

Strengthening Destination Branding Through Local Product Innovation in Watusigar Village, Ngawen, Gunungkidul

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Abstract

Kalurahan Watusigar, which declared itself a conservation village, has a strategic location as the main access point for tourists from the north and east to the tourism area in Gunungkidul Regency, offering the opportunity to pioneer a green tourism village. The local community of Kalurahan Watusigar has initiated various initiatives through collaboration with relevant stakeholders. One such collaboration, with the Research and Community Service Institution of Duta Wacana Christian University (LPPM UKDW), is a community service activity aimed at strengthening destination branding through training for local product innovations of eco prints. The selection of eco print products is based on the availability of plants in the Watusigar area that can be used as natural dyes. The objective of this community service activity is to focus on developing the branding of Kalurahan Watusigar as a conservation village and green tourism village through local product innovation using natural materials and marketing strategies in accordance with digital technology. The target audience for this activity is the community members and Karang Taruna members of Kalurahan Watusigar. This community service activity introduces the eco print product ecosystem, which is the value chain of eco print products starting from creation, production, distribution, consumption, and conservation, utilizing action research methods through training, discussions, and workshops. The result of this community service activity is the expansion of knowledge about plants and materials in the environment to be used as environmentally friendly craft products. The eco print product innovation is an essential step in creating a creative economy ecosystem in Kalurahan Watusigar.

Keywords: *creative economy, destination branding, ecoprint, local product, product innovation*

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that has occurred over the past two years has had a significant impact on all sectors of life, including tourism, which is a national flagship sector. The village of Watusigar, Ngawen Sub-district, Gunungkidul Regency has a strategic location because it is located on the main route from the north and east to the Gunungkidul tourist area. The construction of the Watusigar Bridge, which was inaugurated in 2018, became an important access, especially for tourists from Central and East Java heading to Gunungkidul. This provides an opportunity for Watusigar Village to explore its potential to be packaged as a tourist attraction. One of its potentials is Soka Park, which was opened to the public at the end of 2020. Soka Park is a public space that functions as a green open space and a culinary tourism center located north of the Watusigar Bridge. Various activities supporting tourism are carried out at the location, including culinary, music performances, watching together, and various activity programs initiated by the government and the people of Watusigar Village.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the resilience of tourist destinations, especially in the economic, social, and cultural sectors. However, this provides an opportunity to re-examine tourism priorities and policies through a new tourism model that prioritizes tourism components for education, sustainable conservation, and the local economy (Dewi, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a positive impact on changes in behaviour that are more pro-nature and in line with public awareness of topics related to nature (Rousseau & Deschacht, 2020). Tourist attractions and destination offerings that promote the NEWA (Nature, Eco, Wellness, Adventure) concept will be more attractive in this pandemic era (KEMENPAREKRAF, 2020).

In December 2021, Kalurahan Watusigar declared itself as a conservation village and also in the framework of educating the community about the importance of preserving nature. The program, funded through village funds, was carried out by planting 2,200 seedlings around Soka Park and planting fish seeds in the Oya River that passes through Kalurahan Watusigar (<https://kabarhandayani.com>). Kalurahan Watusigar became the first Conservation Village in Gunungkidul Regency (<https://rri.co.id>). The current tourism trend is shifting towards alternative tourism that has the characteristics of returning to nature, interacting with the local community, preserving culture, and local uniqueness. This is an opportunity for rural tourism that is packaged in a tourism village that presents attractions in the form of rural life and its

local wisdom. Watusigar Village has the potential to pioneer as a green tourism village. Green tourism village is a tourism village based on the empowerment of the local community with the main product oriented towards the principles of preserving the natural environment, local economy, and social culture (Kementrian Koperasi dan UKM RI, 2017). Watusigar Village needs a strategy that can combine existing potentials and opportunities so that it becomes a uniqueness for Kalurahan Watusigar.

