

THE CREATIVE ECONOMY OF ULOS IN THE LUMBAN SUHI SUHI COMMUNITY ON SAMOSIR ISLAND

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ABSTRACT

Ulos is an object that is closely associated with the Batak tribe; wherever there are Batak people, there is ulos. Ulos is not only sacred but there is a shift in its usage, by the community for various events or occasions, additionally, ulos fabric remains an economic value for some communities who appreciate its patterns from various regions, furthermore, from a production perspective, ulos is no longer exclusively handmade (woven) but is also produced using machines with a wider variety of patterns or symbols. The purpose of this research is to determine how ulos can be utilized as a creative economy for the Lumban Suhi Suhi community on Samosir Island. This research is using the City Branding Theory, where City Branding is a strategy that makes a place "speak" to the community, primarily targeting potential visitors (tourists). The approach used is a Qualitative Approach by using the Case Study research method, with data collection techniques involving Observation and Interviews. The result of this research findings that discuss about Creative Economy of Ulos in terms of its transformation into economic value, where the value of a Ulos lies in its various forms, such as fashion items or clothing, skirts, jackets, or souvenirs promoted through events, thereby enhancing Samosir's city branding, particularly Lumban Suhi Suhi, through the Creative Economy sector. This is also influenced by the production process of ulos, which is woven by hand or machine, as there are differences in price and production time, making ulos economically valuable as fashion or souvenirs, therefore, the conclusion of this study is to enhance the economy of the Lumban Suhi Suhi community through ulos in event promotions, its production should also be carried out in the Samosir region by training weavers to improve their weaving knowledge, so that the ulos produced becomes a distinctive feature to strengthen the regional identity and create significant economic value, particularly within the creative economy.

Keywords: Ulos, City Branding, Event, Creative Economy

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of tourist destinations is influenced by successful promotion, which can also lead to people becoming aware of a destination and developing a keen interest in visiting it. Effective tourism promotion leaves a lasting impression on people and may even stimulate interest in visiting among the public. The research conducted by the researcher is titled "The Creative Economy of Ulos in the Lumban Suhi Suhi Community of Samosir Island." John Howkins first introduced the term "creative economy" in his book *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*. John Howkins defines the creative economy as "the creation of value as a result of ideas." Howkins explains the creative economy as "economic activities in society that spend most of their time generating ideas, not just performing routine and repetitive tasks. For this society, generating ideas is something that must be done for progress." Ulos, as a symbol of love and affection by the ancient Batak people, was indeed highly respected. However, with the development of culture and cultural clashes that occurred, some Batak people today only view Ulos as a symbol and identity without understanding its deeper meaning. (Aspiner Panjaitan. *The Function and Meaning of the "Mangulosi" Ritual in Batak Toba Wedding Ceremonies*) However, it is not wrong to provide urban Batak communities today with information and explanations about the meaning, function, and types of Ulos.

In the process, when viewed from the functions, meanings, and symbols present in Ulos, there are many non-verbal values communicated in the giving of Ulos during

Batak Toba traditional ceremonies, this can be observed in various ceremonies that will be held, one of the most sacred types of Ulos given is during a wedding ceremony, where the parents of the bride give Ulos to their son-in-law, and the Ulos given is Ulos Hela. When worn at a wedding ceremony of the bride's family, the ulos signifies that the wearer is a son-in-law (according to caste). For instance, the meaning of the ulos can be clearly seen when it is worn and at what event it is used, along with the motifs on the fabric.

Toba Samosir Regency is a well-known area in the archipelago, particularly for its natural beauty and human resources. The natural beauty and panoramic views of Lake Toba, along with the richness of its indigenous arts and culture, are regional potentials that can be explored and developed in efforts to promote tourism in the country. This is also supported by the local community's tradition of using ulos in every traditional ceremony that takes place to this day, so the community also could make ulos through weaving. The woven products consumed by the local community have made other regions want to have them, so nowadays, Samosir is known as a region that produces ulos weaving.

Ulos is a type of traditional fabric that is often used in traditional ceremonies among the Batak tribe. The presence of Ulos in a ceremony can also serve as a clear identity and a way of showing respect to those who carry out the customs and to the guests attending the event. However, in urban communities (especially among Batak people who have migrated from their original regions), there is often a decline in knowledge about their own customs and culture, particularly regarding the use of Ulos for events or fashion trends. Ulos is not only sacred but has also seen a shift in its use by society for various events or occasions additionally, Ulos fabric remains an economic value for some communities who appreciate its patterns from various regions. Furthermore, from a production perspective, Ulos is no longer made manually (by weaving) but is also produced using machines with more diverse patterns or symbols.

