

# Community Empowerment Through Wayang Innovation in Wukirsari Village, Imogiri, Bantul for Local Cultural and Economic Development

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## **Abstrak.**

Wukirsari Village in Imogiri Subdistrict, Bantul, Yogyakarta, is known as a center of traditional wayang craftsmanship with high cultural value. However, this craft faces serious challenges in the form of stagnant innovation, low interest among the younger generation, and limited use of digital technology. This community service activity aims to identify forms of innovation in leather puppet products, document good practices, and encourage cross-sector collaboration for the development of a culture-based creative economy. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The results show significant innovation in contemporary wayang designs, the adoption of modern production aids, and the use of social media as a means of promotion and cultural education. Youth participation has begun to increase through training and apprenticeship programs, although regeneration challenges and digital literacy remain the main constraints. This activity also encouraged the registration of the Wayang Kulit Tatah Sungging Wukirsari product as a Geographical Indication (IG), as a form of legal protection and strengthening market value. These findings indicate that a community empowerment model based on local innovation that integrates the preservation of tradition, technology, and social collaboration can be an effective approach to sustainably strengthening the cultural craft sector.

**Keywords:** Creative economy; Innovation; Culture; Traditional crafts; Leather puppets.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Wukirsari Village, located in Imogiri Subdistrict, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, is one of the centers of leather puppet craft with high historical and cultural value. The tradition of making leather puppets in this area has been passed down from generation to generation since the 1930s, making it an important part of local cultural identity. However, amid the rapid development of the times and changes in people's consumption patterns, the wayang craft faces various challenges that threaten its sustainability (Morin & Harthoko, 2020).

The main problem that arises is stagnation in product innovation and creativity. Most artisans still use traditional designs without exploring new forms or functions that could appeal to the modern market. This has led to a decline in product attractiveness, especially among the younger generation who are more familiar with popular culture and contemporary visuals. In addition, many business actors are still not able to utilize technology or digital media as production

aids and effective marketing strategies. According to the low level of adaptation of craft actors to digital technology, this has become one of the main constraints in the development of culture-based creative industries. Wahyu (2021),

Another challenge is the low interest of the younger generation in continuing the profession as wayang artisans. This profession is often considered less economically promising and less prestigious than other creative industry sectors. This lack of regeneration is exacerbated by the absence of training programs, apprenticeships, or incentives that encourage young people to be involved in the preservation of this cultural heritage (Split et al., 2024) .

From an institutional perspective, the lack of optimal support from the government and related institutions is also an obstacle to the development of wayang crafts. Access to innovative training, modern equipment, and digital promotion is still very limited and uneven. This condition creates a real need for collaborative strategies that involve artisans, government, academics, and local communities in efforts to build capacity, innovate products, and strengthen markets (Serendipity et al., 2025) .

This community service activity was carried out with a participatory approach and based on local needs, through field observations, interviews, and documentation of the production process and product innovation. The main objectives of this activity are:

1. Identify forms of innovation in wayang crafts that are relevant to current market needs;
2. Present good practices from artisans who have successfully diversified their products and marketing strategies;
3. Encourage cross-sector collaboration in the development of sustainable cultural crafts.

With this approach, it is hoped that wayang crafts in Wukirsari Village will not only be able to survive, but also grow as part of a creative economy that is adaptive, innovative, and still rooted in local cultural values.

## **II. METHODS**

This community service activity was carried out in Pucung Hamlet, Wukirsari Village, Imogiri Subdistrict, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, which is known as a center of traditional wayang crafts. This activity took place for three days, from 19 to 21 May 2025, involving various elements of the community such as senior artisans, young-generation artisans, community leaders, UMKM actors, and village officials who are active in developing the local culture-based creative economy sector.

