Artisans Regeneration Model: Culture Sustainability Effort for Creativity and Indigenous Skill

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ABSTRACT

This study aims at the formulation of a regeneration model for traditional artisans in Indonesia. The model is expected to be a solution for the degeneration problem, the declining interest of the younger generation to learn and to continue tradition art business, mainly batik. The research was conducted specifically on the community of batik artisans in Girilayu, Karanganyar Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. This study is a qualitative one using ethnographic approach method to collect the data. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to design and to formulate the alternatives and to determine the right model. Furthermore, the formulation of the model was implemented and analyzed for the effectiveness as well as the impact that may occur. This study formulates a model for the regeneration of batik artisans in Indonesia. This study found some regeneration gaps in the form of inconsistency in sustainable activities of batik artisans’ generation which has caused the degeneration.

Keywords: Artisans; batik; culture; creativity; indigenous skill; sustainability.
1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional artisans play an important role as a medium to visualize design ideas of products. They are able to interpret the designers' wishes based on some personal intentions and ideas in art products [1]. They work systematically with a sequence of discussions and revisions to achieve the best results. Such compromises and interactions cannot be obtained when producing by machines. Some detailed and complex processes are carried out by artisans in realizing and interpreting the designs into products [2]. The same repeatedly done activity causes the artisans to become experts and to get used to it. The product becomes a point of interest for discussion in various forums. The discussion forums commonly forget to consider the artisans who also play an important role as the executor and determine the final product [3].

Process, material, innovation, quality, and market orientation become in-depth discussions with various perspectives, but they forget the main thing that all the points previously mentioned are simply the effects of the actions done by the main visual actors of the product, i.e. the artisans. A designer has a task to design and to do the quality control on their design, yet the artisans is the interpreter [4]. Industrialization, modernization, and digitalization have become global dynamics that certainly occur because humans need progress and novelty. These two things do not cause traditional handicraft products to decrease and to disappear; instead it is the existence of traditional artisans's attention which shifts to efficiency [5]. The shifting of human power to machines has proven to be effective to lower the operational costs; however, the consideration on tradition sustainability, originality, and living environmental balance have no longer become the priority [6]. Still, the key to the realization of a product is the process carried out by the artisans. The availability of process and materials without the artisan leads to the possibility to produce products become nihility.

2. RESEARCH PURPOSES

The regeneration that has been carried out by individuals along with the support of group communities has not been maximized; thus, a model is required which may enhance previous efforts [7]. There is one model that has been implemented by a group of batik artisans in Girilayu, Karanganyar, Central Java, Indonesia. This model stimulates prospective batik artisans and young batik artisans to believe and to deeply learn or to pursue the current batik activities. The stimulant is in the form of a batik motif made based on a mutual agreement and used as an iconic batik motif in Girilayu. Senior batik artisans through a batik motif called ‘Mbok Semok’ slowly begin to share their insight and to give lessons through the meaning of the decoratively adorning ornaments [8]. Mbok Semok is identical to female batik artisans; nevertheless, it does not rule out the opportunities for the younger male generation to learn batik, especially for the design and coloring process. The iconic batik motif used as a stimulus to attract the interest of the next generation of batik artisans is considered as a new method [9]. Several things are needed to be more deeply explored, including finding out the background which underlies the creation of iconic stimulation model by the Girilayu batik artisans, the effectiveness of the model, and the refinement model as a fixation of the results of several alternative models including the icon stimulation model. The final result of the research is expected to be able to obtain findings which contribute essentially to the community of batik artisans and to consider alternative regeneration models for other forms of traditional art containing characteristics similar to batik.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

After batik has been stated as an intangible heritage of Indonesia by UNESCO, it is the obligation of Indonesian people to maintain its physical existence, process, and function. These require people who play the role as tradition guardians [10]. The problem that may arise is that there is no economically future guarantee for the profession of traditional batik artisans. Thus, the next generation starts to turn to other professions that are expected to be more productive and prosperous. The world conditions are changing due to the advancement in technology that has been shifting manual and handmade work methods [11]. Tradition artisans realizes that the wages they earn are not included in the calculation of regional minimum wage. They work based on an order contract. Most artisans make traditional products principally to survive. The selling price they set definitely overrides the quality of handmade products which are time consuming and complicated [12]. They usually lack confidence and think that their products are only souvenirs for tourists. If there are costly tradition art products, the price calculation is based on the working process and the difficulty in obtaining the
materials; sometimes their personal energy and creativity are not even calculated.

