

## *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara: Revitalization of Tourist Performance Art in Palawijen Culture Village in Malang City, East Java*

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### Abstract

### Original Research Article

This research is focusing on thematic villages in Malang City. In the last ten years, thematic villages have been successfully actuating community to substantiate social position of individuals and peoples within it. One of thematic villages with enthusiasm and potentials toward social empowerment is **Kampung Budaya Palawijen (KBP)**, or *Palawijen Culture Village*. This Village was lauched in 2016 and positioned to be culture village. Potentials were already there because this Village inherited many cultural legacies. One of them is “*sumur windu*”, which is considered as confirmation to the presence of Ken Dedes. Other is a grave of a renown mask artist, Reni (Tjandra Suwarno), who was once described in Ong Hok Ham’s narration. Reni was a public servant for Malang Regency during the administration of AA Surya Adiningrat (1898-1934). Given knowledge about this, Palawijen community attempts to reconstruct them through some events. One is the commemoration of World Dance Day that was held on Sunday, April 28, 2019, and the event is called *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara*. This event is reviewed with qualitative approach, which uses verbal data obtained from interview and depth observation. Key informants include Isa Wahyudi (44 years old) who is an activist in thematic village, Selamat Riyadi (54 years old) who is the chief of Neighborhood Association 03 in Palawijen Culture Village, and *Nyai Dadak Purwa* (28 years old), the stage name of a dancer in any dance events. Analysis is conducted with interpretation and verbal signification. Result of analysis in this review is described as follows: (1) *arak-arakan* (carnivals) is interpreted as representation of ‘*Donga*’ (pray); (2) transformation of mask puppet movement is signified as cultural expression; and (3) revitalization of tourist destination is considered as economic empowerment to the interest of community.

**Keywords:** Revitalization, Spiritualism, Mask Puppet, Thematic Village.

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## BACKGROUND

In the last ten years since 2000s, people start to witness the depletion of oil commodities. Non-oil sectors, therefore, are pushed forward to fill the gap in national income. Tourism sector is one of non-oil sectors that must find itself compelled to generate national income by providing goods and services to keep visitors in comfort [1]. Malang City has successfully improved its tourism level by growing some thematic villages. One of them is *Kampung Budaya Palawijen (Palawijen Culture Village)*. This Village was initiated by a person named Isa Wahyudi (44 years old), who is in social media popularly known as *Ki Demang*. The Village was located in the environment of Palawijen District and officially announced as thematic village in 2016 by Malang Mayor, *Abah Anton*. In the beginning, the mission of Palawijen thematic village is to take a position as “culture village” where the community will inherit, preserve and function the Javanese ancestral culture as

their potential capital. The title of *Culture Village* is successfully gained due to the existence of “*sumur windu*”, which is considered a sacred site because it has historical values related with Majapahit Kingdom. Moreover, it was told that Ken Dedes, the genealogical mother of many Kings in East Java, was once living in *Padepokan Empu Purwa* located at the area that is now called Palawijen District. Being historian, Isa Wahyudi saw this potential and took actions to empower the existence of Palawijen community (Wahyudi, 12 February 2019). Besides Wahyudi, a legend of mask artist also lives in Palawijen, and the name of this legend is *Reni* (originally named Tjandra Suwarno). The name becomes popular after once described in Ong Hok Ham’s narration. Reni was a public servant for Malang Regency during the administration of A.A. Surya Adiningrat (1898-1934). Acting as Malang Regent, A.A. Surya Adiningrat shows great interests to mask puppet. Dancers from many villages in Malang Regency are invited to perform in *Pendopo* (Regency

Hall) to welcome important guests who are mostly Holland officials. Satruno, the Chief of Pucangsanga Village, was one among village chiefs who is frequently assigned as coordinator of the dancers [2].

Cultural and historical capitals in *Palawijen Culture Village* have been perceived as great potential capitals. This Village is an urban establishment in Malang City and mostly inhabited by non-native dwellers. The Village resides at Neighborhood Association 03/Citizen Association 02, Palawijen District, Malang City. It is comprised of 15 households with 12 households (80 percents) coming from Blitar, Tulungagung, and Kediri. Only two or three households

are native but they are born in 1950s and 1960s. Their grand grandfather is no longer traceable. Other natives already move to other region and have family there.

