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## CREATIVE TOURISM AS THE KEY TO COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: REVITALIZING LOCAL NARRATIVES THROUGH CULTURAL PERFORMANCES AT PRAMBANAN TEMPLE

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# CREATIVE TOURISM AS THE KEY TO COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: REVITALIZING LOCAL NARRATIVES THROUGH CULTURAL PERFORMANCES AT PRAMBANAN TEMPLE

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of creative tourism in empowering local communities surrounding Prambanan Temple, focusing on cultural performances as vehicles for revitalizing local narratives. Using a case study approach with mixed methods data collection, the research demonstrates how cultural performances serve as bridges between heritage preservation and contemporary community development. Findings indicate that creative tourism initiatives centered around authentic cultural performances have significantly increased community participation, economic benefits, and cultural pride. The study reveals a three-fold impact: economic diversification, strengthened social cohesion, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. These results suggest that creative tourism frameworks can be effectively leveraged to transform heritage sites from passive tourist attractions into dynamic spaces of cultural exchange and community revitalization, providing valuable insights for other heritage destinations seeking sustainable tourism development models.

## KEYWORDS

Creative Tourism; Cultural Performances; Community Empowerment; Heritage Tourism; Prambanan Temple.

## INTRODUCTION

Introduction Creative tourism has emerged as a new paradigm in sustainable tourism development, offering an approach that emphasizes participatory and interactive experiences that engage tourists in aspects of local culture in greater depth. [Farhan dkk. \(2024\)](#) first defined creative tourism as “tourism that offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences that are characteristic of the vacation destination where they stay.” The concept was later expanded by [Dias dkk. \(2023\)](#) which emphasizes that creative tourism also includes authentic contact with local cultural life and communities.

In Indonesia, Prambanan Temple as one of the UNESCO World Heritage sites faces a classic challenge in heritage tourism management: how to balance heritage preservation with the economic development needs of local communities. Despite being a tourist magnet with significant visitation each year, the economic benefits of tourism in Prambanan are often not optimally distributed to the surrounding community. Furthermore, the rich local cultural narratives are often overlooked in the presentation of the site to visitors, creating a gap between the heritage values preserved and the interpretation tourists receive.

This research focuses on how cultural performances at Prambanan Temple can serve as a tool for community empowerment through a creative tourism framework. By analyzing cultural performance initiatives managed by local communities, this study seeks to illustrate how such activities can revitalize local narratives, create economic value, and strengthen the cultural identity of local communities. The research question underlying this study is: “How can cultural performances in the context of creative tourism empower local communities around Prambanan Temple?” and “What are the social, economic, and cultural impacts of performance-based creative tourism initiatives in those communities?”

This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the creative tourism and community empowerment literature, by presenting a comprehensive case study of a UNESCO World Heritage site in Indonesia. The research results are expected to serve as a reference for policy makers, heritage site managers, and local communities in similar destinations seeking to develop more inclusive and sustainable tourism models.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research uses a case study approach with mixed methods to explore the role of creative tourism in community empowerment around Prambanan Temple. Case studies were chosen because they allow in-depth analysis of a particular phenomenon in a real-life context Ramadhan dkk. (2024) which in this case is a cultural performance initiative as a form of creative tourism in the Prambanan Temple area.

### Research Location

The research was conducted in the Prambanan Temple area, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Prambanan Temple is the largest Hindu temple complex in Indonesia built in the 9th century and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991.



*Source: Camera Ashri Ramadhan, 2025*

The selection of this location was based on several considerations. First, Prambanan Temple represents a cultural heritage site of outstanding universal value. Second, there are various cultural performance initiatives that have developed around the temple, ranging from large-scale performances such as the Ramayana Ballet to smaller community performances. Third, there is a dynamic interaction between cultural heritage sites, cultural performances, and local communities that is interesting to study in the context of creative tourism.

### Data Collection

This research utilizes multiple data collection methods to ensure triangulation and depth of analysis:

#### 1. Participatory Observation

The researcher was directly involved in various cultural performances and related activities at Prambanan Temple over a four-month period (January-April 2025). This observation allowed for a deeper understanding of how performances are organized, how local communities participate, and how interactions between performances, tourists, and communities take place.