Certification done by the government through the department of industry and trade of the republic of Indonesia is merely a formality like data tracing to calculate the number of human resources working as artisans and tradition art in an area [13]. Certification facilitates data collection for the central level related to budgeting for training and improving business quality. The results obtained after traditional artisans have obtained certification still cannot raise their economic welfare evenly and steadily. Only some artisans can maximize their potential with the main keyword, creativity [14]. The death of creativity causes their products to solely become outputs of ideas that don't work well. Creativity is a follow-up action after the selection of creative ideas that determine the sustainability of tradition creations by the actors, artisans.

Welfare guarantee and other professional offers which promise better income lead the new generation of tradition artisans to change their career orientation [15]. They feel the fact that the idealism to survive as the successors to tradition is not economically viable, because the sequence of traditional process is considered to be too long and costly compared to today's fast and inexpensive digital age. The conveniences obtained are not balanced with an understanding that instant made thing is sometimes meaningless. These products are made to meet the needs that are only used for a moment, relying on appearance, and speed in production [16]. In-depth research on cultural elements to be presented in products that quickly change turns into a complex thing, so that it tends to put the value of practicality and efficiency forward. Tradition creativity is a local wisdom which is unique, aesthetic, classic, and authentic while also being less attractive on the other hand since it is typically standard or monotonous like a coin. Building confidence to the younger generation of artisans is an important effort to survive and to sustain tradition art.

Tradition arts provide space and opportunities for their successors to create modifications to certain aspects such as size or dimensions. Some things such as shape, color, line, and detail are tried to be stable, because they are related to certain meanings. This also occurs in batik art in Indonesia, which provides opportunities for the younger generation of artisans to create something new by making collaborations. The problem of traditional artisans' regeneration was first assumed to be due to some thought believing that there is no economically viable future in crafting activities [17]. Mass products made by machines are able to meet the consumer needs, including perfectly duplicating tradition art products. In this situation, the artisans face a big dilemma. Quitting creativity does not earn adequate income and the heritage mandated on them to be succeeded will slowly disappear. If you are willing to stick with tradition, you must create the necessary personal and communal novelties to complement meaningful daily rituals [18]. The position of art products as a tertiary need makes young artisans to rethink living from the traditional art activities.

Many efforts have been made across communities to create a good regeneration system for batik artisans. Activists of batik sustainability perceive regeneration as heritage of batik skills as done to Rifa'iyah batik artisans in Batang regency, Central Java, Indonesia; community empowerment of artisans and an educative atmosphere through establishing Batik Museum in Pekalongan; mentoring and assisting batik artisans to conduct batik businesses in Sumenep; documenting as a geographical indication, and developing motif designs in Trusmi, Cirebon, West Java and Sragen, Central Java, Indonesia. The essential meaning of regeneration as a comprehensive system of changes aiming at learning, imparting, and understanding the batik process and the function of batik, by relying on the artisans as the executors of the entire process. Incomplete definition of sustainability is sometimes based on a multi-perspective view [19]. Batik faces problems that can be approached and solved in various ways according to the point of views used, so that regeneration as an organizational change does not run optimally, because it is carried out in divisions bases [20].