In general, the transmission of knowledge about something that has existed since the time of our ancestors is essential for preserving traditions or culture. Ulos is a symbol deeply associated with the Batak people; wherever there are Batak people, there is ulos. All traditional ceremonies use ulos as a symbol of love and respect from the higher-ranking party to the lower-ranking party (from the hula-hula to the boru). The importance of ulos in traditional rituals is such that nearly all Batak people can weave ulos. Originally, ulos was woven manually using traditional methods, making the production process extremely time-consuming, often taking weeks or even months. The modernization era has transformed the manual weaving process into machine-based production, turning ulos into a cultural industry. This has led to a lack of knowledge among urban Batak communities about ulos woven by hand using ATBM (non-machine looms) and machines. This phenomenon is worth to research because Samosir, as a brand of one of the regions in North Sumatra, has many cultural heritage sites that can position Samosir as a tourist destination, one of which is ulos. Ulos is a sacred object for the Batak people, but today it is widely used for other purposes. Therefore, the Samosir Regional Government has undertaken the revitalization of ulos, which in the process, has led to the community being able to generate economic value from ulos, however, to carry out this revitalization, the regional government, particularly the Dekranasda department, has trained weavers and collaborated with various Samosir events to promote ulos as one of the distinctive characteristics of the Batak tribe that has undergone revitalization.

Exhibitions/promotions of local handicraft products from Samosir Regency are annual events held regularly, such as the International Trade and Handicraft (INACRAFT), Interior and Craft (ICRAFT), INDOCRAFT, and Indonesia Fashion Week (IFW) exhibitions, which are always held at the Jakarta Convention Centre (JCC), the anniversary celebration and exhibition of DEKRANASDA at the Smesco Tower Building, the Lake Toba Festival (FDT) held across all districts/cities in North Sumatra Province, Samosir Regency Anniversary, Horas Samosir Fiesta (HSF), National Cooperative Day (HARKOPNAS), Appropriate Technology (TTG), and BATAM EXPO, all these events aim to introduce, promote, and market the traditional crafts of Samosir Regency.

For example, in 2014, the Central Government, through the Directorate General of Small and Medium Industries (IKM) of the Ministry of Industry, collaborated with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to facilitate weavers from Samosir Regency to participate in the prestigious event at the Indonesia Fashion Week (IFW) exhibition held at the Jakarta Convention Centre (JCC) Senayan Jakarta. Through the above background, this study refers to the theory of marketing communication in the creative economy, which states that communication assists tourism marketing across various marketing elements; in conducting their marketing, they also employ tourism marketing strategies targeting consumers or tourists to attract visitors or introduce the tourism products offered by leveraging promotional tools and events in the region. According to Bungin (2015:127), the general public's understanding of tourism is divided into two groups: the "cloud" group and the 'smart' group. The "cloud" group views tourism solely as part of recreation, sightseeing, leisure, and so on, this group is consumptive, apathetic, and even destructive.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study is a qualitative case study. According to Robert K. Yin (1996), a case study is one of the research methods in the social sciences. In addition to case studies, there are other methods such as experiments, surveys, historical studies, and documentary information analysis. A case study is an excellent method for understanding complex issues and can enhance the strength of what is already known through previous research. The purpose of using case study research, according to Yin (2011: 2), is to explain how and why the case occurred. Case study research is not merely about answering research questions about "what" the object of study is, but more comprehensively about 'how' and "why." Yin (2011: 25) divides the research process into two types: single case study research and multiple case study research. The difference lies in the number of cases, with multiple case studies involving more than one case.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show very significant differences in the price of one piece of ulos based on how it is made, whether by machine or by hand weaving.

Table 1.

Comparative Analysis of Hand-Woven Ulos and Machine-Made Textile Ulos

Hand-woven and Textiles Ulos Production			
No	Difference	Hand-woven	Textile
1	Name	Ulos	Sekka

2	Price	More expensive with an initial capital of Rp 250.000, even up to millions of rupiah per pieces of ulos	Starting from Rp 50.000
3	Production Time	≤ 4 months per piece of Ulos	1day of hundred sekka
4	Thread	100 threads were made from tree sap and plants	Nylon Thread
5	Color	Red, Black, White and Blue indigo	Many colors have been combined
6	Production Area	Samosir, Muara and Tarutung	Already available outside the original weaving production areas.
7	Production tools	Godokan / ATBM (non-Machine Weaving Tool)	Machine

From the results above, Ulos with its various functions in the past until now still exists and will still be used in cultural events, therefore the government makes the earliest possible introduction of ulos to the community, especially students with the aim of being able to maintain cultural values even though ulos is revitalized because there are ulos that cannot be worn by just anyone and this is done through events related to ulos and school culture which every Thursday is required to use ulos. The government is also currently providing knowledge to weavers on how to make beautiful ulos with the help of cultural experts who share their knowledge on extinct types of ulos so that they can be woven again. With this program, the value of a woven product will increase, thereby creating economic value for marketing purposes, even though the concept of high prices remains a dilemma for weavers when marketing their woven products.