The management of Watusigar Village's local potential and natural uniqueness has the potential to be formulated as a brand of Kalurahan Watusigar as a green tourism village. Branding is a set of attributes designed to create awareness and identity, and to build the reputation of a product, service, person, place, or organization. A comprehensive branding perspective as a long-term strategy encompasses a wide range of activities, from product innovation to marketing communications (Sammut-Bonnici, 2014). Based on this understanding of brand and branding, this community service program focuses on initiating the formulation of Kalurahan Watusigar branding through local product innovation using natural materials and marketing strategies in accordance with the demands of digital technology.

To support the initiation of branding formulation for Kelurahan Watusigar, a local product innovation training was conducted, which involved ecoprint using natural raw materials (local plants) as ecoprint motifs and bamboo fan modification with ecoprint products. The utilization of plant potential in Kelurahan Watusigar as an environmentally friendly craft product is a strategy to enhance the image (branding) of Kelurahan Watusigar as a green tourism village and conservation village.

In order to preserve the environment, practical solutions in conservation are needed, which can be achieved through local initiatives. The local initiative refers to the involvement of local communities who have local knowledge and therefore have a good understanding of the local context (Puhakka et al., 2011). Various local initiatives have been carried out by the community of Kelurahan Watusigar through collaborations with related stakeholders. One form of collaboration with the local community of Kelurahan Watusigar is the community service (PkM) activity conducted by the Research and Community Service Institution of Duta Wacana Christian University (LPPM UKDW), which involves supporting destination branding through

ecoprint product training. The selection of ecoprint products was based on the availability of plants in the Kalurahan Watusigar area that can be used as natural dyes.

The purpose of this community service activity is to enable the community of Kelurahan Watusigar to utilize the potential around them as environmentally friendly products to support environmental sustainability and to support destination branding through the conservation village program. The impact of this community service activity is the improvement of the community's competence in increasing the value of a product (in this case, ecoprint products) and understanding the ecoprint product ecosystem, which is expected to improve the community's economy. Innovative creative products can be attractive for tourism, which can lead to the mutual symbiosis between the creative economy and tourism, resulting in increased community welfare (Cemporaningsih et al., 2020). Destination branding is necessary for Kelurahan Watusigar to build a positive and unique identity that is distinct from other villages. In building destination branding, the involvement of all elements is necessary so that it can compete with other tourist destinations, which in turn can lead to multiple effects that result in an increased community economy (Perguna et al., 2020).

The community service activity carried out within Kelurahan Watusigar has brought about significant positive outcomes by focusing on two key aspects: enhancing local product innovation and fostering a deeper understanding of the eco print product ecosystem. The primary achievement of this endeavor lies in the demonstrable improvement in the community's skills and competence, particularly in amplifying the value of eco print products. Furthermore, this community service activity has facilitated the development of a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the eco print product ecosystem among the participants. By delving into the entire value chain of eco print products, which encompasses sourcing of raw materials, crafting techniques, effective marketing strategies, and an emphasis on environmental conservation, the community members are now better equipped to engage in sustainable practices and explore innovative approaches.

This newfound competence and enhanced understanding are projected to directly contribute to positive economic growth within the local economy of Kelurahan Watusigar. The community is now better poised to conceptualize, create, and market high-quality eco print products that utilize natural materials, thereby appealing to the sensibilities of environmentally conscious

consumers. The integration of digital technology and effective marketing tactics also positions the community to expand its market presence beyond its immediate geographical confines, potentially attracting a wider audience of tourists and environmentally aware consumers.

In essence, the ramifications of this community service activity extend beyond the mere acquisition of skills and knowledge. Instead, they manifest as tangible economic advantages for the community, culminating in the cultivation of a thriving creative economy ecosystem within Kalurahan Watusigar. This initiative significantly contributes to elevating the village's reputation and stature as both a conservation village and green tourism village, while simultaneously enhancing the livelihoods of its inhabitants through the pursuit of sustainable and innovative product development strategies.

Methods

The development assistance program for crafts is always associated with the economic creative value chain, namely the chain of creation, production, distribution, consumption, and conservation (Kementrian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif RI, 2021). The implementation of this accompanying program was carried out by making the value chain the basis for the implementation process of the program. This was done so that the community understands the ecosystem of craft products such as ecoprint and encourages sustainability and self-reliance in the future. Considering these needs, the content of the implementation method for this community service program includes economic creative value components as shown in the diagram in Figure 1.