This service used a descriptive qualitative approach because it aims to explore and understand in depth the process of innovation and creativity in leather puppet crafts. This approach was chosen so that researchers can obtain a complete and contextual picture of social and cultural phenomena that develop in society, especially in the field of traditional creative economy. This approach is also considered the most relevant to capture the dynamics of adaptation and the meaning of innovation within the framework of preserving cultural heritage. (Putri & Ramadhani, 2024)

Data collection procedures were carried out through three main techniques:

1. In-depth interviews: Conducted with wayang artisans (both senior and young), community leaders, and UMKM actors to explore their views, experiences, innovation strategies, and the constraints they face in the production and marketing process.

2. Participant observation: Researchers directly observed leather puppet making activities, including the inlay sunnging process, design exploration, and the use of modern tools that support work efficiency.
3. Documentation: Collecting secondary data in the form of activity photos, training archives, innovative works, and digital traces from social media uploads used by artisans to promote their products.

Through this approach, the community service activity is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how wayang artisans in Wukirsari Village adapt cultural heritage into creative products that are innovative and relevant to the current market, without losing the local values that are their cultural identity.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service activity carried out in Pucung Hamlet, Wukirsari Village, shows that the innovation process in leather puppet crafts has developed, although it still faces a number of structural and cultural constraints. Through direct observation, interviews, and documentation, it was found that there are a number of creative efforts by artisans to renew the form, function, and marketing strategies of their products. Before this activity took place, most artisans still maintained traditional production patterns, both in terms of design and product function. Leather puppets were made only for performances or collections, and had not been widely used as other functional items such as interior decoration, souvenirs, or fashion products. Community Service activities through wayang craft activities can be seen in.



*Figure SEQ Figure \\* ARABIC 1. Community service activities through leather puppet craft activities. Venue rental in Imogiri, Bantul*

However, after the community service activity and the facilitation of collaborative discussions between artisans, academics, and community leaders, a shift in perspective and a production approach that is more adaptive to modern market tastes began to be seen. The implementation of the community service activity in Pucung Hamlet, Wukirsari Village, Imogiri, shows development dynamics in wayang craft practices. Through interviews, direct observation, and documentation, a number of important findings were obtained related to design innovation, product diversification, technology adoption, and the role of the community in maintaining the sustainability of tradition while encouraging the creative economy.

Based on in-depth interviews with a number of artisans in Pucung Hamlet, it is known that leather puppet production is no longer limited to classic figures such as the Mahabharata and

Ramayana. In recent years, artisans have begun to create contemporary puppet designs that feature popular figures from national history and popular culture. Some of them are national figures such as Ir. Soekarno and RA Kartini, as well as fictional figures adapted into wayang form, such as a modern version of Gatotkaca or characters from films and comics.

The making of contemporary wayang is generally carried out based on special requests from consumers, especially domestic and foreign tourists who want wayang in the form of souvenirs or collections that are more personal and contextual. Some artisans even dare to explore form—for example, by combining traditional sungging techniques with brighter color elements or modern motifs adjusted to current visual trends. Innovation in wayang crafts through keychain products can be seen in Figure 2 below:



**Figure 2.** Variations of Wayang Crafts Through Keychain Products

Innovation in this design has several strategic impacts. First, it opens new market opportunities outside the traditional segment, reaching young people and urban consumers who are more interested in ethnic products with a modern touch. Second, this innovation provides a broader space for young artisans to develop their creativity within the framework of local culture, thus encouraging sustainability and regeneration of this craft art. Last but not least, this step is also an adaptive cultural preservation strategy, namely preservation through transformation. Rather than rigidly maintaining traditional forms, Wukirsari artisans choose to make this cultural heritage relevant so that it remains alive and competitive amid modernization.

