

"Design Culture" Approach as A Way to Preserve The Local Wisdom of The Samin Community in Sambongrejo Village, Indonesia

Novya Chandra Putri,^{1*} Tryana Puji Pertiwi,¹ Lira Anindita Utami¹

¹*Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia*

*Corresponding email: novyachandra@student.telkomuniversity.ac.id

Abstract

The Samin people in Blora Regency uphold their distinctive viewpoint and customs, place a high value on simplicity and unity in intercommunal relations, and are deeply ingrained with the principles of equality in Sedulur Sikep's teachings. Sambongrejo Village is poised as a cultural tourist destination, yet its full potential in agriculture, the arts, and culture remains untapped. *"Design Culture"* is explored as an approach and method that employs participatory tools and design principles to unlock regional development potential. This research discusses essential strategies for designers and local communities to foster sustainable growth, focusing on identifying local resources, generating ideas, and developing visions.

Keywords: cultural tourism, local resource potential, participatory design, Samin community

Introduction

Blora Regency in Central Java is deeply intertwined with historical and cultural values, particularly evident in Sambongrejo Village. This village showcases the cultural values of the Samin Community, known for their local wisdom, simplicity, honesty, and positive behavior. The Samin people emphasize a balanced relationship with nature and adhere to Sedulur Sikep, a teaching that promotes harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. To increase awareness and understanding of Samin culture and its natural resources, Sambongrejo Village has been designated for development into an educational tourism destination centered on culture. *Design Culture* refers to a set of circumstances that is the outcome of specific actions. The description was proposed as an academic field of inquiry to explore the relationships between design practice, production, and consumption (Julier, 2013). In academic practice, *Design Culture* as a philosophy and approach to designing living was introduced in a Design Culture Lab. in the Department of Design Science, Chiba University, a sub field of design science that is dedicated to developing sustainable lifestyles marked by tenacity, commitment, sincerity, and kindness (Purwandaru, Kartikasari, et al., 2021; Purwandaru, Utami, et al., 2021; Suzuki & Miyazaki, 2008), by employing experiential learning strategy and tools of participatory action (Utami et al., 2022) in observing and recording various aspects that construct the structure of regional identity, identifying a culture based on a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment, and create actionable plans to conserve them (Ueda, 2010).

Sambongrejo Village relies heavily on agriculture, fisheries, plantations, and trade for income, with rice and corn being the primary agricultural products. This highlights the pivotal role of the agricultural sector in the economy and the livelihoods of Blora Regency. By focusing on developing these natural resources, particularly in the Samin community, there is an opportunity to enhance the economy while preserving cultural traditions passed down through generations.

With this perception of *Design Culture*, this paper analyzes the basic approaches that design practitioners and the local community should apply as the key factors to promote sustainable regional development by identifying natural resources (*treasures*) and intangible cultural forms that embody various ideas.

Method

The method used in this research is a qualitative approach supported by various data collection and analysis methods. Researchers employed direct observation, literature review, and documentation to collect data. Observations in the field were used to understand the context of the situation, the meaning of the local wisdom within the Samin community, and to identify the potential of existing cultural and natural products, both tangible and intangible. The method of participatory learning is structured by first understanding *Design Culture* as a philosophy and a discipline focused on enhancing a community-ecology relationship by recognizing, identifying, and utilizing local treasures with the participation of the local community. This approach involves creating systems, services, and/or products that anticipate cultural dynamics in the lived environment, as well as strategizing for the challenges faced by the community. An essential element of this process is integrating external participants, such as students or designers, into the community, where they participate and learn, enriching both their experience and growth within the community. This method involves a team of designers revitalizing society by envisioning "Designing Living," through "what should be" by re-recognizing and identifying the numerous local potentials that exist but are often overlooked. Then, deciding on the stakeholder who will carry out the process. To document all the information about local potentials, treasure mapping is also crucial in this process. Upon gaining a comprehensive understanding of the project's scope and informing all stakeholders, the next step involves implementing the ideas.

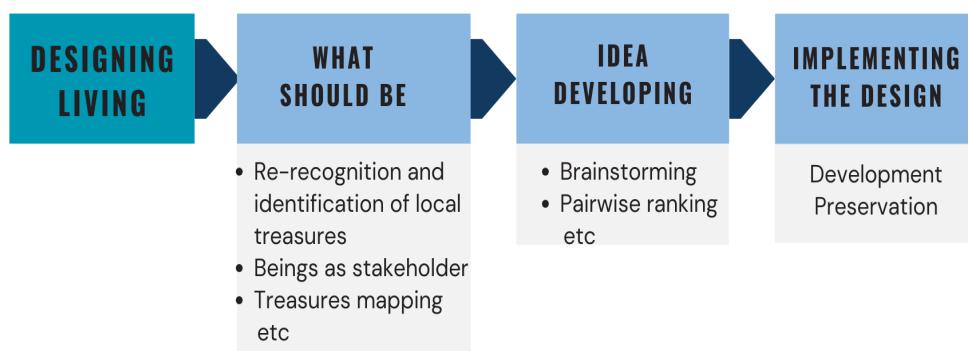


Figure 1. Design Living method
Source: author documentation

Result and Discussion

Nowadays, Samin Village is being sought by the government to become an integrated tourism village to preserve the teachings of Sedulur Sikep, which are starting to get eroded by the cultural dynamics of modern times, even though there are many things that can be learned from these teachings. The observation aimed to understand the daily life and aesthetics of the Samin community, mapping cultural elements considered treasures, which are visually and physically perceptible objects related to daily life in Sambongrejo Village.

From the results of identifying those circumstances, the Sedulur Sikep tradition embodies a set of teachings emphasizing the interplay between humans and nature, central to the Samin community's cultural values. The local wisdom of the Samin tribe in the agricultural sector is needed to ensure the sustainability of nature from generation to generation. Local wisdom values are fundamental to providing knowledge. Land management that prioritizes the balance of ecological elements will lead to increased agricultural productivity. The agricultural sector is the primary sector for the people of Samin village, with rice and corn being the primary products.



Figure 2. Rice field and straws, sappan woods
(source: author documentation)

In the initial process, several visits were made to discuss the main objectives of the program with the community in the village, to identify a pilot that could be conducted together with community members, and to create a map of treasures. Through interviews and discussions, design practitioners, government officials, and local communities can exchange information and personal insights, as well as discuss problematic or sensitive situations, to develop solutions regarding the utilization of agricultural products such as *sappan* wood and rice straw. The strategy was designed in such a way as not to eliminate the identity of the Samin itself, mainly because it emphasizes local community participation. The ideas that the stakeholders and the team designers decide upon together are then discussed in order to stimulate and encourage further development. These materials are to be developed as utilitarian products made by the local community to strengthen the economy and preserve inherited cultural traditions by concentrating on the development of these natural resources.

Conclusion

Design culture emphasizes experiential learning and action as a design practice through field activities closely related to the local community and environment. The aim is to preserve cultural and ecological diversity by highlighting and utilizing the local potential that defines communal identity. This approach aims to stimulate endogenous development that supports environmental sustainability, social acceptance, and economic growth, particularly in Samin Village.

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