Fig 1. Value chain diagram of creative economy for the implementation of community service activities in Watusigar Village

To support the achievement of the value of local creative economy products in Kalurahan Watusigar, this community service activity implements the action research method. The action research method can help achieve the objectives of the activity, which is to improve the situation of the organization or community involved in the community service activity (MacDonald, 2012). Taylor (2005) in Sugiyono (2015) stated that action research is a study of social situations, by looking at the improvement of quality in the actions taken towards these social situations. Based on the action research method, the steps of this community service activity consist of four stages: planning, action, reflection, and evaluation (Pain et al., 2010).

A. Planning Stage

This community service activity in Watusigar Village is a series of collaboration activities between LPPM UKDW and Kapanewon Ngawen, Gunungkidul Regency, in the form of a Community Service Learning (KKN). To initiate the KKN activities, community leaders in Watusigar Village (GKJ Watusigar Pastor) proposed a community service activity involving lecturers and students as an introduction to the community. Discussions to prepare the material for this community service activity were part of the KREASI component of the creative economy value chain. The preparation stage was carried out twice, namely:

1. Initiation of community service activities with GKJ Watusigar Pastor: carried out on April 11, 2022, in the church meeting room. This initial meeting was a brainstorming session to explore community service activities that could be carried out for the people of Kalurahan Watusigar. The discussion narrowed down to a training program for innovative products made from local materials, namely the ecoprint method, as an effort to improve craft products that will be marketed together with BUMDES Watusigar at Taman Soka, showcasing local products from Kalurahan Watusigar.
2. Maturation of the Ecoprint Innovative Product Training Idea: a discussion to introduce ecoprint innovation and explore local potentials that support the training program. The discussion was held by the community service team with employees of Kalurahan Watusigar and the chairperson of BUMDES Watusigar on May 17, 2022. After agreement was reached regarding the ecoprint product training, tasks and responsibilities were then assigned between the community service team and the Kalurahan Watusigar officials. The meeting also agreed on the time, place, and participants of the ecoprint innovative product training. The discussion continued with a survey of the Watusigar Village environment to observe local potential.



Fig 2. Discussion on the preparation for the implementation of local innovation training on ecoprint products in the Pendopo of the Watusigar Village Office

B. Action Stage

The ecoprint product innovation training activity to build the branding of Kalurahan Watusigar was carried out for two days with the following division of focus:

1. Day 1 on June 14th, 2022: The purpose of this training phase was to broaden the knowledge and insights of participants about ecoprint products and design compositions as the basis for designing creative ecoprint products, as well as the utilization of local plants as the pattern or motif of ecoprint. Material on digital marketing strategies was provided to solve marketing problems still faced by residents of Kalurahan Watusigar. In this regard, awareness of product uniqueness or branding was also conveyed to the participants



Fig 3. Day 1 training on the basics of ecoprint innovation products and digital marketing

2. Day 2 on June 15, 2022: this is the practical stage of making innovative ecoprint products and initiating the formation of an organization or business group to open an online store together.



Fig. 4. Day 2 training on practice of making ecoprint products and initiation of business group formation

C. Reflection Stage

Reflection is an important stage in the action research method applied in this community service program (PkM). Reflection is necessary to obtain learning that has been obtained through the PkM activities on the training of ecoprint innovation products. The results of the reflection show that the involvement of the local community in every stage of the activity process, starting from the selection of activity types to the implementation of ecoprint innovation product training, is very important. The local community is an expert figure who understands the potential and conditions of their region, so the PkM team, as outsiders, learns from the local knowledge and values of the local community. However, the PkM team contributes to the development of local potential through skills and knowledge, as well as the mastery of technology for the development of their superior products.

