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d - Livelihood diversification in Sebesi island (from left to right: chocolate commodities, vegetable seller, junk collection business, and banana commodities. (Authors' personal collection.)

Transportation also plays a pivotal role in supporting other small businesses on Sebesi Island. For example, Mr. Hamsari's meatball stall in Bangunan Hamlet is one of the most popular food establishments on the island. He procures meatballs from a supplier in Kalianda, with his children or ship crew handling the weekly pickups. Having learned meatball and sauce preparation techniques from a stall in Kalianda, Mr. Hamsari initially sold his products door-to-door using a shoulder carrier. With sufficient capital, he eventually opened a meatball stall in front of his house, offering additional menu items such as chicken noodles and fresh beverages. For Mr. Hamsari, this venture is not merely a source of livelihood but the realisation of his dream of business ownership (Hamsari, p.c., September 17, 2022).

The absence of a formal market on Sebesi Island has led to the emergence of small, community-run stalls that provide essential goods, including cooking oil, rice, eggs, medicines, and snacks. The largest grocery store, operated by Ceu Udin and his wife, Mrs. Rosmawati, in Bangunan Hamlet, functions as a key supplier for these smaller stalls. To maintain stock, Ceu Udin procures goods daily from a reseller in Kalianda, ensuring a steady flow of supplies to the island (Ceu Udin and Rosmawati [his wife]), p.c., 13 September 2022). This dynamic inter-island trade highlights the crucial role of transportation in supporting local livelihoods. As noted by Jedrusik (2011), such trade activities invigorate transportation networks and stimulate economic growth. Beyond trade, these activities have spurred the growth of ancillary businesses, demonstrating the Sebesians' adaptability and resourcefulness in navigating a dynamic economic landscape.

Figures 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d - Various economic activities in Sebesi include portering, small stalls, a motorcycle workshop, and a fuel seller. (Source: private documentation.)

Access to healthcare on Sebesi Island is limited, with residents primarily dependent on two midwives stationed at the local health post. In cases requiring advanced treatment, patients are transported to health facilities in Kalianda, necessitating boat travel. Traditional healers and over-the-counter medicines sold in local shops serve as alternative options, particularly for minor ailments. However, mobility remains essential for accessing adequate healthcare services, highlighting its significance beyond economic activities.

In line with Sebesi, the Pacific islands also face a similar situation, where migration and human mobility are vital in shaping and constantly changing the island seascapes. Bremner

and Perez (2002) present an interesting case study from the Galapagos Islands about the relationship between human migration and the socio-economic livelihood trajectories of sea cucumber catching and selling activities. In addition to this, several studies in the South Pacific, Solomon Islands, and Polynesian outliers suggest that human migration and mobility have consistently served as integral components of island livelihood systems (Christensen & Mertz, 2010).

The social and economic sectors are the primary drivers of mobility. In contrast, as a mode of transport, mobility enables islanders to traverse waterways to and from other islands and the mainland as part of their daily activities. This is evident in studies conducted on Pacific islands and Sebesi Island, where migration emerged as a direct response to market fluctuations and socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, the study on the island of Dugi Otok in Croatia confirmed that diverse forms of mobilities and the life experiences of islanders remain essential lifelines, symbolising both opportunity and dependency for islanders (Cuka & Oroz, 2023). Undoubtedly, mobility and migration are integral aspects of island life, with periodic migration functioning not as a choice but as a systematic necessity embedded in the ecological and social systems of island communities, driven by their confinement within limited land areas. This further highlights small islands as locations that, despite their remoteness and accessibility challenges, are deeply interconnected with the global economy (Christensen & Mertz, 2010).

Based on the previous explanation, it can be argued that current mobility patterns, as they have been practiced for centuries, enable islanders to be highly flexible and adaptive to changes. It is a paradox that, on one hand, Sebesi is being isolated, yet it is also highly dependent on migration and mobility on the other. Hence, following Christensen and Martz (2010) and Cuka and Oroz (2023), this study confirms that, both between islands and between islands and continents, it is clear that islanders, including the Sebesians, may be remote and insular, but far from isolated. In situating Sebesi Island within global island scholarship, this paper addresses a critical gap in the lived realities of daily mobility as a strategy of adaptation, agency, and transformation in a small-island context. It is clear that mobility, when rooted in localised knowledge systems and socio-cultural anchoring, becomes not just a coping mechanism but a pathway to thriving.

Conclusion

The case of Sebesi demonstrates that island life is not shaped by isolation, but by mobility, connectivity, and layered strategies of survival. What appear to be environmental constraints – limited land, scarce resources, and vulnerability to hazards – are turned into opportunities through diversified livelihoods and relationships with mainland communities. These are strategies of resilience where mobility is not just a necessity, but an asset, allowing people to extend their opportunities across islands and continents. At the same time, the case of Sebesi shows that attachment to place remains central even in the midst of all this mobility. Migrants who settle on the island are part of a constantly evolving social fabric, where belonging, exclusion, and the negotiation of difference are integral to community life. Islandness here is not a fixed condition but a fluid process that is constantly (un)made through movement, settlement, and adaptation. By following these dynamics, Sebesi becomes more than a peripheral outpost: it is a node where migration and livelihood diversification meet, where resilience is built in the face of environmental uncertainty. Moreover, in doing so, Sebesi demonstrates how small islands are integral to wider mobilities

and networks, challenging the notion of remoteness and providing new insights into the interplay of risk, resilience, and resourcefulness in island societies.

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