Thematic villages in Malang City are constructed to prepare the community to attain better social position, either as individual or as a group. One of thematic villages with enthusiasm and potentials toward social empowerment is **Kampung Budaya Palawijen** (*Palawijen Culture Village*). Both activists and peoples of the Village have agreed to create a distinctive exotic environment, and it begins with garnishing houses with old-day attributes, including embellishing *gedhek* (bamboo plait) to outside wall.



A house model with *gedhek* wall (Photograph by Robby)

The location of *Palawijen Culture Village* (PCV) is at Neighborhood Association 03/Citizen Association 02 but it precisely resides at the bank of small river that provides streams to the rice field. Along the river, there are gazebos, few barracks for rehearsal and performance of the dance, and a library chamber. All these are prepared by PCV community with enthusiasm to develop Javanese culture art. The community organizes dance rehearsal before performance, holds exhibition of *batik* making process, and provides special spots for singing *macapat* and playing percussions. It can be said that PCV community has taken a transformative position with an act of revitalization. This position has been signified as an attitude of having conscience on traditional legacy [3].

Palawijen community has arranged some events. One of them is *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara* that was held on Sunday, April 28, 2019, for the commemoration of World Dance Day. This event is an effort to conduct a progressive prediction combining performance art and ritual procession. Therefore, in this research, the problems are formulated as (1) whether *arak-arakan* (carnivals) is interpreted as representation of 'donga' (pray); (2) whether transformation of mask puppet movement is possible to be signified as cultural expression; and (3) whether revitalization of tourist destination can be considered as economic empowerment to the interest of community.

## METHOD OF RESEARCH

Approach to this research is qualitative descriptive, which means that this research is using verbal data derived from interview and depth

observation. Key informant in this research includes Isa Wahyudi (44 years old) who is the initiator of thematic village, Selamat Riyadi (54 years old) who is the chief of Neighborhood Association 03 at *Palawijen Culture Village* (PCV), and *Nyai Dadak Purwa* (28 years old), the stage name of a young male dancer who must wear *trans-costume* (dressed like a female) during the dance event. In the event of *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara*, it seems that *Nyai Dadak Purwa* plays the character of *Dewi Sri* or *Dewi Kesuburan* (Goddess of Fertility). The event was continually and inductively analyzed [4]. Meanwhile, the analysis is understood through verbalistic interpretation technique. It means that any statements and actions of informants will be concluded based on associative and analogic capabilities, or in accord with deep understandings of statements and actions of the community. Factor of art as one complex thing is also taken into account due to the considerations of intra-aesthetic and extra-aesthetic [5].

## DATA DESCRIPTION

*Palawijen Culture Village* (PCV) was initiated by Isa Wahyudi with the knowledge about cultural and historical potentials of the environment where he lives. The Village is located at Neighborhood Association 03/Citizen Association 02 in Palawijen District and occupied by 15 households. Many houses are neatly lined at river bank. The river provides waters for many rice fields nearby public cemetery. Before initiation into PCV, the residence seems desolate and the residents do not have social activity. They mostly work outside the house, while wives care the house. Children are lacking of opportunity to attend the activity related with their

personality and professional development. In the other hand, garbage heaps are covering river banks. Isa Wahyudi, also acknowledged as *Ki Demang*, put great concern about this and takes initiative to bring the village into better position.

Support to the initiative seems becoming stronger after the grave of *Mbah Reni* (Tjandra Suwarno) was found in 2015. The grave lays at the side of the road that divides public cemetery. Since the discovery of the legend's burial plot, citizens of Palawijen was enlighten by social activists to knowing that the village has a precious historical value. Among these activists are *Yudit Pradananto*, an art motivator and a collector of mask and puppet (wayang), and *Nasai Sabrang Panuluh*, a photographer and an activist in a social organization that concerns on social enlightenment and community empowerment. In fact, Yudit Pradananto successfully retrieved the Mask of Ragel Kuning from the driver of a mask collector, and this Mask was created by Reni [6]. Citizens of Palawijen are motivated by Pradananto to give memorial value to Reni's grave because Reni is one of legendary mask carver during the administration of Malang Regent A.A. Surya Adiningrat (1898-1934). Reni's existence becomes public consumption after a historian wrote about him in a scientific magazine in 1972 [7]. Indeed, Reni has been acknowledged as an art conserver from Palawijen village and his beneficiaries are still alive and living in the village. Reni has successfully generated the descendants of mask puppet artists in Jabung Village and arounds.