D. Evaluation Stage

Evaluation of the implementation of PkM for ecoprint innovation product training to build the branding of Kalurahan Watusigar was carried out through a questionnaire that was distributed before and after the training. This evaluation is useful for obtaining feedback that can be used as a reference for further mentoring steps. The evaluation results showed that most of the training participants already understood ecoprint products and the potential of plants as natural

coloring agents, but they have not yet understood how to make them. Regarding digital marketing, most of the participants also already understand and use digital store platforms, but do not yet understand how to manage them. Furthermore, this questionnaire is also aimed at observing the increasing understanding of the Watusigar community towards the ecoprint product. After participating in the ecoprint training process, over 50% of the community now comprehend the various products that can be created through ecoprint activities. Supported by the high interest of the participants and the enhancement of skills related to ecoprint as an environmentally friendly product, the community is able to creatively develop products with high marketability and in line with current market trends. As a result, their economic benefits can also improve.

Results and Discussions

The implementation of PkM, which was carried out for 2 days (June 14-15, 2022), was not only to introduce ecoprint products to the Watusigar community but also to introduce the ecosystem of ecoprint innovation products. The introduction of the ecoprint product ecosystem is a value chain of ecoprint products from creation, production, distribution, consumption, and conservation, which is carried out with the action research method through training, discussion, and practice/workshops. This is intended so that the participants who attended PkM can recognize the overall circulation and journey of ecoprint products globally.

A. Creation Stage

The creation stage in this PkM process began with a discussion as a brainstorming step with the Kalurahan Watusigar to explore the potential and problems in implementing PkM strategies. The process includes the initiation of PkM activities with the GKJ Watusigar Priest and the maturation of the idea of ecoprint innovation product training, which includes the following:

- a. Ecoprint training was held for 2 days (Tuesday-Wednesday, June 14-15, 2022).
- b. Target: male and female residents of Watusigar Village, and Karang Taruna (youth village organization) with a target of 30 people
- c. The Watusigar community was still constrained for marketing existing products.
- d. Day 1 implementation: training on the introduction and use of ecoprint, composition training, digital marketing training, and composition workshop.

- e. Day 2 implementation: ecoprint practice workshop, product photography training, joint online store marketing workshop.
- f. Kalurahan Watusigar has the potential for leaves that can be used as coloring agents, including mainly teak, *marenggo*, *mind*, *lanang/bungle*, cherry, *gamal*, etc.
- g. Kalurahan Watusigar has the potential for bamboo handicrafts, so this potential is used as an idea for developing ecoprint product diversification in the implementation of PkM.
- h. In the implementation of PkM in Kalurahan Watusigar to introduce various types of ecoprint products, training was given on the introduction and use of ecoprint. The training material includes the origin of ecoprint, its advantages, its utilization as a fashion product.



Fig. 5. The activities of community service (PkM) and the diversified products of ecoprint innovation produced during the implementation of community service

B. Production Stage

The production process started with the process of making ecoprint products through a workshop held on the second day of the PkM. Ecoprint is one of the printing techniques applied to natural fiber materials using natural dyes by utilizing plants as a source of dyes (Herryprilosadoso, 2019). In ecoprint, two techniques are known, namely steaming technique (by steaming - basic and iron blanket) and pounding technique (by beating). In this PkM, both

methods were practiced by the participants, with the steaming technique applied to fabric sheet products and the pounding technique applied to shawl, t-shirt, and fan products. This PkM involved participants in contributing materials and equipment available in their homes. Some materials and equipment brought by participants include leaves found around their homes, and pounding tools (wooden hammers, rubber hammers, iron hammers coated in plastic, or *munthu/ulek kayu*).

The creative process previously learned in the form of product diversification and principles of leaf composition arrangement were applied in this ecoprint workshop process. In this production process, participants were also introduced to the types of materials and equipment needed, how long the process takes, the availability of raw materials around them, and tips for overcoming common obstacles in the production of ecoprint innovation products. While waiting for the results of the steaming ecoprint products they have made, participants practiced making ecoprint products using the pounding technique. The ecoprint production process, especially the pounding technique, requires patience and perseverance from the participants as it was their first time making it. However, this effort paid off when they saw the results of the ecoprint products they made. The participants, consisting of community leaders, community members, and Karang Taruna Kalurahan Watusigar, were very enthusiastic during the ecoprint workshop. Participants did not expect that leaves and even roadside grass, which seemed to have no use and were sometimes considered pests, could be transformed into an attractive product that could become a branding for Kalurahan Watusigar.



