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Empowerment of Songket Woven Craftsmen: Qualitative Study of Creative Economy in Sukarara Village, Indonesia

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Abstract: This qualitative study examines the potential of the creative economy in Sukarara Village, Indonesia, by empowering *Songket* woven fabric craftsmen in tourism. The research question is to explore how empowering *Songket* craftsmen in tourism can revive the industry and promote the creative economy in Sukarara Village. The study was conducted in Sukarara Village, Jonggat District, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, and data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The participants included *Songket* woven fabric craftsmen, traditional institution members, and local community members involved in tourism activities. The data collection techniques used were semi-structured interviews, open-ended interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The study's findings reveal that tourism activities based on the creative economy in Sukarara Village include weaving Songket fabrics, studying motifs and production, traditional customs, marketing, and management. The community involvement in empowering the craftsmen includes developing traditional institutions, arts, cadet's corals, and weaving patents. The study highlights the practical implications of empowering *Songket* craftsmen in tourism, such as boosting the local economy and promoting cultural heritage. In conclusion, this study provides insights into how the creative economy can be harnessed through tourism to revive traditional crafts and promote community development.

Keywords: *Songket* woven fabric, Empowerment, Tourism, Creative economy, Sukarara Village

JEL Classification: O14, I31, L83, O34, R11

Introduction

Empowering local communities has become a crucial aspect of developing and managing cultural and tourism resources (Jansen et al., 2018). The concept of community empowerment has gained prominence in recent years, emphasizing the need to ensure that local communities are active participants in the development of their own communities. In Indonesia, the Creative Economy (*Ekraf*) and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) framework dominate business activities due to its simplicity and affordability, particularly for middle to lower-class communities. However, the rapid economic growth and the rise of globalization have created a fiercely competitive environment for businesses, resulting in companies facing various obstacles in their development, such as changes in technology and trading systems, and growing consumer interests.

To drive the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the creative economy industry has been integrated into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024. The Creative Economy and MSMEs practitioners need to keep up with the times to remain competitive in the market (Putra & Murniati, 2020). Therefore, empowering rural MSMEs through science and digital technology is vital in the current era of information (Rosalina & Febrianti, 2019).

According to Jansen et al. (2018), empowering local communities has become a crucial aspect of developing and managing cultural and tourism resources. In Indonesia, the Creative Economy (*Ekruf*) and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) framework dominates business activities, particularly for middle to lower-class communities, but there are challenges to remain competitive in the market due to globalization and changes in technology and trading systems (Putra & Murniati, 2020). Meanwhile, Rosalina & Febrianti (2019) emphasize the importance of empowering rural MSMEs through science and digital technology. However, despite the growing interest in the creative economy and the empowerment of local communities, few studies have examined the specific challenges faced by Songket woven fabric craftsmen in tourism in Sukarara Village, Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap and provide insights into the potential for empowering *Songket* woven fabric craftsmen in Sukarara Village to promote the creative economy and enhance the community's economic and social development.

Sukarara village in Central Lombok Regency is a community that supports the development of the creative economy industry. The majority of women in Sukarara village spend their daily lives weaving *Songket* fabric, a local cultural form that has become a tourist destination. Despite the great potential of Sukarara village to produce highly competitive creative economic products, there are still limitations in terms of social development aspects in the awareness and support of the community. Therefore, the village government needs to provide assistance and training to *songket* weavers in Sukarara village in their involvement in creative economic tourism activities. Such a program would be a crucial step in ensuring that the Sukarara community can benefit fully from the economic opportunities offered by the creative economy industry while preserving their cultural heritage.

This qualitative study aims to explore the potential of the creative economy in Sukarara Village by empowering *Songket* woven fabric craftsmen in tourism. The research location was Sukarara Village, Jonggat District, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, and the data collection techniques used were interviews, observations, and documentation. The study's objective is to understand how empowering *Songket* craftsmen in tourism can revive the industry and promote the creative economy in Sukarara Village.