Values, meaning, vision, and mission of stable creativity and activities of making batik become a measure of the success in regeneration [21]. The new generation should be able to carry out the process of batik and the same rituals to those done by the previous generations. Effective batik learning through family education by involving children according to their age levels in the process of making batik. In addition, it is important to instill awareness to the younger generation making batik means continuing the noble traditions and the heritage from the ancestors [22]. Batik is not just learning to hold a
canting (special tool made of copper or wood to make batik) with hot liquid wax inscribed on the cloth. Through batik, the younger generation of artisans learns about perseverance and patience in a long and complex production process, so that it becomes the mental capital to survive by developing creativity without going too far from the traditional path. The understanding in the regeneration of batik artisans is the interpretation that if they have decided to study and to do batik as a skill and profession or career, they must be totally responsible for holding the tradition well through proper learning. Their desire to exploit resources, monopolize, and gain as much profit as possible with certain engineering processes that damage the natural environment must be eliminated [23]. Sustainability through batik regeneration relies on a good understanding and knowledge to maintain the balance of various components and aspects including the nature and the environment. Sustainability through regeneration contains messages from generation to generation about the importance of maintaining tradition as a form of natural balance for the survival of humans. Regeneration in various fields is an important part of the concept of sustainable development.

4. METHODS

This study is a qualitative research which adjusts the character of the majority of the research objects, i.e. social communities of traditional batik artisans [24]. Interaction for data mining requires an intensive approach. The character of the community of written batik artisans is mostly introverted or closed-minded people, so the ethnographic approach is appropriate for extracting personal data through observation without intervention. The location of the research objects is in a mountainous area, 330 meters above sea level, away from the crowds, i.e. Girilayu, Karanganyar, Central Java, Indonesia. This mountainous geographical condition has formed selective and careful characters in the community. Accordingly, ethnographic data mining should use personal interviews to obtain appropriate primary data [25]. Group interviews were conducted to complete the data and to conduct general cross-checks. Batik artisans in Girilayu have already their own discussion groups held once a month or according to some urgent needs. The group meeting is held by community concept that discuss the problems faced by artisans related to the process, marketing, obtaining capital funds from agencies or sponsors, preparing strategic plans, socializing programs from the government, private sector, universities, or special institutions, and discussing the development and innovation of batik products. The selection of research location adjusts to the residence of the research object [26]. The research object of batik artisans in Girilayu was chosen based on interesting social phenomena focusing on the regeneration of batik artisans through the application of some stimulation models with the creation of iconic batik motifs that have not ever been carried out by the community of batik artisans in other places as for what has been done by other groups are usually through activities initiated by institutions, communities, and universities by conducting research activities.

Four stages of FGD were carried out to formulate a final model that could be implemented and evaluated. The first stage of FGD was conducted by socializing and aligning the vision and mission, followed by stage II by discussing and evaluating the current model, stage III by discussing alternative models and determining the final formulation, then finally, stage IV by discussing implementation and detailed design for the implementation. The FGDs were held using different methods to adapt the pandemic situation to various restrictive policies and strict health protocols. The impact of social restrictions has caused a new character in the ethnographic approach which is periodic or can be referred as ethnographic periodicity [27]. Researchers are only given special time to interact with the artisans community for research activities. This does not reduce the validity of the data, because it is still monitored and verified through effective communication using social and online media according to the agreement [28]. The location of the Girilayu region in the mountains derives challenges for communication connections, only under certain conditions the community can access the network and connect well. Limited capabilities for online meeting applications, such as using Zoom Meetings or Google Meet, cause FGDs to be conducted directly with health protocols. Regeneration theory was used as a guide for data collection. The principle stating that ‘people’ in the three components of sustainability, i.e. people, process, and product, is the main point; thus, sociological studies are used as a tool for systemic analysis [29]. After the final model is formulated, it then enters the trial phase. The results of the trials are presented in graphical form to facilitate understanding, not to change the nature of the research into semi-quantitative or mix-methods. Documentation,
manuscripts, and archives are used to strengthen the description of the analysis results as secondary sources.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Four stages of FGD have complemented the data obtained from interviews and literature studies based on notes from several documents. The FGD stages are four times to maximize the discussion until the approval of the model formulation is considered to be applicable and valid. Batik artisans in Girilayu as the object of research have a closed character to foreigners, so that the communal discussion approach is appropriate to build trust and to collect the data. The form of FGD is the method proposed by the artisans. Their daily activities are much tied, so group discussions are usually synergized by their gathering time in the association every month to conduct some evaluations. Stage I of the FGD which invited various components of the community was carried out to discuss the regeneration model of batik artisans in Girilayu. This discussion resulted in collected data containing three types of regeneration models that have been used. This difference occurs because there is no obligation to apply a certain model. In addition, it happens due to different educational backgrounds, parenting patterns, and beliefs.