Fig. 6. Activities during the ecoprint innovation product making workshop

C. Distribution Stage

The distribution stage in this community service program (PkM) is introducing and helping participants understand how their eco-print innovation product can reach consumers. The ongoing pandemic has made digital platforms and tools crucial in avoiding economic congestion for companies in crisis. Most SMEs that have demonstrated their ability to adopt digital approaches have quickly adapted in 2020, while others that did not adapt have suffered setbacks or even bankruptcy (Alfrian & Pitaloka, 2020). Companies vary in size and industry segment, but it is important to remember that digitalization has proven to be a long-term compensatory strategy, regardless of the differences. With digital platforms, SMEs can reduce operating costs, automate business processes, and significantly reduce error rates. Digital tools combined with innovative strategies will also help SMEs become more competitive and better understand consumer behavior.

The PkM participants were supported with materials on "Why Choose Digital Transformation for SMEs" and "Preparing for the Digital Journey" for small business owners. Firstly, SMEs need to redesign their business operations and target mobility, data analytics, cloud, and technology integration into their processes. Reliable and experienced technology partners can play a key role in enabling SMEs to deliver outstanding value to their customers and succeed in any crisis. SMEs may be skeptical about investing in digital solutions and strategies, but the emergence of the COVID-19 crisis has forced entrepreneurs to consider the survival and prosperity of digital technology. Small business owners need to focus not only on making more investments but also on maximizing the potential of digital investments (Lestari & Saifuddin, 2020). The digital operating ecosystem ensures that SME owners get better insights, streamline employee operations, and, most importantly, improve customer retention by providing better services. Therefore, this training emphasizes the importance of SMEs being brave enough to break through limitations and adapt to the online world.

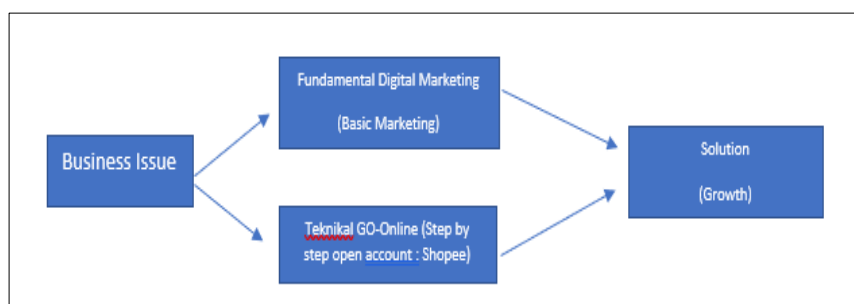


Fig. 7. Flowchart of Watusigar MSMEs going online

a. Consumption

During the consumption phase, the PkM participants were supported with an understanding of who the market players are that buy and utilize ecoprint products. Next, they would be provided with an explanation of the technical aspects of registering a business account on one of the e-commerce platforms, namely Shopee. Shopee is another popular e-commerce company in Indonesia that reaches even small towns. The main attraction for Shopee sellers is that they do not charge commissions. Here are some of the benefits that buyers offer to sellers that are in line with the needs of the Watusigar community: First, increased sales through high traffic channels. The main advantage is the presence of a large online market. These markets have built a reputation and people's trust. Second, attracting new customers who visit the store. Acquiring customers with the help of this large online store can attract repeat customers by providing excellent service and satisfaction. And finally, good delivery and logistics. It was expected that with the fundamental and technical go-online materials, the Watusigar community could maximize their potential and become a self-sufficient village. The technical management of the Shopee store began with the selection of a group leader who will manage the admin schedule consisting of training participants, followed by training on how to manage an online store and how to sell products to delivery. It was expected that with the system of mutual cooperation in managing Shopee stores, the solidarity of the training participants could be increased, and the store's performance could also be improved.

b. Conservation

The first step in developing the creative economy is to improve the quality of human resources. This is achieved through education for the local community that works synergistically with the local government. Education is necessary to increase the knowledge of the community in managing their local potential based on local wisdom. However, the increase in community knowledge through education must be balanced with a concern for the environment, both natural and cultural. Therefore, conservation of the natural and cultural environment is needed for the development of the creative economy based on local wisdom (<https://koranbuleleng.com>).