The ulos woven today are far from being popular, unlike those made by machine. This is due to their price and the time it takes to make them. Ulos woven by hand are only sought after by a select group of people with a high appreciation for art or those with the means to purchase them, as they feature intricate patterns created by hand, unlike machine-made ulos, people now prioritize efficiency when choosing ulos, as machine-made ulos can be dyed with beautiful colors in a single piece and are more affordable. However, the cultural significance of ulos has been lost because handwoven ulos are made from hundred-thread yarn, leading to high demand for machine-made ulos while handwoven ulos only see a 2%-7% increase in demand. Therefore, the government conducts an annual program in weaving, training those who wish to learn and become weavers. The Dekranasda program trains individuals who wish to weave, whether they have a background in weaving or not, by providing instruction on weaving, the government also provides looms for the weavers they train so they can weave, thereby creating job opportunities and reviving the beautiful art of weaving, this ensures that Samosir remains wrapped in the beauty of ulos throughout the process and becomes a region renowned for producing ulos while preserving cultural values, even though some ulos are made by machine.

Both handwoven and machine-made ulos are now used by the community as fashion items due to their unique patterns, resulting in increasing demand for ulos in

Samosir, though not overly specific, as ulos made for fashion also hold economic value in terms of sales. Weavers can produce ulos of high quality, though the results and prices will differ significantly from traditional ulos, as fashion or clothing worn by the general public who desire a unique appearance do not mind the price, such as tourists or visitors to the weaving areas in Samosir, this is evident from the fact that some countries have adopted ulos as cultural work attire, and ulos is worn as clothing in important events in each country additionally, designers combine ulos with other fabrics to promote it through fashion events, so the price, quality, and patterns can compete with ulos made without weaving as a result, ulos is recognized by the public as Samosir with its beautiful ulos. The creative economic process being implemented by the local government should also assist weavers in developing and creating creative ideas while preserving the primary material used in ulos weaving. For example:

1) Socializing the Work Program

It is essential to effectively communicate the work program to the weavers to foster collaboration in enhancing resources. This will help create more beautiful ulos and support the formation of weaving groups that can be trained continuously, leading to better and higher-quality weaving outcomes.

2) Preservation of Natural Raw Materials

Government programs must ensure that woven products continue to utilize natural raw materials, especially for ulos production. Raw materials such as indigo blue, which are becoming increasingly rare, must be preserved and sustained. This effort supports weavers in producing naturally dyed ulos that meet both quality and pricing standards.

3) Support from Dekranasda and Creative Institutions

Dekranasda should take initiative in not only conducting weaving training but also organizing special events where weavers' products can be assessed. This helps ensure that woven products align with market values and that weavers do not suffer financial losses. Such activities should be conducted in collaboration with creative institutions at both the regional and national levels.

4) Setting Fair Pricing Standards

If local governments have previously provided weaving equipment, they must also work with relevant stakeholders to establish fair pricing for woven ulos. Pricing should reflect the difficulty in acquiring natural dyes and overall production costs, ensuring that weavers are adequately compensated for their craftsmanship.

5) Enhancing Ulos Marketing Internationally

Support should be provided to help weavers expand their market reach beyond local areas, including promoting ulos at international events. This is strongly encouraged, as ulos has already been adopted in workplaces abroad and appreciated by international tourists. Promoting ulos globally not only boosts the economic well-being of weavers but also contributes to increasing regional income, particularly in Samosir.

The explanation provided by the researcher will give a distinctive characteristic to the Samosir region, as the revitalization of the sacred ulos, which is currently being revitalized, can attract both domestic and international tourists. Although Samosir is known for its identity as the home of Lake Toba, tourists can also show their interest in

Samosir through Ulos. The revitalized Ulos has become a creative work with such beautiful weaving that the production process can be directly observed, allowing visitors to enjoy the cultural heritage of Samosir.

CONCLUSION

Local potential as part of regional identity is key to creative city development. A creative city is not just about city branding, but rather a commitment to promoting and developing local potential. Ulos, which has been revitalized, is currently enhancing the quality of the region through various events organized by Samosir, where Ulos serves as the main symbol in every event. This has attracted many visitors, both domestic and international, who are interested in Ulos, thereby creating a new function for its use. Creative spaces must be able to accommodate and inspire the emergence of a sense of creativity. On the other hand, these spaces must also integrate the processes of creation, production, distribution, and marketing of existing creative economic potential. This is also tied to the enhancement of Samosir's city branding through Ulos, which is promoted through an annual event where the community wears Ulos as the foundation of the event, thereby immediately attracting visitors' interest to purchase Ulos and modify it into clothing, skirts, jackets, or souvenirs that can enhance their appearance or surroundings.

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