Artisans Regeneration Model I is implemented by conducting habituation and exemplification (providing examples and ways) in the family environment. The introduction of batik in this model is carried out specifically in the family environment. There is a special formula or recipe that you expect to keep it as a secret, so that the main successor is entitled to the story. It is not through specific guidelines but gradually and symbolically. The implementation of the model is based on previous experience that has been passed down through the generations. The positive effect of this model I is the increased understanding of meaning, function, and process. Moreover, the shortcoming of model I is the limited cooperation scope, because it only relies on the expertise of family members for generations and is mostly closed. Furthermore, the Artisans Regeneration Model II focuses on communal strength. This regeneration model is carried out by batik artisans whose extroverted characters. The batik activities and businesses they do are commonly new in the family environment, not inheritance businesses and only done as additional income, for example their main professions as employees, teachers, factory workers, and farmers. The values instilled in the family environment are free. There is no special formula that is taught down and down, so they are comfortable with group activities. The existence of many group communities and association accommodates the need to obtain the required information about batik. Discussions and evaluations make them easier to share experiences of success and failure in making batik until marketing the products. The positive impact of model II is an increase in productivity related to design development and diversification of batik derivative products into functional objects, for example: clothing, merchandise, and interior accessories. However, the weakness of model II is the lack of individual freedom and privacy, because some matters are arranged for the needs of the group based on communal agreements. Each artisan must prioritize group interests over personal ones.

The Artisans Regeneration Model III relies on the collaboration with partners outside the family and the community. Partners who often collaborate with batik artisans in Girilayu are companies and state-owned enterprises through CSR programs. Then, the government and the private sector make a cooperation in terms of policy socialization, training, business capital assistance, and marketing facilitation through promotion and exhibition of local, national, regional and international products. The last partner is educational institutions, from elementary school to university levels. Batik is an effective educational media to introduce cultural arts and local wisdom values. The advantage of implementing regeneration with this model is that the artisans learn and gain more new insight about the concept of systematic cooperation, since there is customarily a lot of tolerance for mistakes made by members, and tends to be minimally punished when using the kinship and community model, so that sometimes it goes off track from the main target. The weakness of this model is that the artisans are often preoccupied by the obligation to complete administrative responsibilities for financial accountability reports on the allocation of the use of funding aid or grants. The three models that have been described have their own advantages and disadvantages as a result of the evaluation of stage II of FGD. At this stage, it was agreed that the formulation of the regeneration model should include aspects that can complement the weakness or the shortcoming of each model I, II, and III. Weaknesses or negative impacts of each
model can be reduced by combining and collaborating the three models, in order to obtain a blended model for batik artisans regeneration in Girilayu. This blended model is not final yet because it must go through the implementation stage done by the artisans in the community groups. Such blended model was formulated in Stage III of FGD, while at the same time making an implementation plan whose results will be evaluated in Stage IV.