As shown in Figure 8, the plants that can be obtained in the surrounding environment are important elements in the production of ecoprint products, as both pattern makers and

natural dyes. The local community already has knowledge about these local plants, but they need to be educated on how to utilize them as natural dyes.



Fig 8. Plants as the natural dye materials for ecoprint products

Utilizing plants as natural dyes is a strategy to maintain environmental sustainability. The waste produced from natural dyeing does not harm the environment. However, the community needs to be given knowledge about waste management from the ecoprint production process, which may disturb the surrounding environment, such as unpleasant smells. The innovation of ecoprint products is part of the development of the creative economy of the Watusigar Village community, most of whom work as farmers. The ecoprint products produced will provide economic benefits supported by the appropriate marketing strategies. In addition, ecoprint products can be modified to complement traditional Javanese clothing. Thus, ecoprint products can support the preservation of Javanese culture in the Watusigar Village community.

Considering the strategic role of ecoprint in environmental and cultural conservation for the development of the creative economy, this product innovation supports the realization of sustainable development in Watusigar Village. In addition, community assistance in Watusigar Village to increase ecoprint product innovation by utilizing local plants is an important effort to build community awareness about branding that is in line with the vision and mission of Watusigar Village, as a green tourism village and a conservation village. In this regard, the local government has a key role in mobilizing the community towards realizing this vision and mission.

Conclusion

Community empowerment in Kalurahan Watusigar through Ecoprint Product Innovation Training has expanded the knowledge of the community about plants and materials in the surrounding environment that can be utilized as craft products. The innovation of ecoprint products is an important step in creating a creative economic ecosystem in Watusigar Subdistrict. The use of plants as natural dyes supports the strengthening of the branding of Kalurahan Watusigar as a green tourism village and conservation village. The method used in this community service activity is the action method, starting from the planning stage by initiating activities and developing ideas. Furthermore, the action stage is the implementation of activities divided into two phases: the delivery of knowledge about the ecoprint product ecosystem and the practice of making ecoprints. The reflection stage excavates the lessons from the eco print innovation product training. The evaluation stage is through a questionnaire before and after the ecoprint workshop to get feedback and the subsequent organizational step. The four stages of this action research help the activity's objectives, namely that the people of the Kalurahan Watusigar can take advantage of the potential around them through eco print innovation products. The community understands the value chain and ecosystem of ecoprint products, so they hope to improve the community's economy. The action method proved very effective because it actively involves community participation and relevant stakeholders to fully engage in every process, starting from planning, action, reflection, and evaluation.

The realization of the vision and mission of Kalurahan Watusigar requires the participation of all stakeholders who work together according to their respective roles. As a follow-up to this Community Service activity, a business group organization that manages the marketing of ecoprint products needs to be formed, so that it can provide better economic benefits for group members. The discussion at the end of the training discussed the selection of a business group leader who will initiate and coordinate the creation of an online store together. The discussion showed the enthusiasm of the training participants to follow up on this ecoprint training with more concrete actions, namely marketing the products produced. However, the limitation of knowledge and skills in using digital media was a constraint for some of the training participants. Therefore, the PkM team recommends mentoring activities for opening an online store and digital marketing as a follow-up to this training.

The local government and the management of BUMDES Watusigar plan to hold an exhibition (expo) of ecoprint products produced by training participants. The ecoprint product expo will be held at Taman Soka, which serves as a display for local products in Kalurahan Watusigar. This plan is an effort to maintain the sustainability of the training program and have a greater impact on the community of Watusigar Sub-district. This effort reflects the commitment of the local government in preserving the environment and building the branding of Kalurahan Watusigar as a green tourism village destination.

The reflection that can be obtained through this PkM activity is that ecoprint product innovation training is a means for learning together with the community. Direct interaction with training participants is a valuable experience for obtaining local knowledge that is not obtained in academic environments. Reflecting on this experience, PkM activities should involve the community, local government, and relevant figures from the beginning. Thus, the PkM activity will be more beneficial and impactful for training participants.

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