#### 2. In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 35 key informants consisting of:

- a. 15 local community members involved in cultural performances
- b. 5 site managers and performance coordinators
- c. 10 tourists attending performances
- d. 5 local policy makers

Interviews focused on perceptions of the benefits and challenges of cultural performances, the level of community engagement, and the economic, social, and cultural impacts of the initiative.

#### 3. Survey

A survey of 150 respondents from the local community was conducted to measure their perceptions of the economic, social and cultural impacts of cultural performances at Prambanan Temple. The survey used a Likert scale (1-5) to measure respondents' level of agreement with various statements related to the benefits of cultural performances.

#### **4. Document Analysis**

Documents such as site management reports, performance financial reports, regional tourism development plans, and media publications related to cultural performances at Prambanan Temple were reviewed.

#### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data from observations, interviews, and FGDs were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis process included:

1. Familiarization with the data through transcription and repeated readings
2. Initial coding to identify emerging themes
3. Search and review of themes
4. Defining and naming themes
5. Compilation of analytical narrative

Quantitative data from the survey was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify patterns and relationships between variables. Bibliometric analysis was also conducted to map research related to creative tourism and community empowerment, resulting in network visualizations, overlays, and densities that illustrate the development of this field.

#### **Research Ethics**

This study adhered to the ethical principles of research, including informed consent from all participants, assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, and sensitivity to local norms and values. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and consent was sought before participating in interviews, FGDs, or surveys.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Profile of cultural performances at Prambanan Temple**

Cultural performances at Prambanan Temple have undergone a significant evolution over the past decade, from being dominated by the centrally managed Ramayana Ballet, to a more diverse ecosystem of performances with active participation from local communities. Based on observation and document analysis, at least 15 types of regular cultural performances organized in the Prambanan Temple area were identified, ranging from large-scale performances to smaller community performances.

The Ramayana Ballet remains the flagship performance attracting an average of 1,500 visitors per performance. However, significant growth is seen in small and medium-scale performances managed directly by local communities, such as traditional Javanese dance performances, gamelan music, and folk theater. Data from the site manager shows that the number of community performances increased by 300% from 2018 to 2023, with an increase in local community participation as performers from 120 people to 450 people in the same period.

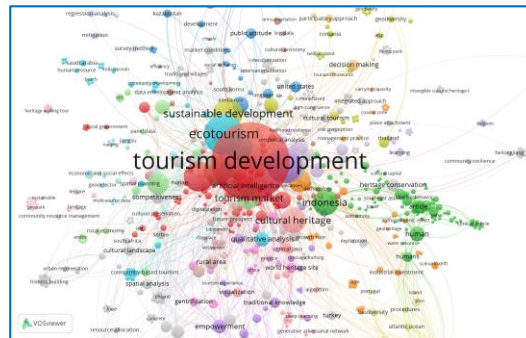
#### **Economic Impact of Cultural Performances on Local Communities**

The results of a survey of 150 respondents from local communities showed significant economic impacts of cultural performances. 78% of respondents reported an increase in income directly or indirectly related to cultural performances, with an average increase of 35% compared to the period before the development of community-based performances.

Further analysis reveals that the economic benefits are distributed through several channels:

1. Direct Income: 42% of respondents were directly involved as performers, production crew, or support staff in performances, receiving direct financial compensation.
2. Secondary Economy: 36% of respondents benefit from the secondary economy that grows around the show, including food and beverage sales, souvenirs, and transportation services.
3. New Entrepreneurial Opportunities: Cultural performances have triggered the emergence of 27 new micro and small businesses in the area, including craft studios, art galleries, and traditional food stalls offering local gastronomic experiences.

An interview with the community performance coordinator reveals the motivation behind this initiative: "We want to show that Prambanan is not just about the past, but also about us today. Through the performance, we share stories that are not in the history books stories about how our ancestors lived side by side with this temple for centuries."