However, some artisans also said that the innovation process is still carried out by considering cultural ethics, so that the essence and philosophical values of leather puppets are not reduced to mere commercial products. Therefore, in every design process, manual inlay techniques, the use of leather as the main material, and symbolic narratives in distinctive visual forms are maintained. Thus, the product innovation carried out by artisans in Wukirsari not only reflects a response to market demand, but also a form of collective creativity that reflects the ability of local communities to develop the cultural economy independently and sustainably. The following wayang craft innovation as a lamp cover can be seen in Figure 3 below:



**Figure 3.** Variations of Leather Lamp Cover Crafts

Some artisans in Pucung Hamlet, Wukirsari Village, have begun to adopt modern production aids as an adaptation to increasingly competitive market demands. Among the equipment that has started to be used are a small drill (mini drill) for drilling processes on leather, as well as initial pattern templates made of mica or transparent plastic to help speed up the sketching process before manual carving. This innovation emerged from the need to improve efficiency and product consistency, especially when artisans receive large orders or for national and international craft exhibitions. Although the use of these tools reduces processing time by 20-30% in the initial production stage, the artisans still maintain the final finishing stage manually, especially in the *sungging* process (coloring and detailing). This is important to maintain the authenticity and artistic value of heritage-based products. Thus, technology is used selectively—not to replace traditional skills, but to support them so that they can be more adaptive to the rhythm of the modern market. The following are activities that have been carried out in utilizing existing technology.



**Figure 4.** Production Aids

The adoption of these modern tools is also an indicator of a paradigm shift among artisans, from previously relying entirely on conventional ways of working to a production approach that is more systematic and responsive to demand. This step not only increases productivity, but also gives local artisans new confidence to meet the quality standards and production volumes required by export partners, especially to countries such as Japan, France, and Australia. In addition, this process creates opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transfer, where young artisans with higher technological literacy can help elders operate the tools, creating positive synergy in the community regeneration process. Therefore, the use of this simple technology is an important part of the strategy to strengthen the capacity of artisans in a local culture-based creative economy ecosystem.

The implementation of the community service activity in Puctung Hamlet, Wukirsari Village, shows that product innovation carried out by artisans does not stop at exploring the form and character of wayang, but is also followed by market expansion. Based on interview results and field observations, around 60% of Wukirsari's total wayang production has successfully penetrated the export market, especially to countries such as Japan, France, Turkey, and Australia. This export is facilitated by cooperation with exporter partners who connect local products to international markets. Meanwhile, to reach domestic and local markets, artisans have begun to use social media such as Instagram, as well as marketplace platforms to market their products digitally.

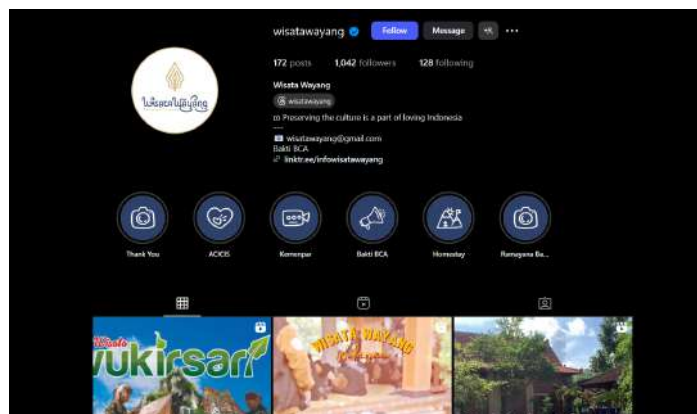


Figure 5. Instagram Account of Wukirsari Village Imogiri, Bantul

Social media not only functions as a digital storefront to display products, but is also used as a means of cultural education and educational tourism promotion. One concrete form of this digital use is the creation of promotional videos that show the process of making wayang, interviews with artisans, and narratives of the history and philosophy behind wayang figures. This initiative has proven effective in attracting public interest, especially among young people and tourists from outside the region who are interested in local cultural products with a modern visual approach (Ringkasan dkk., 2025)

This development is inseparable from the strategic role of artisan associations and local communities that function as the main driving force in maintaining the sustainability of the tatak-sungging tradition as well as a center for skills regeneration. This association not only focuses on preserving handicrafts, but also becomes an active link between artisans, tourists, educational institutions, and the village government. They also initiate various activities such as training, workshops, apprenticeship programs, and the development of culture-based educational tourism packages that integrate art and crafts with local narratives.