One event in Palawijen that draws many crowds is *nyadran* where in this traditional rite, villagers are required to wear mask. Surely, this event may strongly inspire Isa Wahyudi to empower Palawijen village to inherit historical and cultural potentials. It may be less surprising if these potentials are considered as the driving factor of social power.

After inauguration of *Palawijen Culture Village* (PCV) in 2016, culture-related activities are gradually designed. It begins with creating environment that shows traditional image of 1940s. Houses are adorned with *gedhek* (bamboo plait). River bank environment is filled with gazebos for regular meetings. Village library is also built over there. The inspiring moment may be when Yudit Pradananto successfully retrieved the Mask of Ragel Kuning, a legendary mask created by Mbah Reni. Catching up this moment, Isa Wahyudi then reserves a dance titled *Ragel Kuning* from traditional dance artist, Moch. Soleh Adipramoni, from *Padepokan Seni Mangundharmo Tumpang*. In the beginning, the model of this dance is performed by Supriyanto who is also the trainer for the dance. Nowadays, *Ragel Kuning* dance is still performed for special events, mainly to receive guests who visit PCV.

Contemplating on Isa Wahyudi's initiative, researcher then have an idea to empower community

potentials. The idea is manifested into a mass performance called *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara* held on April 28, 2019, to commemorate World Dance Day. This grand event was planned together with PCV citizens in order to produce a memorable event that is possible to be recelebrated on the next year. *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara* is meant to be the expression of gratitude. The expression is done through variety of traditional masks that represent ethnical diversity in Indonesia.

The event of *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara* is possibly considered as the regular attraction in PCV's tourism calendar. Constructively, the event starts at Site of *Sumur Windu*. The march is led by *Sapu Jagad* shamans accompanied by *Ki Kamituwa*. The procession continues with the tribute of ritual offerings by *Nyai Dadak Purwa* who plays the character of *Dewi Sri* with the assistance of *dayang* (in this event, two female servants). Pray of gratitude is recited during tribute procession. After praying session, the march is then escorted to the village. During the journey, village representatives receive the march with some flower offerings and Nusantara masks. Then, *Nyai Dadak Purwa* is invited to the village (precisely village hall) to watch over various attractions of dance art performed by PCV citizens. Dance performance is halt until Dzuhur summon completes. Next stage of procession is conducting *nyadran* to Mbah Reni's grave in public cemetery. The pilgrimage process is the peak stage of the event where offerings are devoted, flowers are sown, and masks are arranged around the grave. Nearby the grave, Ragel Kuning dance is performed.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULT

This section will describe the results of data analysis. Data description is already obtained after attending the grand event of *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara* in *Palawijen Culture Village* (PCV) that was held on April 28, 2019, to commemorate World Dance Day. In general, results of analysis consist of three aspects that must be comprehended, and each is elaborated as follows:

### **Arak-arakan (carnivals) as the representation of "Donga" (pray)**

Carnivals are presented as the expression of social gathering, harmony, and community involvement to share the joyful day. *Nyai Dadak Purwa* plays the character of *Dewi Sri* (Goddess of Fertility), and the appearance of this character symbolizes the hope that the community will be blessed with prosperity, peace and safety. This hope is strongly adjured with *Nyai Dadak Purwa* wearing white costume that epitomizes chastity, cleanliness, and innocence. In front of *Dewi Sri*, there is two *dayang* (servants) who each walk in the flank. The march is pioneered by representatives (usually shamans) of *Sapu Jagad* royal servants with *Ki Kamituwa* as companion. Pure water is spread by these pioneers who all wear black costume symbolizing heart persistence and knowledge. *Dayang* wears green

costume to signify a gratitude for blessing of prosperity. Other participants of carnivals wear mask and yellow costume to epitomize hope. All symbols used in carnivals not only give social effect on community but also internalize philosophical value into them. Any symbols used in mask puppet have been described by Eko Wijayanto in his book titled with *Conserving Traditions and Cultural Customs* [8]. The philosophy of color is reflected on *Kiblat Papat* (four polar

directions), precisely (a) east, (b) south, (c) west, and (d) north. Signification seems strongly emphasized to motivate tourists to learn about it. One reason behind this tourism motivation is that modern tourists desire authentic presentation[12]. *Nyai Dadak Purwa* and mask carnivals are indeed authentic events. The design of these events is also authentic activity, but still based on an understanding that performance art discipline is *art of acculturation* or *pseudo traditional art* [9].