Community Empowerment

The empowerment of local communities has become an essential aspect in developing and managing cultural and tourism resources (Ernan, 2018). It is a widely accepted paradigm that supports the idea of continuous improvement in the social system towards a better life. As such, it has been argued that empowering the community through science and digital technology for the digitalization of rural MSMEs is critical in the current era of information (As'ad, 2019).

Indonesia's rapid economic development has led to an increase in competition among companies, with growing consumer interest and technological advancements being contributing factors (Mulyani, 2021). The development of the creative economy (*Ekruf*) and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) has become a popular framework for business activities in Indonesia. This framework is chosen because of its simplicity and affordability, particularly for the middle to lower class community. However, to keep up with the times and remain competitive, *Ekruf* and MSMEs practitioners must embrace technological advancements.

The creative economy has been identified as a driver for the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) that have been integrated into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024 (Pudjiastuti et al., 2020). *Songket* weaving is one of the cultural practices that has become a tourist attraction in Indonesia. Sukarara village, located in Central Lombok Regency, is a hub for the *songket* weaving culture, with most women in the village involved in the craft. This cultural practice is not only significant for the community, but it is also a source of income for the community by selling woven products as typical Lombok souvenirs for tourists who visit (Oktiana, 2020).

Despite its potential, the Sukarara village community faces challenges in terms of social development, awareness, and support for creative economic tourism activities (Fadhillah et al., 2021). There is a need for a program from the village government to provide assistance and training to *songket* weavers in Sukarara village in their involvement in creative economic tourism activities. Such a program can help to empower the community, enhance their skills, and promote the development of the creative economy in Sukarara village.

In conclusion, literature suggests that the empowerment of local communities, technological advancements, and sustainable development are essential components for promoting economic development in Indonesia. *Songket* weaving in Sukarara village is a valuable cultural practice that has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of the creative economy in Indonesia. Therefore, it is crucial to create a program that supports the involvement of the Sukarara village community in creative economic tourism activities.

Research Method

In this study, a qualitative interpretive descriptive method was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the cultural and social context of *songket* weaving and its potential for creative economic tourism in the village of Sukarara. To collect the necessary data, several techniques were utilized, including in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the *songket* weavers to gain insight into their experiences and perceptions regarding their craft and the potential for creative economic tourism activities in Sukarara village. Observation was used to gather data on the village's social and cultural environment and the *songket* weaving process. Documentation was also used to supplement the data collected from interviews and observation.

Stakeholders were also involved in the study, including the *songket* weavers, village government officials, and creative economic tourism experts, to ensure that the research is relevant and valuable to those affected by its findings.

The data collected from interviews, observation, and documentation were analysed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. Data reduction involved summarizing and categorizing the data collected, while data display involved organizing and presenting the data in a meaningful way. Finally, conclusion drawing involved interpreting the data and drawing conclusions based on the research findings.

Result and Discussion

Empowerment Activities

Based on the results of interviews and observations with respondents, it is evident that Sukarara Village is well-known for its creative economy-based tourism activities, particularly in the field of *Songket* weaving craft. This unique craft is an integral part of the village's history and culture, and it plays a significant role in the daily lives of the local community.

Weaving (Nyensek) *Songket* Cloth is an essential part of Sukarara Village's culture and beliefs, with every woman in the village required to learn how to weave as a prerequisite for marriage. Weaving is not only a way of life for women in the village but also a vital source of

livelihood for them. The weaving process, also known as *Nyensek*, is a traditional and manual process, where wooden tools are used to create beautiful and intricate *Songket* fabrics. Tourists visiting Sukarara Village are often mesmerized by the weaving skills of the local women, who continue to uphold this age-old tradition.