Sumber: Analisis Bibliometrik, Network Visualization 2025

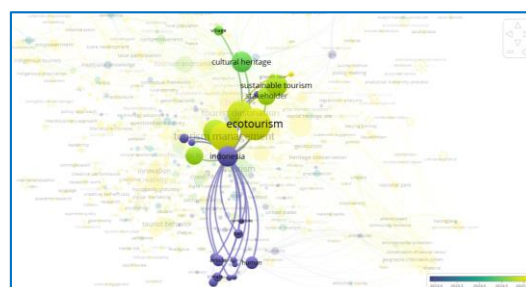
### Transformation of Community Role from Object to Subject

One of the most significant findings of this research is the transformation of the role of local communities from mere objects of tourist spectacle to active subjects in creative tourism production. Data from FGDs with local artist groups reveal a fundamental shift in power relations:

1. Decision Making: 85% of the content of community shows is now determined by local people themselves, as opposed to the previous situation where content was largely determined by site management authorities or external consultants.
2. Creative Ownership: Local communities are no longer mere executors, but active designers, scriptwriters, choreographers and producers of performances, with technical support from performing arts professionals.
3. Cultural Representation: Performances increasingly reflect local understandings of cultural heritage, rather than interpretations tailored to tourist expectations.

An artist group member's statement in the FGD highlights this change:

"In the past, we just danced according to the direction from outside. Now we tell our own stories. This makes us proud and re-energizes the show tourists can feel the difference."



Sumber: Analisis Bibliometrik, Overlay Visualization 2025

### Challenges and Adaptation Strategies

Although successful in many aspects, creative tourism initiatives at Prambanan Temple also face various challenges. The interviews and FGDs revealed three main challenges:

1. Quality vs. Participation Tension: There is a tension between maintaining high standards of performance quality and ensuring inclusivity of participation by people with varying skill levels.
2. Financial Sustainability: Small-scale performances often face challenges in maintaining financial sustainability, especially outside of peak tourist seasons.
3. Internal Power Dynamics: New power dynamics emerge within communities as the creative tourism economy develops, sometimes creating tensions between different groups within the community.

Data analysis shows that the community has developed several adaptation strategies to overcome these challenges:

1. Tiered Training Program  
Develop a multi-level training system that allows the participation of people with varying skill levels, while maintaining show quality standards.
2. Product and Schedule Diversification  
Create a variety of performances with different scales and formats to cater to the preferences of different segments of tourists and ensure year-round activities.
3. Community Forum  
Establishment of community dialog forums to facilitate participatory decision-making and conflict management.



Sumber: Analisis Bibliometrik, Density Visualization 2025

### Community Empowerment Model through Creative Tourism

Based on the comprehensive findings of this study, we propose a model of community empowerment through creative tourism that consists of five core components:

1. Creative Ownership  
Ensure local communities have substantive control over the content, production and presentation of cultural performances.
2. Economic Linkages  
Build strong links between cultural performances and local economies through integrated value chains.
3. Authentic Narratives  
Developing content based on local narratives and knowledge, rather than simply reproducing stereotypical representations for tourist consumption.
4. Adaptive Capacity  
Building the community's ability to adapt to changing tourism trends, market preferences, and external conditions.
5. Cultural Sustainability  
Ensure that innovations in cultural performances continue to respect fundamental cultural values and contribute to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

The model offers a framework that can be adapted by other heritage destinations seeking to develop community-based creative tourism initiatives.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

This research shows how cultural performances within a creative tourism framework can be an effective tool for community empowerment around cultural heritage sites. The case study of Prambanan Temple highlights the transformation from a conventional heritage tourism model towards a more participatory and inclusive creative tourism paradigm.

The main findings of the study show that community-based cultural performances have contributed significantly to three dimensions of empowerment: economic, socio-cultural, and political. Economically, cultural performances have created new sources of income and stimulated the local

economy. Socio-culturally, they have revitalized local narratives and strengthened cultural identity. Politically, they have changed the power dynamics in tourism management, giving greater voice to local communities.

The community empowerment model proposed in this study offers a framework that can be adapted by other heritage destinations. However, this research also recognizes that the success of creative tourism initiatives depends on the specific context, community capacity, and supportive policy environment.

Further research is needed to test the transferability of this model to other cultural heritage site contexts and to explore more deeply how creative tourism can overcome structural challenges in the conventional tourism industry. Nonetheless, the case of Prambanan Temple provides convincing evidence that creative tourism can be key to empowering local communities and revitalizing cultural narratives in heritage destinations.

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