Carnivals accompanying *Dewi Sri* led by *Ki Kamituwa*  
(Photograph by Robby)

### Mask transformation as cultural expression

Dance performance in PCV to celebrate World Dance Day is distinguished from others through the use of mask in the dance. There are two methods to wear mask, precisely, (1) mask is put on face in traditional way by biting the mask or tying mask to the face with knots, and (2) mask is used as accessory, which is always placed above the head. Mask as accessory shows progressiveness and creativity that involves tradition and innovation. At least, if creativity is emphasized, the presence of art is becoming momentous, which is hardly replicated [10]. Dance performance with masks in PCV is the manifestation of mask transformation. In some parts, dance moves are linked through a choreography system presented as the sign and effort of dance conservation, while other parts of the dance are without movement at all. Interestingly,

*Nyai Dadak Purwa* does not show any passions to dance. The reason is possibly that *Nyai Dadak Purwa* is considered as the representation of blessing, or in reality, the presence is only symbol, or “being a guest”. Citizens of PCV are indeed expecting the coming of visitors and *Nyai Dadak Purwa* is presented as “a witness” to the incoming visitors. The event of *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara* is presented on the day when *Nyai Dadak Purwa* is witnessing the visitors come to the village to make gatherings with the villagers to desiderate blessings (Javanese calls it *ngalap berkah*). This event has successfully promoted *Palawijen Culture Village* as a site of history, culture, and tourist destination. Also, this event represents a progressive step to bring PCV citizens to have acknowledgment about historical and cultural potentials of their village and its impact on tourism.



*Nyadran* on Mbah Reni's grave is the final stage of procession  
(Photograph by Robby)

### Revitalization of tourist destination as economic empowerment

Revitalization of tourist destination is aimed to advance tourist destination into having close relation

with economic factor [11]. Three aspects stands behind revitalization, namely, (1) revitalization of historical sites, (2) revitalization of cultural potentials, and (3) revitalization of event presentation.

Revitalization of historical sites has been carried out on several sites, such as (1) Site of *Sumur Windu Ken Dedes*, (b) Site of *Joko Lolo*, and (c) Site of *Padepokan Empu Purwa*. The purpose of this revitalization is surely to substantiate the meaning behind the presence of tourist destination. Historical sites are promoted and made to public with the availability of complete information. Some locals may work as communicator (or tourist guide) with oral skill to tell the historical potential of the sites.

Revitalization of cultural potentials is actualized by PCV citizens by organizing culture-related activities, such as (a) teaching the youths about Malang traditional dance art and (b) coaching them of how to sing *macapat*, (c) how produce *batik*, and (d) how to make wood mask. All these potentials will support revitalization of tourist destination, which the immediate result is people economic empowerment.

Revitalization of event presentation is implemented by facilitating periodic appearance. The pioneer event is *Gelar Donga Topeng Nusantara* that is organized in the form of ritual procession for the commeration of World Dance Day. This event is held in grand scale and surely, it gives great significance to the existence of PCV as tourist destination. In the future, tourism callendar should be disseminated periodically to the public to give them acknowledgment about tourist attraction schedule.

## CONCLUSION

World Dance Day has been commemorated in *Palawijen Culture Village* (PCV) in grand scale of event. The author of this research has observed this event and then remarks some conclusions. The commemoration is stressed upon several aspects of performance art presentation, which the culminate goal is revitalization (re-empowerment). The idea of revitalization is the fundamental concept used by PCV initiators to bring thematic village into a better place by exploring the past (mostly historical aspects) and its relevant philosophical values. After historical values are successfully set, village identity is established as marker to distinguish the village from others. After few mind processings, the distinctive marker is decided to be "mask", which is then regularly used in presentation of performance art in PVC. What people can do for revitalization is only by making conspicuous the focus of "thematic" of the village, such as by presenting performance art. Organizing some ritual events may be enough to convince visitors to come to the village. All these activities are indeed in accord with the mission of PVC to empower thematic village into tourist destination. Citizens of PVC already understand this fact and therefore, they actualize it by creating procession of *arak-arakan* (carnivals) that sets out the

figure of *Dewi Sri* (Goddess of Fertility). The presence of this figure is emphasized by dance attraction adopting the transformation of mask puppet dance. The use of mask as part of ritualism is meant to be the reinforcer of dance attraction to provide audiences with thematical and visual views and also to create a distinctive nuance as the final goal of PVC for obtaining village identity. It has been widely recognized that the event has brought positive impact on PVC's economic development.

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