**Figure 6.** *Leather Puppet Craft Center. Venue rental in Imogiri, Bantul*

However, interview results also show that regeneration and digital literacy challenges are still real constraints. Young people tend to be reluctant to continue the profession as artisans because they consider it not economically promising and less prestigious than modern creative industries. On the other hand, limited digital literacy among senior artisans is also an obstacle to optimizing online marketing. To address this, several initiatives have been carried out, such as digital marketing training and apprenticeship programs for local SMK students. Although not yet massive, these steps provide hope for a more sustainable regeneration process.

In order to strengthen the position of craft products in national and international markets, the village government together with the Yogyakarta Ministry of Law and Human Rights has also processed the registration of Wayang Kulit Tatah Sungging Wukirsari as a Geographical Indication (IG) since February 2025. This effort not only aims to provide legal protection for the originality of the work, but also to increase the bargaining value of local products amid intense global competition. A comparison of conditions before and after the implementation of the service program shows a number of significant changes that can be summarized in the following table:

**Tabel 1.** Perbandingan Kondisi Pra-Program dan Pasca-Program

Aspect	Before the Program	After the Program
Output	Traditional (Ramayana, Mahabharata)	Contemporary (national figures, special orders)
Production Process	Fully manual	Manual with modern tools
Marketing	Offline, limited direct tourists	Online (Instagram, marketplace, promotional videos)
Youth Participation	Low	Active in training, design, and marketing
Community & Association	Focused on preservation	Collaborative, active in promotion and cultural training
Product Legal Status	Not yet registered	In the process of IG at the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (February 2025)

From the evaluation results, it can be concluded that this community service activity has a real impact on the wayang artisan community in Wukirsari. Product innovation, the use of digital media, and market expansion have increased the community's confidence and capacity to survive in the modern era. In addition, the active involvement of the community and local associations shows a collective awareness of the importance of adaptive cultural preservation. Although regeneration is still a challenge, the spirit to continue to develop, learn, and adapt becomes important social capital in realizing the sustainability of leather puppet crafts as part of a culture-based creative economy.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The community service activity in the wayang craft center in Wukirsari Village reveals that product innovation and the use of digital technology are important factors in maintaining the relevance and sustainability of local culture amid the challenges of the times. The development of contemporary wayang designs, the use of modern tools in the production process, and the use of social media as a promotional medium are indicators that the artisan community has begun to respond to market changes adaptively. Before this program, most artisans still produced wayang in classic forms and marketed their products conventionally, limited to tourists who came directly. After the activity took place, significant changes began to be seen, such as the presence of products with national and modern character designs, as well as increased digital promotion activities through Instagram and marketplaces. This is in line with findings showing that product diversification and the integration of simple technology can expand market segmentation for cultural crafts. Prihartami (2016),

In addition, the active involvement of artisan associations and local communities has proven to encourage skills regeneration and youth participation, especially through training, apprenticeships, and cooperation with educational institutions. This strengthens the argument that the success of preserving local culture is highly dependent on the social function of the community and collective work across sectors. However, interview results show that the main challenges still

lie in low digital literacy, weak economic perceptions of the artisan profession, and limited access to modern production tools. Therefore, as emphasized by long-term mentoring and multisector collaboration, these are key to strengthening the capacity of local cultural actors to be able to adapt to social and economic transformation. Yuniati (2017), Ibrahim (2022),

As a follow-up, it is recommended that there be a sustainable digital mentoring program involving village youth as creative innovation agents and digital content trainers. In addition, legal protection for cultural products through the Geographical Indication (IG) that has been submitted to the Ministry of Law and Human Rights needs to be fully monitored, in order to provide legal guarantees for the authenticity of local techniques and materials (Masrur, 2018). As a new finding, this activity confirms that a community empowerment model based on local innovation—which combines the preservation of tradition, technological transformation, and social collaboration—can be an effective approach to strengthening a culture-based creative economy sector. This model can be adopted in other areas with similar cultural richness, as an adaptive preservation strategy oriented toward community self-reliance.

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