Learning about *Songket* Weaving Motifs and Production is another aspect that tourists find fascinating when visiting Sukarara Village. The unique characteristics and motifs of *Songket* weaving distinguish it from other forms of *Songket* production in the region. The patterns and threads used in weaving are values passed down from generation to generation, and the skills are typically acquired from mothers who teach their descendants. The motifs and colours of *Songket* weaving are well-preserved, ensuring that they remain unchanged for years to come. Sukarara Village boasts a variety of *Songket* weaving types with beautiful and unique motifs, such as *wayang* motifs, *Subahnale* motifs, *Keker* or *Merak* motifs, four-star motifs, and *Alang* or *Lumbung* motifs. There are various kinds of goods produced by artisans, some of which are shown in the table (See table 1):

Table 1. Type of Product and the Price

Product's Name	Price (Item)
<i>Lambung</i>	IDR. 150.000 – IDR. 500.000
<i>Selendang</i>	IDR. 300.000 – IDR. 500.000
<i>Sabuk Anteng</i>	IDR. 200.000 – IDR. 500.000
<i>Pegon</i>	IDR. 150.000 – IDR. 500.000
<i>Cepug/ Sapug</i>	IDR. 50.000 – IDR. 200.000
<i>Dodot</i>	IDR. 150.000 – IDR. 300.000
<i>Wiron</i>	IDR. 500.000 – IDR. 3.000.000

Source: Interview

Begawe Jelo Nyensek and *Ngendang* tradition are two festivals held in Sukarara Village that showcase the rich culture and traditions of the local community. *Begawe jelo nyensek* is held annually at the end of the year, and it involves more than one thousand two hundred female weavers who display and demonstrate the weaving process located along village roads. *Begawe Jelo Nyensek* is not only a form of community development but also a means of promoting and introducing tourists to the main attraction of Sukarara Village, which is *Songket* weaving craft. The *Ngendang* tradition is another fascinating aspect of Sukarara Village's culture. It is a symbol of tradition in the matchmaking event, which usually involves village girls who are still virgins to be introduced to by village youths, with various special ritual processes that must be carried out. The *Ngendang* tradition is carried out simultaneously with the *Begawe Nyensek* event, and it attracts many local and foreign tourists who come to witness the activity.

Marketing Activities and Market Share play a crucial role in the success of the *Songket* weaving craft business in Sukarara Village. Participants in the interviews highlighted that social media is an essential tool for marketing their products, and the success of sales still relies heavily on word-of-mouth. However, since 2018, the market has shifted towards virtual platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. While Artshop Ida Tenun Lombok already has a Facebook page, it is not working optimally for online sales due to a lack of employee expertise in managing social media. Participants noted that they sell woven fabrics not only at the Artshop location but also online via Facebook, using the Cash On Delivery (COD) system.

Effective management and finance are critical aspects of any business, including the *Songket* Craft business managed by Arshop in Sukarara Village. Financial management involves not only the storage of funds but also planning and asset control. Proper financial planning is crucial to ensure that the business remains financially stable and sustainable in the long run.

In terms of management activities, it is noteworthy that Artshop *Ida Tenun Lombok* already has an organizational structure in place, albeit not in written form. However, the financial records and books are still manually calculated and not yet digitally systemized. This

can lead to potential errors and inconsistencies that could impact the business's financial stability.

On the other hand, Artshop *Dharma Setya* is still in its nascent stage and does not yet have an institutional or organizational structure. Similarly, bookkeeping and financial records are still carried out manually, which can result in errors and discrepancies. As the business grows, it becomes increasingly important to develop a proper management and financial system that can provide accurate and reliable information to support decision-making processes.

In conclusion, effective management and financial planning are essential for the success of any business, including the *Songket* Craft business. It is imperative that both Arshop and Dharma Setya develop a structured approach to financial management and adopt digital systems to improve accuracy and efficiency in financial record-keeping. This will enable them to make informed decisions, achieve financial stability, and sustain their businesses in the long term.

Community Involvement

The involvement of *Songket* weavers in the creative economy-based tourism in Sukarara Village has been supported by the village government, which acts as a facilitator in community empowerment activities. To achieve community empowerment indicators of equality, participation, self-reliance, and sustainability, the Sukarara Village Government has developed several activities listed in the RKP 2022.