The implementation of the model was started by holding a limited-scale batik festival in Girilayu which strictly adapted to the health protocols imposed by the Indonesian government. Measurement of the implementation results through interviews and group discussions with three components indicators represented a combination of three models (the blended model), i.e. capacity (production), competence (understanding of batik), and creativity (development of batik motifs and product designs). The selection of these aspects represented each of the integrated models, i.e. competence from the final conclusions of model I, capacity from the conclusions of model II, and creativity from the conclusions of model III. Based on the results of interviews conducted with 12 groups of batik artisans community in Girilayu, aspects of capacity, competence, and creativity within a period of five months have increased between 0.5% to 5% higher than that before the implementation of the regeneration model. The creativity aspect showed a significant increase starting from 2% in the first period and to 5% in the fourth period from January to February 2021. The smallest number is indicated by an increase in competence aspect in the form of an understanding of batik knowledge as a process and meaning of making batik activities. The understanding process gradually increased from habituation and teaching to a combination of family scope, group, and the latest information from socialization and online seminars concerning on batik, which was held during the pandemic.

The results of the conducted interviews which were processed into a graphic table based on the evaluation results in Stage IV of FGD led to an interesting finding. These findings are based on the results of the artisans’s elaboration that during the regeneration process they found some difficulties causing the degeneration. Some batik businesses in the area did not even worse continue to operate their activities due to degeneration. As an illustration of the condition of degeneration that occurs is the loss of interest of the next generation in the batik business. This happens because they have different perspectives and life choices which are greatly different from their ancestors. Degeneration can also occur due to a lack of control from their predecessors, so that the next generation chooses the wrong way to continue the inherited business and ends up going bankrupt. The stigma that batik is a traditional product that makes a slow income circulation has been abandoned by the next millennial generation who likes technology products with fast and real income results. After further study, in the fourth discussion, all participants were coordinated by the discussion leader to visualize these conditions into a chart. The visualization is combined with the regeneration stages using the blended model. This activity resulted in finding the cause of degeneration, i.e. gap or blank space between regeneration stages. Based on the agreement in the discussion, this blank space is called the regeneration gap. The gap is a state of vacuum or lack of regeneration activity. The absence of activity is caused by various social distractions and disruptions contributing to inconsistencies. A bridge between stages is required to make regeneration successful or intact. In addition, preparation and evaluation are needed to fill the gap. In the final phase, the final model formulation was obtained as a refinement of the blended model. The regeneration gap between the pre, implementation, and post stages is connected by evaluation that results in a complete regeneration process. The final model as the purpose of this research has been implemented by batik artisans in Girilayu. The results of the implementation went well, although the increase in capacity, competence, and creativity aspects was slow.

6. CONCLUSION

Regeneration gap is mostly caused by disruption and distraction in the social interactions of batik artisans in Girilayu. These disturbances cause delays and inconsistencies in the process of regeneration (Thombs & Osborn, 2019). On the other hand, distraction indirectly conditions the artisans with maximum priority management. The initiation to stimulate the next generation of Girilayu Batik is an alternative model that is able to adapt to the millennial characters. The sustainability degeneration of the batik artisans community is a threat to the sustainability of the tradition and intangible heritage of batik. The formulation of the artisans regeneration model is
a solution for permanent international recognition of batik. The existence of batik is a form of identity and cultural arts sustainability of the Indonesian nation through tradition textiles. Regeneration efforts are not only to maintain the process and understanding of the meaning of local wisdom, but also the great legacy of the genius and skills of the Indonesian ancestors synergizing with the natural surroundings. The shortcoming of the current batik artisans regeneration model is that it has not been tested and applied on batik artisans in other places. Thus, there are opportunities and potential to gain different results and to create new findings as the cultural character of batik in various parts of Indonesia is highly diverse. Further research is widely opened to be conducted, even on the results of other traditional textile cultures in Indonesia, such as weaving, songket, and ikat dyeing. The form of regeneration gap as a research finding becomes interesting when studied in depth. The final results will vary according to the environmental, social, and cultural conditions of the community around the research location. At last, stimulant is an appropriate effort to maintain tradition values and original expertise that deserves to be appreciated and supported by various parties.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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