One of the activities is Traditional Institution Development, which aims to build a traditional community institution that is in line with the customs and norms of Sukarara Village. This activity focuses on preserving and developing customs, social, and cultural values of the village community. The government plays an active role in this development, as it is obligated to ensure the welfare of its citizens under Law No.11 of 2009 regarding social welfare.

Another activity listed in the RKP 2022 is Traditional Art Development, which educates local and wider communities about the history of the village and the history of *Songket* weaving. This form of participation and awareness of the village community to be fully involved and contribute to various activities carried out to promote the welfare of many people.

Youth Organization Development is also carried out in Sukarara Village, as a process of renewal and human resource development to achieve self-reliance or independence of the community. The development activities are divided into functional and technical development, which includes education, training and counselling, social welfare entrepreneurship, community service, spirituality and mental development, sports and cultural arts, environment and community relations.

In addition, the Sukarara Village government has also designed sustainable activities such as Traditional Weaving Patent Registration, which showcases the village's characteristics and has an impact on the sustainability of *Songket* weaving as its identity. The form of this activity is a meeting with the village community, especially *Songket* weavers. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) laws had little response in Indonesia in its early development, which was disadvantageous for weavers. However, the government's efforts in Traditional Weaving Patent Registration aim to address this issue and support the preservation of cultural heritage in Sukarara Village.

Implication

This study has several potential research implications. Firstly, it could offer insights into the factors that may foster the growth of the creative economy in Sukarara village and comparable communities. To achieve this, researchers may examine how local and national government policies and regulations support creative industries, as well as how external factors

like changing consumer preferences and global economic trends may impact the creative economy in Sukarara village.

Secondly, the study could identify the obstacles and difficulties that *songket* woven fabric craftsmen face when attempting to access markets, resources, and support systems for their products. To address these challenges, researchers may investigate the possibility of collaboration between craftsmen, local businesses, and tourism stakeholders to create sustainable and inclusive tourism opportunities that benefit both the craftsmen and the wider community.

Finally, the study could provide valuable insights into the potential for cultural preservation and heritage tourism in Sukarara village and similar areas. This could entail examining the role that traditional arts and crafts play in preserving cultural identity and promoting cultural tourism. Furthermore, researchers could explore how traditional crafts can be integrated into contemporary design and fashion trends to develop new and innovative products that appeal to modern consumers. Overall, the study has the potential to enrich the existing literature on creative economy development, cultural preservation, and sustainable tourism, and may inform future policies and practices in these domains.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the steps that can be taken by tourism village managers to market their village in the current era of the digital and sharing economy to develop a good image and become more widely known as a tourist destination. The research also aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the challenges faced by the Kembang Kuning Tourism Village in terms of its positioning and proposing strategies that can be used to strengthen its position.

The findings of the study indicate that Kembang Kuning Tourist Village has potential natural and cultural attractions, but many tourists are not aware of the village as a tourist destination. The village has already taken steps to strengthen its positioning through programming and promotion indicators based on the marketing mix theory. However, the village still faces challenges in terms of socialization activities, utilization of paid media, and the development of identity.

The findings of the study imply that tourism village managers need to focus on strengthening the programming and promotion indicators based on the marketing mix theory to improve their village's positioning. The village needs to conduct more socialization activities to increase awareness of the village as a tourist destination. The village should also consider utilizing paid media to reach a wider audience and develop a unique identity that differentiates it from other tourist villages.

The study has several limitations that need to be addressed. The research was conducted in only one tourism village in East Lombok Regency, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The study also relied on qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, which may limit the validity of the findings.

Future research can focus on exploring the challenges faced by other tourism villages in Indonesia and developing strategies to improve their positioning. Future studies can also use a quantitative research approach to validate the findings of this study. Additionally, future research can explore the effectiveness of utilizing paid media and developing a unique identity in improving the positioning of tourism villages.

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